Change and Perception of Change in the PhD in Social Sciences. A case study

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I, Frederico Braga de Matos confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Blueskies University is a top UK institution: an *old* university, very prestigious, and a strong brand. As others it changed doctoral degree programmes in compliance with the Roberts Report, the QAA guidelines for research degrees, and the Joint Statement of the Skills training requirements for research students. These brought the importance of transferable skills to the fore. Universities should prepare students for life outside academia where research skills gained throughout the PhD may not be enough. A strong emphasis on completion deadlines is also affecting the structure of doctoral programmes.

In this process the main PhD actors – supervisors and doctoral students – have not been heard. This thesis aims at giving voice to these two cohorts. Therefore I conducted 40 in-depth interviews in different Social Sciences departments at Blueskies University. The PhD experience as well as individual conceptions of the PhD were the main axes of my study.

This research concludes that whereas the official skills discourse was widely perceived as being of little value, the views on the 3-4 years deadline were diverse. For the students, many of them gone over the deadline, this was of little relevance. However, supervisors were divided: some thought the deadline was a good thing. Students would have time for creative research throughout their academic career. Others voiced the concern that original thinkers were being rejected from PhD programmes for fears that their research could take longer.

This thesis suggests that, for universities such as Blueskies University, the PhD may be losing its intrinsic value which conceives knowledge as an end in itself, and is being chosen for its extrinsic value, that of a passport to academia.

 It posits that the nature of social research is changing and therefore disciplines are changing too. Finally, the thesis questions whether universities are preparing intellectuals or efficient researchers.

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1. Introduction

> Higher education is in the knowledge industry, although in a special sense. It manufactures not knowledge as such – that is the business of the university's research arm – but knowledge competences. It produces graduates with abilities to handle knowledge in definite ways.
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> However, what seems definite and desirable in one age comes to be questioned in another. The forms of knowing and competence considered worthwhile give way surprisingly easily to new definitions.
>
> (Barnett 1994:1)

> There is a strong perception that we are being cajoled, criticised and pressurised to change, innovate and adapt, rather than to celebrate our achievement or cherish our academic values. In many ways, the climate in universities is more one of compliance than rational debate, critique and contestation which, it seems to me, are essential components of an educational process. Even the way we organise our basic 'product' – knowledge – is changing.
>
> (Rowland 2001:1)

> The more that credentials are required for employment, the less the knowledge content associated with obtaining those credentials matters to prospective employment. This is largely because credentials are not longer sufficient but merely necessary to securing a position.
>
> (Fuller 2003:113)

Barnett asserts that universities produce graduates with competences to handle knowledge. And clearly separates the two 'arms' of universities' activity: teaching and research. More importantly, he notes that concepts of knowledge are easily changeable. This seems to me to be of significant relevance to PhD programmes since they can be seen as crossing over the two areas of research and teaching. As researchers PhD students should be in the business – to use Barnett's words – of manufacturing knowledge, and as students they should be getting research competences. Arguably, these are two complementary activities. What happens though when national funding policies for research degrees appear to focus on the

arm of the competences and less on the one of creation of knowledge? This question is at the very core of my doctoral research.

Rowland's quote suggests that universities are having changes imposed upon them that are leading them away from their original educational purposes. Even the way knowledge is produced and shared is changing. Fuller notes that knowledge is being devalued. Credentials are what is important. And this to the detriment of content – knowledge. These three quotes very succinctly set the frame of my doctoral research. On the one hand there is the notion that universities are undergoing a process of change and on the other the idea that credentials may be overtaking knowledge production and dissemination. It is the remit of my doctoral research to assess whether these are happening at doctoral level and how or if they affect the PhD experience and the value of the PhD.

This thesis intends to be a reflection on the state of affairs in the PhD in Social Sciences in a research-intensive university in the UK. To do so it looks at students and supervisors' experiences of the PhD. It reflects on issues surrounding the idea of change: how doctoral programmes have changed and how this may have affected the PhD experience, as well as what the PhD is and what kinds of academics universities may be producing as a consequence of the changes. These have been a product of national policies that appear to have geared the PhD towards a more labour market oriented view of the degree. The Roberts Report, the Joint Statement of the skills training requirements for research students and the QAA guidelines for research degrees may all have set the PhD into a new direction. It seems that the PhD may no longer be perceived as the time to find one's

academic voice and a time for intellectual serendipity. In fact it appears that funding policies are diverting the PhD from its historical functions: creation of new knowledge, an original contribution to knowledge. Thus it is crucial to question whether the concept of original contribution to knowledge is changing.

I interviewed research students and supervisors in the social sciences about their PhD experience. These in-depth interviews were conducted within the remit of two different research projects. An initial one – 'preliminary research' – was set within my remit as a research officer working for Blueskies University. The other one – my doctoral research – arose from the opportunity I created within the initial project to extend its original aims. Whereas the initial project intended to assess whether departments were adopting and implementing the new rules for PhD degrees the doctoral research aimed to give voice to those who had not been heard in the process of change namely PhD students and supervisors.

This interest in interviewing PhD students and supervisors arose from my interest in trying to understand how universities as peculiar social organisations work and how knowledge is conceived in different disciplines. By trying to understand individual perspectives and expectations about the PhD as well as the PhD experience I was aiming at understanding two sets of elements. One which is directly linked to the PhD where I wanted to focus on how higher degrees are being conceived, and a second one which was directed at understanding what academics universities are training. It is clear that doing one case study, as is the case of this thesis, will not give me all the answers I am looking for. However, it can frame an understanding of the mechanics and workings of a research-intensive

university in the UK. The main objective is not however to be able to generalise but mainly to probe different issues that I believe are crucial for my understanding of academia as a distinct social institution.

How does the understanding of the PhD enhance the understanding of the university and vice-versa? As will be developed in chapters 2 and 3 the PhD can offer an insight into how universities work in various ways: it is the highest degree accorded by the universities, it is the rite of passage for future academics, and includes the two main elements of what could be called academic function: research (doctoral thesis) and teaching (supervisory relation). The two main strands of the university's 'industry' come therefore together in the PhD. Understanding the university therefore may also help understand the PhD.

A study on the PhD can thus illuminate two relevant points for a sociological understanding of academia: the dynamics of research and teaching in a higher degree and, consequently, the kind of academics that may be emerging from this process.

The research questions that led my research are the following:

1. What is a PhD?
2. Why do a PhD?
3. Why do a PhD at Blueskies University?
4. What kind of students do a PhD a Blueskies University?
5. How do interviewees view the role of the supervisor to be?

6. What are interviewees' opinions about the structure of the PhD programme in their department?

7. What advice would interviewees give to prospective PhD students?

These questions were meant to prospect different aspects of the PhD experience. By understanding what the PhD is and why students do a PhD we may begin to illuminate the social function of the doctoral degree as well as the place of new knowledge within the doctorate.

In exploring why students choose Blueskies University and what kind of students undertake a PhD there, we may begin to build a picture of a possible student type, or types, that go into a research-intensive university in the UK.

By understanding how students and supervisors view what the supervisory role is supposed to be as well as how they view the structure of doctoral programmes we can unveil important elements of expectations and practices in doctoral programmes.

Finally, from an exploration of the advice that would be given to prospective students one can infer, affirm or even see contradictions in previous responses given by the respondents. Above all this question will indicate what, in the mind of the respondents, the future of the PhD may be.

A study of the *voice* of the main participants on the PhD degree is needed because changes appear to have been introduced to doctoral programmes in a top down

way. Concerns from funding bodies appear not to have had in mind the valuable contributions to the discussion that students and supervisors could have made. It is also an attempt to understand how policies have been put in place in practice by individual departments and supervisors. Ultimately, it can show how compliant practitioners have been and whether there is space for contestation within supervisory and doctoral practices.

I think this is needed at the moment. As I refer to in chapter 3, there has been a few instances where students have been asked how they are experiencing their doctoral degrees programmes. This has been done through the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) under the auspices of the Higher Education Academy. However, in my view one, of the main flaws of this survey is that it does not enquire about alternative ways of doing things nor about perceptions of the value of doing things as they are being done. In a way, it represents an administrative exercise to assess how well policies have been introduced. It is however important for me to understand something which is overall different: is this the way PhD programmes should be working and structured. And that remained at the very heart of my thesis.

As a research officer at Blueskies University working on the 'preliminary study' I found that there was little critique or contestation in the study being suggested. There was no space for inquiring how changes could affect the PhD experience rather than a rather limited view on the introduction of transferable skills training and stricter deadlines. What I set myself to understand as a research student was therefore a rather different thing. I wanted to enquire how changes being

implemented changed the students' and supervisors' experience of the PhD and, more importantly, what are the effects of these changes in the intellectual journey of the students and how these would affect the training of future academics.

The following chapter, chapter 2, will be looking at some of the major developments in the history of the university which are relevant for our understanding of the current trends in higher education. The chapter will focus on the development of the university from its inception at the end of the twelfth century in Paris and Bologna to recent developments in the UK and continental Europe. It will look as well at funding of universities and inter-national recognition of degrees and will contextualise some of the main elements that will help to frame our understanding of the institution that has historically been the main producer and disseminator of knowledge.

Chapter 3 will explore the main strands in the literature that have focused on the PhD. It does so by doing a genealogy of the PhD, reflecting on the PhD in the Social Sciences, contextualising doctoral programmes especially looking at policy changes that have greatly impacted on the PhD. It explores some contributions that could be said to have shaped our thinking about the PhD and finally reflects on how the Roberts Report specifically has affected the structure of PhD programmes in the UK.

Chapter 4 will explore the methodological reflections that have affected and impacted on my doctoral research. It clarifies my roles during the research process (from research officer at Blueskies University to doctoral student at UCL) and the

timeline of the research process. It explains the qualitative methodology chosen and the process through which the research process underwent. It continues by exploring the complexities of my *privileged access* to the data and the interviewees. Finally it suggests a *duet* metaphor in order to explain my two main roles as researcher during my investigation: as a participant observer and as a researcher doing participant observation.

Chapter 5 explores the supervisors' views on PhD programmes and on the students. It focuses on views of past PhD practices and research, on the current PhD programmes, on what they see the PhD to be, why students do or should do a PhD, their views on their own students and what they are looking for in prospective students.

Chapter 6 focuses on the results of the interviews with students. Of particular relevance are the following: why they were doing a PhD, what a PhD was for them, why they had chose Blueskies University, what they expected from their supervisors, what were their views of the doctoral programme in their department and what advice they would give to prospective students.

Chapter 7 is an attempt to summarise and structure the voices of the supervisors and of the students. The previous two chapters explored the interviews with both cohorts. This chapter however attempts to look at similarities and divergences within each cohort as well as between the cohorts. It also introduces my own voice, my own experience of the PhD and how I, as both a researcher and a PhD student, fit within the wider research project.

The following chapters, 8 and 9, are an attempt to analyse and explore relevant issues for the present and future of the PhD and consequently of the university arising from the interpretation of the interviews with both supervisors and students. Chapter 8 questions what is the actual value currently being given to the PhD. It introduces the concepts of extrinsic and intrinsic value of the PhD and analyses what the role of the PhD in the Social Sciences is in this university, and possibly in other research-intensive universities.

Chapter 9 reflects on how the current trends affecting university education and funding of doctoral programmes may be changing the nature of social science research and ultimately, of the disciplines in the social sciences by adopting research practices and models that are historically in contradiction with them. It posits that this has consequences for the type of research being done at university as well as the academics universities may be producing in this new model of doctoral education.

Finally, the concluding chapter reflects and explains the main conclusions of this study and identifies the main contributions to knowledge of my research. It suggests future steps of research not only for research arising from the present data but also for new data collection for different research avenues.

This thesis is centred around the issue of the intellectual life of the PhD student and of the intellectual life of the university. These underline the whole of the thesis. By asserting whether the PhD is mainly a credential or whether the PhD is mainly

an intellectual journey one can assess what the priorities of the university currently

are in (en)forming the academics of the future.

2. The University

2.1. Short History of the University, a European Institution

In a study that focuses on doctoral programmes it is necessary to look at the University as an institution. My PhD research intends to look at the purpose of the PhD and recent developments in PhD programmes. This cannot be done without analysing the role of the university and how it has shifted, as the role of the PhD is shifting too. The PhD, thanks to its crucial role in preparing students for an academic career, can be indicative of other, more general trends, in academia. And that is how this thesis sees the relationship between both. In the following section I will make a genealogy of the PhD. In this one I will make a genealogy[1] of the university itself. It is of interest for this research to clarify the context, historical and present, of the object of study. A history of the university could help clarify if there were common trends between different higher education systems. This is even more pertinent when considering the internationalisation of the higher education market and the standardization of degrees seen across the globe. More importantly, it will be of relevance when trying to understand if the university, and the preparation of new academics, as will be discussed in the final chapters, is changing.

The question of the role of the university is an increasingly important one. As a particular social system, the university appears to deserve special attention and no longer be a sub-field of academics in sociology, education or psychology which,

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[1] The use of genealogy here borrows from Foucault's historical studies which assume that "a given system of thought (…) was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends" (Gutting 2003)

every so often, appear to dedicate some attention to academia as a field of study. As Abraham Maslow stated: "the study of scientists is clearly a basic, even necessary, aspect of the study of science" (quoted in Dreijmanis 2004).

"To the sociologists of science as well as to the sociologists of education (…) studies of the institutions of higher education have traditionally been, at best, a small sub-field" (Wittrock 1993:306). Wittrock mentions some authors as important in the study of higher education: Talcott Parsons, Neil Smelser, David Riesman, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Crozier, Alain Touraine, Jurgen Habermas. Their contributions however have remained separate, discrete. Authors have not referred to each other's work. Therefore it is not possible to consider this area as an established field of academic research. There has been research conducted in this field, but a lot has yet to be done in bringing all these contributions together. Studies in higher education are "fortuitous instances [and] are far from representing a strong tradition of sustained scholarship. Rather, the opposite would seem to hold true for social science on universities and higher education" (Wittrock 1993:307). More recently there have been important reflections on the university and its role in contemporary society. Barnett (2000, 2003, 2005), Delanty (2001a, 2001b, 2003) and Fuller (2000, 2009) could all be said to have contributed to the understanding of the university. However sociological approaches to the field cannot be said to constitute yet a subfield of what could be called sociology of academia or sociology of higher education.

As an increasingly important step into an academic career, the PhD is a privileged ground to understand some dynamics within academia. As a stepping ground, as a

rite of passage, as a power game, the PhD can provide crucial insight into how universities work and what it can mean for their future. This, not only as the main provider and creator of knowledge, but also as the ground for a socialization process that an increasing number of the population in western countries, and increasingly in developing countries, go through (UNESCO 2004). The PhD is at the same time the highest degree a student can obtain at university and the first step to become an academic. As such, it is the stepping ground for the progression: from student to pre-academic. In the process of doing a research degree, students are supposed to better understand how research is done, and many times also have the chance to teach. As such they will experience in practice some important elements of the academic career. And as such the PhD is also a rite of passage. Bourdieu (1989) suggests that the most important element of a rite of passage is the transitional moment lived through the ritual rather than the transition itself. In this light, the PhD therefore performs the role of a transitional time, a space where one is no longer *just* 'a student' but is not yet an academic, with the legitimacy accorded by the peers.

As a power game, the PhD is the *locale* where the ritual is played. Therefore there is something important students need to prove. That they are good enough (cf. interviews with students and supervisors) to become academics. And this is judged by no more than three or four people – one or two supervisors, and the two viva examiners. The product of the three or more years of work is to be judged and assessed. The power of this decision makes the PhD process one of considerable inequality. Even when supervisors talk of PhD students as their colleagues, they nonetheless acknowledge the asymmetry of the relation. This section intends to

contextualise what universities are by understanding and exploring what they have been throughout some fundamental steps in their history. This is because it is difficult to understand the PhD without understanding the role and the development of the institution that confers it: the university.

I will focus on some relevant developments in the history of the European university, from its inception up to the nineteenth century, including its *export* to the Americas, and opening some insights into the American university in the twentieth century. From the middles ages, it will then attempt to briefly review some of the issues arising in the period between 1500 and 1800, including the creation of several universities in the New World, namely in southern and northern America. Finally, the emergence of the Napoleonic and the Humboldtian universities will be analysed, especially the impact they had in the way universities started being conceived, including the emergence of the research university as the most influential university model in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. This is not an historical piece as such, but rather one that will briefly focus on some important developments in the history of the university, without which it would be difficult to assert whether the university is changing or not. In a reflection about change, looking at the recent past may not suffice. Since the recent past may be in itself a changing period too. A longer term approach to the history of academia, even as limited as it needs to be here, can therefore illuminate the main historical and regional trends.

The aim is to look at the social and political functions of the university throughout time and assess whether there have been recurrent themes in the history of

university. These may allow for a comparison between the different higher education systems. Whatever comparison is drawn it cannot, however, dismiss other issues such as internal organisation and structure, national, political and religious contexts.

2.1.1. The middle ages: the birth of the university

"The university is the second oldest institution with a continuous history in the Western world, the first being the Roman Catholic Church" (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993:1). Some accounts suggest the existence of different kinds of higher education centres or academies, before the middle ages, in China, India, Greece (Plato's Academy), Constantinople and even Morocco. The university as we know it today, had its origins in Europe, specifically in the birth of the universities of Bologna and Paris in the late eleventh century. In fact, Ruegg suggests, "the university is an European institution; indeed, it is the European institution *par excellence*" (1992a:xix). For him, the university is essentially a European endeavour that has managed to spread its existence and structure throughout the whole world, and which has historically been very close to the Catholic Church and the political power. However, institutions like the Catholic Church and political power, which were, since the inception of the University, a crucial part of its structure and *raison d'être*, have dramatically changed. For some though, the Roman Catholic Church, even if it has also spread throughout the whole world, has lost the monopoly it once had in Europe. This fact notwithstanding "the university is, together with the Church, the most time-honoured of all present-day macro-societal institutions" (Wittrock 1993:303). The strength of the political

establishment, especially through public funding of universities and research, still remains very strong.

The University as an institution, throughout its history, has kept many of its characteristics. The degrees awarded have been accepted worldwide, and the division into faculties is also a common feature of universities everywhere. Since the eighteenth century the university has been given a more particular focus: it has become the place where knowledge is to be cultivated and transmitted. One other trait that makes this an eminently European institution is that it has served certain functions across European countries. It has created and divulged knowledge and this within an intellectual tradition that is that of the European countries. Within this role, it has created an academic elite based on values that transcend frontiers within the continent (Ruegg 1993).

European Universities originated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. University as *Studium generale* was an institution of higher education promulgated by the pope or the emperor where its members, students and teachers, were put under the protection of that supreme authority who had founded the university itself. The right to teach was seen as universal and so it allowed the holder of the *licentiate docendi* to teach in all Christendom. Equally, the titles of *master* and *doctor* were also recognised everywhere and equally, independently of the university that had granted them. Verger notes, however, that there were the cases of Paris in regards of Theology and Bologna in regards to Law that firmly believed in the superiority and primacy of their degrees. They were the symbol of the highest intellectual achievement and, thus, assured high recognition and prestige. "Many universities

were, and still are, of the view that, the older they were the more they would gain in respect and authority" (Ridder-Symoens 1996:205). The institution of the *studium generale* followed, rather than established, the first universities when ecclesiastic authorities started creating new universities and needed a common legal form for all the new higher education institutions.

Verger (1992) argues that in the middle ages the term *universitas* was used by jurists to describe all types of corporations and communities. The use of this term to define the *Studium generale* clearly shows the important focus attributed to the fact that they were communities of teachers and students (but only of students in the so-called students' universities like Padua and Bologna where teachers were hired on annual contracts). "It implied a degree of independence and internal cohesion" (Verger 1992:38).

The two oldest universities are Bologna and Paris. Though it is difficult to date precisely when Bologna university was indeed founded, it is commonly accepted that it was the first university to be created, around 1088. These two universities were very different in their roots, focus and in the way they were administered. Bologna had various law schools. Because Italy was the main stage of tensions between the papacy and the empire the birth of the university there was a direct consequence of the need to develop written laws that those tensions and 'the renewal of urban life' needed. The university in Bologna was a 'students' university' since it was them who were responsible for, amongst other things, annually contracting its teachers.

Verger (1992) points out that the University of Paris, which was founded almost at the same time as the one in Bologna, had very different characteristics. Its origins can be traced to the schools which appeared at the end of the eleventh century. On the one hand there was the theology school at Notre-Dame and on the other there were the private schools with a more varied portfolio of courses. The university was founded so as to organise and control the proliferation of schools and the consequent confusion that such proliferation had created. In contrast with the University of Bologna, the University of Paris was a 'university of masters', where the masters administered the university.

Whereas Bologna was the model for the new universities in southern Europe, the University of Paris was the model for the fewer universities in northern Europe – Oxford University, for example, was created by scholars who had, mainly, studied in Paris. Until the end of the middle ages the number of universities in Europe proliferated. All of these were under the influence or administration of the pope or the emperor and the teaching of theology was high up in the universities' agendas.

From its very beginning there has therefore been more than one type, or model, of university. Talking about the University, even in the middles ages, cannot be about one single unique structure but rather one that originates from different settings and circumstances and therefore functions and is regulated in different ways. It is important to note the temptation to talk about a uniform institution however what there has been throughout the times is different kinds of institutions that have some similar characteristics (wide recognition of degrees awarded, site of transmission and creation of knowledge, international in its constituency, and as an influential

instrument of political power) but have also characteristics that make them different between themselves.

In the globalised academic world, where staff and students are increasingly international, there has been an attempt (e.g. Bologna Process) to uniformalize universities. The proliferation of English as the academic language is one of the examples. Even in countries with a strong resistance to foreign academic and intellectual influence such as France and Germany, but also in Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland and other European countries, there has been an increase in the offer of programmes in the English language. Turkey and Middle Eastern countries also have a strong tradition of higher education in English (and also some in French). The use of an international common language cannot but erode national differences. The offer of internationally recognised degrees (such as MBAs) also reinforces the view of the University as a uniform institution, or at least as an institution which desires that uniformity.

2.1.2. Transition from middle ages to Renaissance

From the late fifteenth century, with the Portuguese and Spanish discoveries, to the Renaissance period there were various factors which operated a change in the university, its aims and focus. If humanism shifted the focus of knowledge by liberating individuals from the overwhelming control of the roman catholic church, the discoveries and the contact with new cultures brought about the necessity to focus on subjects such as cosmography and geography, but also human rights and international law.

2.1.2.1. In the colonies

With the Portuguese and Spanish discovery of the new world the exchange between the two sides of the Atlantic started. One of the things the European exported was the University. By the end of the eighteenth century various universities had been created in the American continent. These were mainly European in the sense that they were established using the European universities and models. So, in a sense, new world universities were, in their beginning, reproductions of European universities. The Spanish created universities in South and Central America whereas the French and the British took their models to North America. Roberts et al (1996) argue, however, that if in the Spanish colonies the model remained a metropolitan one, in North America other models were later created and developed. It is important to note that the purpose of the universities that were originally created in the New World was to provide education to the European settlers and not to the indigenous people. This is a reflection of a self-serving and ethno- and euro-centric view of the role of the university, which asserts and reaffirms the power of a small part of the population.

They go on to notice that the colonial powers to set foot in America were of a different time. The Spanish settlers created their first university in south America (1538)[2] at least one century before the first university was created in north America. The Spanish settlers belonged to "the mental world of the middle ages". The Spanish model of university was still very much based on the model coming from the middle ages where the influence of the Catholic Church from Rome was still extremely dominant. Specifically they looked at the University of Salamanca

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[2] Real e Pontificia Universidad de Santo Domingo

which was one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the old continent. Two-thirds of the central and south American universities were based on the Salamancan model. The British and French, on the other hand, were men of the "early modern era", after the protestant reformation. The implication of this for the universities themselves was that while the Spanish model aspired at total control of culture, the universities in North America, even though very religious, belonged to a more pluralistic world.

The first university to be established in North America was the Massachusetts General Court in 1636, in 1639 renamed as Harvard College after a grant from a John Harvard. It was the first higher education institution in North America to be allowed to confer degrees. Yale College was created in 1701. In 1746 the College of New Jersey, now known as Princeton University was instituted. Columbia University, the then King's College in New York was founded in 1754.

2.1.2.2. In Europe

Muller (1996) notes that during this period there were two different systems of study: the *modus parisiensis* and the *modus bononiensis*, so named after, respectively, the University of Paris and the University of Bologna. The Parisian model consisted of a closed boarding and was present in French, English and Spanish universities whereas the Bolognese model was characterised by free attendance at the university and life in private accommodation and was common in Italian, German, northern and eastern European universities.

"The desire for a general improvement of human life presupposed practical instruction and cultivation of the mind" (Hammerstein 1996:621). During the Renaissance, Europe, be it catholic or protestant, adopts a new attitude towards knowledge. Instead of accepting 'truths' passed on by tradition, it is critical knowledge that tries to force its way into the 'European mind' (Hammerstein 1996). Thus, everything political, social, religious and philosophical could, eventually, be criticised.

2.1.3. University in crisis

There was, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries a crisis that affected universities and their prestige. Universities were criticised for being inert and for not serving the needs of the society they should be serving (Ruegg 1996). "The primary function of the university was reproducing the elite, with only limited social ascent from strata below" (Anderson 2004:13). The sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the period of the scientific revolution, were periods of great turmoil and change at universities. The fact that knowledge was still very much based in centuries old Greek and Arabic books constituted a problem for the men of science of that era. Critics wanted universities to become more scientific (in a modern sense) and less *bookish* (Porter 1996). Universities declined in popularity from the mid-seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. There were several reasons for this: the city bourgeoisie and the landed classes would study for the professions in professional colleges rather than in universities and the aristocracy preferred the military academies instead of universities.

2.2. National Culture and Nationalism

Hammerstein (1996) notes that, in the second half of the eighteenth century European nations turned to their own history and by doing this, countries started valuing their own traditions and history. Since the Enlightenment's main aim is to improve quality of life for the biggest number, the over-valuing of particular characteristics of one's own country seems to be, not against the nature itself of the Enlightenment, but rather one of the possible outcomes of the Enlightenment itself.

The fact that European nations turned towards themselves created tensions between them and a sense of nationalism developed throughout Europe. Intellectual exchange at the international level decreased to the point that, originally the Spanish, but then the French, the Italians and the English were forbidden to study at foreign universities (Hammerstein 1996). Later, study at the student's own country was the only choice. The use of Latin as the intellectual *lingua franca* decreased and national languages gained prominence.

2.3. Control and function

By the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century the Reformation, then followed by the Catholic Counter-Reformation shaped, in many ways, the way universities were controlled and what their objectives were to become. In England, the study of religion became quite important because there was a need for informed and educated clergy. Also, in Oxford and Cambridge, access was restricted to Anglicans. The Catholic Church, after the Council of Trent, created the seminaries to educate their clergy with the considerable advantage that

these seminaries were wholly controlled by the Church. Hence, this function remained separated from the university. In Germany religious divisions were quite clear and intense between Protestant and Catholic states. The 'territorial university', under the rule of the prince, would be affiliated to the prince's religion (Anderson 2004). In Holland, however, and due to its large Catholic minority, universities remained open to students of different confessions, which contributed to their intellectual standing in Europe. There were no universities in any Orthodox country until the creation of Moscow University in 1755.

Jesuits had a strong hold on German catholic universities, as well as those in Poland. Their grip over universities in western Europe was less strong and sometimes even inexistent, as in Louvain. Jesuits were "specialized in humanist, philosophical, and scientific education" (Anderson 2004:7). In western Europe the Jesuits had to compete with other religious orders over university control.

In Italy things were different. The Papal States controlled their universities, including the university of Bologna. In some northern states, like Lombardy and Tuscany, some universities were controlled by the Habsburgs. Finally, some universities in the southern states like Sicily and Naples were under the control of the Spanish.

In Spain, which had a large number of universities, a clear sign of its wealth and power in the sixteenth century, universities were very much dominated by religious orders, and thus remained independent from central power and control.

The prevalence of the study of traditional subjects like theology and philosophy soon gave place for a need to teach disciplines of a rather more practical nature like economics, technology, medicine and the natural sciences (Hammerstein 1996). In some countries, like France, Spain and Portugal, universities were not deemed to be the right vehicle of the new lights, since the institutions were too much ingrained in the practices and knowledge of the past. Hence, societies and foundations such as the Société des Sciences in France and the Royal Society of London came into existence in order to provide the much needed more pragmatic programmes. This was alongside the creation of new colleges that focussed on specialised subjects.

In Portugal, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the then Portuguese minister, decreed the enlightenment and progress as priorities in his country. He withdrew from the Jesuits their 'education prerogatives' as he wished that education would be based on secular principles arising from the French Enlightenment. The Jesuit-founded University of Évora was abolished and the University of Coimbra, one of the oldest in Europe, became the national university, based on the principles of the Enlightenment. In 1777 the end of scholasticism was decreed and there was a redirection of sciences towards 'empiricism and practical application (Hammerstein 1996). "Portugal seemed to be in the vanguard of the enlightened Catholic societies. Enlightenment was taught; it was eagerly taken up in the New World and carried further there. This all happened well before the reforms of the university in France in the early nineteenth century" (Hammerstein 1996:637). Spain followed Portugal in this move towards the enlightenment.

2.4. The nineteenth century onwards

1800 marks a new era in the history of University. In France this shift is symbolised by the centralized university with clear objectives in terms of social utility. In Germany the shift was different. The Humboldtian university saw a fusion of both teaching and research but, most importantly, saw research as not having to serve any other ends than the general intellectual education and improvement of human race (Anderson 2004). This was

> "the beginning of two decisive though contradictory lines of development which are shared by the universities in the nineteenth century. The orientation of the centrally, governmentally organized educational system, perfected by Napoleon and aimed at immediate social utility, is one of these. The other pattern is that inspired by von Humboldt – research without practical ends and intended to serve the intellectual education of the human race"

> (Ruegg 1992:xxiv)

Wittrock (1993) suggests that the Humboldtian university was inspired by holistic thinking. By this he means that its philosophy was one of refusal of 'narrow-minded' specialisation, and that this, in turn, was to become the ideal home for scientific activities. In Germany as well as in other European countries the rise of the research-led university was parallel to the creation of the modern nation-states in Europe. Universities served, thus, two purposes: creation of new knowledge and crystallising and reinforcing a sense of national identity. Whereas the French

model privileged not only a strict control over the curriculum and discipline, the university being the vehicle of conformation with official ideals, the German model, or Humboldtian model, more than passing on knowledge, saw the role of the university as showing how to attain knowledge.

2.5. The American model

2.5.1. Professional education

> There is a genre of American writing on anti-intellectualism in United States history, but there is also a body of writing on anti-intellectualism in Britain […] Suffice it to say that the Anglo-American political constitutions require an active citizenry; and while there are differences between the two countries on how that citizenry is to be educated, and differences of opinion within the countries themselves, traditions of representative government have inhibited if they cannot altogether prevent the penetration into the liberal education curriculum of idealist conceptions like Bildung.
>
> (Rothblatt 1993:41)

In the nineteenth century the ideal of liberal education is seen as better fulfilled in colleges. But the advantages of this policy was appreciated much sooner than that. In fourteenth century Padua there were as many as twenty-seven residential colleges. In nineteenth century America, changes were different and there were more 'opportunistic' responses to social and political changes. Hence, and in contrast with higher education institutions of colonial times, like Harvard and Yale, new institutions were created which specialised in the teaching of engineering and agriculture for example. Military academies and medical schools followed suit.

Thus, "diverse in curriculum and intake, the new American institutions could not and did not exemplify the principle of the unity of knowledge as found in the whole person of balance and moderation" (Rothblatt 1993:47).

Torstendahl makes reference to one important change in higher education which led to a transformation of the university system: "the professionalization of all scientific and scholarly work" (1993:139).

2.5.2. Graduate education in the US: the German influence and a research ethos

"Perhaps overshadowing all these changes was the long-awaited establishment of graduate education and research within American higher education" (Geiger 1993:235). He mentions Richard Storr who noted that in the half-century before 1860 'the need, as distinct from the demand, for graduate education had been declared loudly and repeatedly'. This was a consequence of the 'growing prowess' of the universities in Germany. The hegemony of German academia and the concrete examples of German university practices set strong examples, not just for American reformers, but for scientists and scholars all over. Yale was the university which conferred the first American PhDs in 1861, and Geiger argues that those PhDs were modelled from the German degree. This would avoid scholars having to go abroad for their graduate education. John Hopkins University, founded in 1876 defined itself as a 'German-style' university. The 1880s were the years where the influence of the German university was at its highest but it continued in the following decade. "The number of Americans studying in Germany continued to swell into the 1890s; but as these ambitious and

motivated scholars returned to their home campuses, they would spend the next generation adapting the ideals of German learning to the realities of higher education as they found them in this country. Chiefly, this meant assimilating advanced study and research with the nature of the American college" (Geiger 1993:235).

2.6. Financing higher education

From the 1890s the American universities saw a considerable development. While, Geiger (1993) acknowledges, the college was still at its centre, the development of separate departments, later called schools, helped develop education having in consideration utilitarian and professional purposes. This helped universities grow. Where this was not the case, as Princeton, John Hopkins and Stanford, universities remained relatively small in size. Schools of agriculture and medical schools developed a markedly research ethos.

At the time, research and teaching were mutually exclusive activities (Geiger 1993) due mainly to the fact that teaching was an all-absorbing activity. Students were generally ill-prepared and unmotivated. Entry requirements were generally low and 'lenient'. To overcome this, or at least to improve the quality of the cohorts of students, the Carnegie Foundation, in the early twentieth century was quick to define minimum secondary school requirements that a university worth its name should impose. "In 'The PhD Octopus', the Harvard philosopher William James penned the most celebrated condemnation of alleged Germanic tendencies toward pedantry and overspecialisation in American graduate studies. A substantial

number of humanists defended an ideal of liberal culture against the growing trend toward specialised erudition" (Geiger 1993:242-43).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, both Yale and Harvard started receiving donations from their alumni. Geiger (1993) points out that the Yale Alumni Association was created so as to help the university collect small donations. However, the university started receiving sizable endowments. At Harvard, its class of 1880 gave the university $100,000 and, from then, "every subsequent class would give at least as much" (Geiger 1993:243). These circumstances easily made both universities the richest in the country. More, philanthropy became an increasingly important element in university funding thus offsetting the financial problems that American universities had endured since their inception. But, this was not for all universities' benefit. While some universities saw their endowments grow, others continued struggling financially.

The increased financial well-being was also the starting point for the breaking away from the German university tradition and structure. The financial well-being of some universities was also brought about by increased student numbers. This allowed for an increase in faculty numbers. Departments grew and faculty became more specialised. Geiger (1993) points out that this changed the nature of university departments where specialisation led to the co-existence of various professorships within a particular department in contrast with the one-professor model prevalent in German universities. The 'autocratic model' of the latter was substituted by the collegial model. "The chaired professor, often also directing his own research institute, was (until the major 'reforms' of the 1960s) the central

figure in most European universities, in both Humboldtian and Napoleonic systems. Indeed, in a sense, the professors *were* the university" (Trow 1993:291-2). The powerful role of the professors in Europe was not replicated in the UK or in the American system. But this was due to very different reasons. Departments in American universities were, thus, constituted by various professors each specialised in their own field. They were expected to contribute to the advancement of their field. This models prevails today not only in the US but in Europe as well.

Geiger calls the creation of graduate teaching fellowships "one of the greatest unsung inventions of American higher education" (1993:245). Through the receipt of a bequest destined to encourage research, Harvard decided to create thirty fellowships for graduate students. These included the obligation to teach. The fellowships not only provided much-needed financial support for graduate students but it also relieved faculty from some of its teaching obligation.

"By the time of the First World War the American university had evolved a distinctive pattern that was quite different from what had been envisaged by the university purists of the preceding generation. Instead of eschewing the undergraduate college, it capitalised upon its popularity, upon the deep loyalties that it inspired, and upon the possibilities it presented for a fruitful division of labour. The pattern was anything but neat, and the university system still lacked funds for research *per se*; but because this model reflected powerful indigenous trends, it held great potential for the future" (Geiger 1993:245).

2.7. American Universities after the first World War

The 1920's saw a further growth and development of American universities. Geiger (1993) states that the number of PhDs in that decade almost tripled. And research in universities also grew. This trend showed no signs of abating even in the Depression years that followed. Numbers of PhDs doubled in the following decade. And, by the dawn of the second World War, "American scientists and scholars had established themselves at the frontiers of knowledge in virtually all fields" (Geiger 1993:245).

The period between the wars represented the coming of age for American universities and researchers, which were now seen to be at the forefront of knowledge in almost every field. (Geiger 1993). This, though, could not have happened without the contribution of two men: Beardsley Ruml, who in 1922 became director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, and Wickliffe Rose, who in the same year was to become director of the General Education Board. Geiger (1993) points out that these two men were important in the development of the idea that research was crucial for a better living: they both believed in the crucial role of science for the improvement of all. The two organisations were then reorganised as the Rockefeller Foundation but universities continued receiving considerable grants for their research. Grants, however, started became smaller and given to fields considered strategic. If the grants were reduced in size they became, however, available to more institutions (Geiger 1993).

The Rockefeller Foundation created with the National Research Council the first

post-doctoral fellowships in 1919 reinforcing its support to establishing research communities and boosting research capacity (Geiger 1993) in research universities.

2.8. American Universities after the second World War

The Second World War showed the benefits of the direct application of research outputs. This impacted in the notion of the university as an autonomous body (with self-organised knowledge) as shown in the creation of the University of Berlin which was very concerned with the freedom to teach and research. The prominence of the research side was, however, well in tune with the grant systems present in the American system. The American, research-intensive, model became the model for university reformers elsewhere.

2.9. Three university models? The US, the UK and Europe

At the time of the American Revolution there were 8 higher education institutions in the US, whereas in England there were only 4 (Oxbridge, Durham and London), plus 4 in Scotland and 2 in Ireland, even though England was rather more populous.

2.9.1. The US

In the US higher education institutions could be said to be divided into colleges – focussed on undergraduate degrees-, and universities – who grant higher degrees like the doctorate (Trow 1993). When US universities were created the idea of market as a crucial element of social life was already prevalent. On the other hand,

in England, this had not been the case and the idea that 'the market' could or should regulate 'higher culture' is not well accepted at all.

2.9.2. The UK

Cardinal Newman's "The Idea of the University" had a considerable impact on the way universities were conceived in the UK. For him, the University was "the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, in fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation; it maps out the territory of the intellect, and sees that … there is neither encroachment or surrender on any side" (Cardinal Newman in Kerr 2001:2). This idea was influential in the UK university system throughout a considerable part of the twentieth century. Two major developments in the last century however changed the landscape of higher education in this country and moved the system away from Cardinal Newman's idea of the University.

The first was the expansion of the number of universities in the 1960s in England when by 1969 university numbers had almost doubled from 25 to 45 according to Deem (2004) or from 33 in 1960 to 44 by 1971 according to Mayhew et al (2004). This followed the Robbins Report and its recommendation to increase the number of universities (Committee on Higher Education: 1963). The expansion of the university sector in the 1960s focused on two types of university: 'new' universities, like York and Sussex, and 'technological' universities, like Loughborough and Brunel (Mayhew et al 2004). The Robbins Report identified four major purposes: (a) instruction in skills; (b) promotion of general powers of the mind; (c) the advancement of learning; (d) the transmission of a common

culture (Mayhew et al 2004) which were linked to the rise of the 'new middle class' and the new economic demands for graduates.

The most fundamental change, however, happened in the early 1990s when polytechnics "came under the same funding arrangements as the universities" (Blanden and Machin 2004: 233). In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act established the polytechnics as universities and became known as the post-1992 universities. The incorporation of polytechnics into the Universities raises a few concerns but the following paradox needs to be pointed out.

> Whilst a typical ex-polytechnic is different from a Russell Group university in, inter alia, the average academic attainment of the students it admits and in the mix of subjects and courses offered, a commonly applied funding mechanism is likely to make the two more alike in courses offered, internal objectives set and incentives employed and in staff requirements than they otherwise would have been.
>
> (Mayhew et al 2004:76)

These two developments moved the UK higher education system away from Cardinal Newman's original ideas of the university. Firstly, in the 1960s universities were created mainly to respond to new economic demands and less so for the protection of "all knowledge and science" without "surrender". The aims were of a more pragmatic nature than those suggested by Cardinal Newman. The incorporation of the polytechnics into the university system might have diverted many universities away from "the territory of the intellect". The need for a more market oriented and vocational course offer has made some universities refocus their aims towards the labour market needs sidelining a conception of knowledge and the intellectual as being at the core of the university.

Mayhew's et al argument is an important one however; with the increase in UK fees to up to £9,000 per year from 2012 it will be interesting to assess how different types of universities will respond to the new economic and labour demands. However, what remains is that in the UK there is a least a two-tier system of higher education, with prestigious and research-intensive universities on the one hand (and Blueskies University belongs to this group) and on the other universities more geared towards vocational subjects and more heavily reliant on teaching rather than on research. Even if there is one system it could be suggested that it is an hierarchical one with research institutions at the top of the hierarchy and teaching-oriented universities in the bottom of the hierarchy.

Even with the widening participation agenda in higher education in the UK we still remain very different from the mass education system *par* excellence, the US. In the UK there are higher entry standards for universities than in the US: "If our [US] colleges and universities, for example, were to try to maintain a high and common standard for entry, as in the UK, many of them would have no students at all" (Trow 1993:286). The UK higher education system is still moving from an elitist to a mass higher education system.

Student support (counselling services, career services, learning centres – student services) provided by US universities may be more appropriate, in a European mindset, to a secondary school. In the US professional education still has an enormously strong hold on universities whereas in the UK they are largely excluded from the university system. However this might be changing especially

with the introduction of higher fees in 2012 and with the subsequent increase of the "value for money" attitude from the part of students and parents. Universities will need to be seen to provide a variety of services and support to students channelling some important funding away from teaching and research and towards support services and infrastructure.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw the creation of new, 'civic', universities, such as Birmingham and Manchester. These universities were often created by local politicians and philanthropists and aimed at serving the needs of the local communities (Macfarlane 2007).

> Unlike their predecessors, 'civic' universities embraced a more modern interpretation of service that today is rooted in the language of access, widening participation and social justice. However, while contemporary universities seek to widen participation to all socio-economic groups, those in the nineteenth century were beginning the process of democratization by extending opportunities to the new middle classes who had prospered as a result of industrialization. A falling birth rate and family size also meant that investing more in the education of the individual child became a practical possibility for some.
>
> (Macfarlane 2007:33)

The UK has had in the past 20 years one of the smallest proportions of university enrolment in the developed world. In the early 1990s enrolment was 15% below any other 'modern industrial society' (Trow 1993). Even if entry rates for tertiary education have improved throughout the 2000s, the UK still lags behind many OECD countries with 47% entry rates in 2002 (OECD 2010). As for the US, 'the largest and most diverse system of higher education in the world', entry rates in 2002 were 64%, circa 14 million students enrolled in its 3,500 institutions (these

numbers exclude the FE college population in the UK but includes community colleges in the US).

According to Trow (1993) the lack of a large learned population in the US meant that universities were in fact managed and directed by laymen. This characteristic has subsisted there. In the UK, however, the higher education system was very much influenced by Oxbridge with its peculiar college system governed by fellows. This altogether more democratic system (even though it is simultaneously a rather elitist system in itself) prevails since many English academics in other universities had in fact studied at Oxbridge.

> In Britain the old universities and those established in the postwar period are seen by many to be challenged by the former polytechnics, which have acquired the status of universities and as a result the idea of the university as a place of excellence is becoming meaningless.
>
> (Delanty 2001a:108)

2.9.3. Europe

In continental Europe there is a variety of models in university education. As such it is very difficult to unify the continent and suggest that there is a European model of the university. From the 5-years degrees to reach an undergraduate degree in Portugal and Spain to the 5 years it takes to complete an undergraduate and masters degree in Germany, to the existence of Hautes Ecoles in France there has been a variety of models in Europe. These differences though, are being slowly erased by the introduction of the Bologna process and similar length degrees and similar degree titles are being introduced.

2.10. History of the University: brief reflection

In this section a short history of the university was presented. By understanding the University's history we can better grasp what its role has been and what were the main characteristics that made, and make, the universities what they are today. Some important elements in its history are still pertinent - and some of them are still present – and remain important topics when thinking about Higher Education, in thinking about what the university is in the twenty-first century. The wide recognition degrees have had is still a present characteristic of an internationalised university system; the creation and spread of knowledge are main elements in university life; the division between teaching and research remains at the core of academia, the birth of the research-led university in Germany and its influence in American universities and the influence of American universities in the twentieth century all over the world have shaped much of the history of the university in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries; the establishment of graduate education in the US. The issues of funding higher education are as fundamental now as they have always been, especially when students start to funding themselves from 2012; the use of teaching fellows to liberate faculty to do their research, the huge increase in PhD numbers since the early 1900s, and the supremacy of American scholars.

This understanding of the history of the university has helped to shape my research and my thesis because in order to understand what the PhD is about, and what it is becoming, I need to understand what universities are, how they have been structured, their social aims and contexts. What universities are today is a consequence of the development of the University throughout the centuries as well

as of geographical and country specific peculiarities. In order to study the university it is therefore important to understand both. However, there are elements of the modern university that borrow heavily from the history of this institution. And maybe more so in *old*, elite universities like Blueskies. This history has shaped my analysis of Blueskies University because it has helped understand how it has coped with period of changes, how funding has heavily impacted its structure and aims and served different agendas. The introduction of a stronger research ethos influenced by the Enlightenment as well as the impact of the American university in the current model of university systems worldwide have all contributed to focus my analysis and my understand of the University as well and of Blueskies University.

The following chapter will focus on issues that have surrounded reflection about doctoral degrees.

3. The PhD

3.1. State of the art: Literature on the PhD

Currently, there is a considerable amount of published work with practical advice on how to proceed in the PhD study, a *genre* I will name: 'how to do' literature. These usually focus either on the whole doctoral process, and guide students through it (Fitzpatrick et al 1998; Dunleavy 2003; Finn 2005; Glatthorn 2005; Brewer 2007; Churchill and Sanders 2007), or on a particular element of the PhD process, like writing, the viva or time management (Murray 2003; Tinkler and Jackson 2004; Kearns and Gardiner 2006; Murray 2006).

However, these studies are general reflections over personal experiences and views rather than (in-depth) research over the PhD process and meaning. This has changed, mainly in the 21st century with the publication of, amongst others, the Roberts Report (HM Treasury 2002), What Do PhDs Do? (WDPD?) (UKGrad 2004) report published by the UKGrad and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES survey) (Park 2007, Park and Kulej 2008, Kulej and Wells 2009) directed and published by the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

Some authors have addressed student experience having in mind some recent changes. Phillips and Pugh (2005) already tried to assess what impact the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice had on the PhD itself. But the literature still lacks an analysis of the PhD experience that focuses on the impacts that the Roberts Report had on the PhD itself, and subsequent PhD experience. There has been, to my knowledge, only one attempt to assess the nation-wide

implementation of the new directives for doctoral programmes, namely the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) under the auspices of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (Park 2007; Park et al 2007). This was the first national effort to gauge the extent to which changes introduced in the PhDs were having an impact on the doctoral experience of PhD students. Notwithstanding, more efforts need to be made in order to assess and evaluate how doctoral programmes have been adapted and how this has been received by students and supervisors alike. PRES is currently in its fourth edition in 2011 however some of the institutions who have taken part in the previous edition (2009) will not do so this year. The main argument is that the two editions are too close together in terms of time and thus institutions have not yet had the time to implement or even suggest changes to their institutions arising from the first edition results. Moreover, there is a concern not to overwhelm students with surveys and to avoid survey fatigue.

My doctoral research thus aims at addressing issues that are yet to be developed in the literature, namely how students and supervisors alike are adapting to these changing times, how they are coping with them, and how the implementation of new rules is being put in place. The doctoral degree requires a considerable investment, namely of time, on the part of both actors: doctoral students and supervisors. It is hence imperative to address their concerns, their expectations, their own (social) constructs and frustrations. By addressing these issues, we are more likely to understand what the PhD in fact is rather than what it should be, which I consider a fundamental question in the current climate, one of perceived change. More, a topology of praxis at doctoral level is something I consider crucial

and useful at the same time. Who is doing what and how are pillars to understanding motivations and socialization processes that lie behind them. All of these issues will hopefully make clear what is in fact changing, what is the PhD practice in the departments I studied and the fundamental question of what the purpose of the PhD is.

What the literature has yet to address and maybe because the changes that have occurred are quite recent, and are still underway, is how PhD students and academics are experiencing, and adapting to, the changing doctoral programmes in the UK. In fact, the literature on PhD supervision and about the student-supervisor relationship is quite prolific. Some literature, mainly coming from the US, focuses on the American doctoral degrees with a special attention to attrition, length of the degree and destination of doctoral graduates (Bowen and Rudenstine 1992; De Valero 2001; Holden 1995).

3.2. Genealogy of the PhD

Doctoral programmes in the UK are undergoing substantial changes and a considerable amount of what has been written about them is geared towards practical implications of political and funding pressures. Recent research and literature have been more focussed towards what these changes could mean in terms of what kind of PhDs the new directives could *produce* and also towards what PhDs should be (Park 2007). However interesting and important, these issues are missing some crucial points: why students are undertaking their own PhDs, what their expectations are and how supervisors can adapt to the new constraints.

Very little has been written about how the changes in doctoral degrees programmes have affected the PhD experience of both the students and the supervisors. This is not to say, however, that little has been written on the PhD, on the supervisory relationship and so on. Things have moved since Bowen and Rudenstine stated in 1992 that little had been written on doctoral programmes as such even if they stated that supervision and supervisory relations were then a hot topic in the literature (Bowen and Rudenstine 1992). What is missing though is the analysis of change in PhD programmes, which is natural considering how recently the changes have been introduced.

The literature on higher education has been prolific since the early 1980s but the one reflecting on personal experiences of doctoral degrees has been less. Some reflections on the role and *prestige* of the PhD however can be traced back to the 1960s, an era of intense discussion in Europe and the US over the purpose of education and the university, materialized in the intense student demonstrations in France and elsewhere. The 1970s also saw some activity surrounding the issue of doctoral degrees. While I was researching the literature on the PhDs I found some interesting contributions dating as far back as 1905. I decided to do a short genealogy in the Foucauldian sense of the literature on the PhD, especially that made available through academic journals. In his article "Some Ph.D. Statistics" (Tombo 1905) discusses issues of inbreeding within universities by which he means the number of professors with PhDs from the institution where they are now members of faculty.

German universities were very important to the birth and early ages of the American universities. In the previous section I have looked at how German universities shaped American ones and made a short reference to the history of the university and its purposes and characteristics. This is relevant in terms of understanding what the role of the university is currently and how the doctoral degree fits within academia's role of knowledge production and reproduction.

For the period from 1928 to 1939 I would like to point out three articles which are of particular interest for the analysis of the development of the literature on the PhD. Their importance stems from that fact that they set the ground of what have become important elements and issues present when questioning the purpose, the role and the structure of PhD degrees. The issues they discuss have persistently been present in the literature until today. The way the doctorate is discussed at present echoes these past texts and questions hence my choice of these texts. These three articles provide the fundamentals to do so a short genealogy of the literature on the PhD. In the Foucauldian sense the concept of genealogy is used to describe the process through which a concept, or 'thing', develops through its history.

In 1928 Eaton (1928) from Cornell University suggested three types, or *functions* as he puts it, of the *doctors' degree*: one that sees the student as a kind of employee that executes the research under the supervision of the professor and which belongs to the latter; another that suggests that the student is an independent learner and researcher where the role of the supervisor is one of 'advice and criticism' and, finally, a third one which assigns the candidate a certain level of independence after, and only after, s/he has fulfilled an initial probation where s/he

has proved her/his proficiency in certain techniques which are of importance to his discipline and research.

Let's concentrate on the two first conceptions. These appear to have remained in the practice of PhD programmes to the present. If, on the one hand, the doctorates in sciences, such as in Physics, Biology and Chemistry, adopt a model where the student joins a research group under the direction of a principal investigator and where the student performs part of that research which is assigned to him, on the other, there is the model, more common in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, where the student defines and produces their own individual research project. But Eaton goes further and creates a gradation of quality in research produced in the different *types* within his model. For him, the highest level of research, which he defines as the discovery of *truth*, is the one produced when the student is working under the guidance of the supervisor and has not ownership of the research. Where the research he is undertaking is the supervisor's. The lowest form of 'truth discovering' is the one that distinguishes the quality outcome of research: the research from the student is never on the level of the one made by the faculty. He states: "For it is neither assumed nor to be assumed that the norm of acceptability in student research shall equal the norm of staff production in research. The standard is, rather, the *minimal level of acceptable staff research*" (Eaton 1928:620) (my italics).

If we extrapolate this comment to the sciences versus social sciences doctoral models we could conclude, in Eaton's view, that the current PhD programmes in the Social Sciences produce, at the level of the doctoral student, research which is

below the quality of the supervisors'. This could easily be the case in the early years of the doctoral programmes, but it is questionable by the later years of the doctoral research. However, Eaton notes that it is in the second model, where the student is an independent researcher, that "the candidate is placed in the position of the researcher" (Eaton 1928:620) and thus is trained by performance of a "'complete act' of research" (p.620). In the first model, which we could call of apprenticeship, the student is "trained only as a technical assistant, not a researcher" (1928:620).

These are important elements to take into consideration when analysing the purpose of the PhD and to frame the analysis of the literature that was to be produced in the future. Eaton concludes that the university, which should both aim at producing research of the highest quality and, at the same time, preparing researchers to fulfil that role in the future, is dealing with a tension. This tension lies in the fact that the model that in his view creates higher quality research is in opposition with the one that produces the best future researchers. "The functions of research and of training in research are coordinate, but they are not coincident" (1928:620). How does he solve this dilemma? Well, he envisages a university that embraces two types of research: a research of the *highest quality* which will be performed by experts – and which he call university research – and a research of *high quality* performed by apprentices which will not contribute to the furthering of knowledge but will serve the purpose of preparing researchers. This conception can be a valuable contribution to the analysis of my data in order to see whether supervisors and students share this twofold conception of university. Or else,

maybe the functions of the university as Eaton sees them co-exist in the universities but the relationship between them remains critical and complex.

A couple of years after the publication of Eaton's article, the Journal of Higher Education, in its first volume, published an article from Dale (1930) which focussed on the "Training of Ph.D.'s". In this paper, the author ponders over the ability of doctoral students to teach, and asks how can a PhD prepare for a college teaching position. The conclusion is that it cannot at the time and that new structures should be put in place to prepare them for that particular role. In addition, he quotes a communication from the Association of American Colleges that recommends that no university should admit students who have not had previous teaching experience and that it should require the student to obtain "such interest and experience … for which no graduate credit should be given" prior to admitting the student as a doctoral candidate. This article is a reminder that much has changed in the way universities prepare their students for their future careers. The Roberts Report, which is changing the face of doctoral study in the UK, or at least of doctoral programmes, addresses the question of research training but also that of transferable skills training. The Roberts Report and the new training demands put on doctoral students also have in mind that doctoral students should complete their degrees with more than research skills and specialized knowledge on their field of study. Also that students should be prepared for their career post-PhD. If they are looking to pursue a career in academia then it is important that they prepare themselves for that, and this includes getting teaching experience and reflecting on their own teaching practices.

Nelson (1933) brings to the fore two interesting and important concepts when thinking about what the PhD represents: PhD as a "union card" for academia and that of servility amongst candidates for higher degrees. He suggests that his peers view the doctorate as a "union card" which grants access to an academic career and this, in turn, creates a sense of servility and humbleness from students towards the achievement of a PhD. In other words, and already in the twenties and thirties, and maybe more even in the Unites States than over here in the United Kingdom, the PhD was an essential milestone through which one could be granted access to a career in an university. The concept of servility brings along some problems. Students, according to Nelson, are usually in economically difficult circumstances and the access to the "union" is of extreme importance for their livelihood. But, for that, they need to comply with rules and requirements set up by the "union card" holders who are all too aware of the value of said "card". Thus, the discussion over whether to grant less degrees and thus making the "card" even more valuable comes as a logical consequence against the widening of participation.

The three articles referred to in the present section are important for they analyse and discuss important issues in what relates to the PhD: what is the role of the PhD student and the value of their research, the importance of a wider view of doctoral education that includes skills other than those merely related to research and, finally, the idea of the PhD degree as the door into academia. These issues will be present in the analysis of the questions that I will pursue in my research.

3.3. The PhD in the Social Sciences

The PhD in the social sciences has characteristics that distinguishes it from the PhDs in the natural sciences, as in Physics, Chemistry and others. Table 1 shows some of the most fundamental differences between two PhD *types*: social sciences and sciences. This terminology is used in order to simplify the comparison and because is the usual one used by academics. The differences between PhDs in different subjects range from the daily run of the research to the scope of the thesis as shown in table 1 below where I attempt to devise a simplified typology of main characteristics of two different types of PhD: the one in the Social Sciences, main focus of this thesis, and the PhD in the Sciences, which is a model that as I will show later has been increasingly used as the ideal PhD model and thus the one that other disciplines should adopt. It is important to note that according to the Higher Education Policy Institute in 2006-07 the social sciences topped the non-STEM subjects in terms of number of students in research degrees (HEPI 2010). In the same year 60% of research students were doing a PhD in a STEM subject and 40% in non-STEM subjects. There were 8,540 students doing a PhD in social sciences in that year which represented an increase of 16% from 2002-03 (HEPI 2010). This typology arises from my understanding of the literature and my research on the PhD, especially arising from my interviews with both PhD students and supervisors.

Table 1: Differences between PhDs in Social Sciences and in the natural Sciences

	PhD in Social Sciences	PhD in natural Sciences
Scope of the thesis	Student responsible for whole research project	Student responsible for a part of a wider research project
Topic of the thesis	Student's own	Part of a wider research project and selected/assigned by the supervisor/principal investigator
Results	Only positive results accepted	Negative results accepted
Proximity to supervisor	Meeting by arrangement	Constant presence of supervisor
Location	Student rarely has own space provided by department/university. Many students work from home	In the lab.
Proximity to other researchers	Lonely endeavour	Close to other researchers in same lab
Funding	Student has to apply individually for funding	Attributed to student as part of the overall funding for supervisor's project
Duration of doctoral programme	Rarely within 4 years	Stricter time limit – due to funding
Facilities	Usually none.	Lab, computing facilities, desk

This table illuminates main differences between the two types of PhD research and experience. Firstly, it refers to the scope of the thesis. One difference that appears fundamental is that of the scope of the doctoral project. In the Social Sciences the student is expected to devise the topic of their research as well as determine the various steps of the whole of the research project. The student is expected to conduct all elements of the research project. Some of the students interviewed had spent their first year of the PhD defining and finessing their research project and

proposal. On the other hand, students in the sciences tend to be part of a team of researchers, which may include the principal investigator (who tends to be the main supervisor of doctoral students involved in the project), postdoctoral researchers and other PhD students. The project proposal and scope as well as the funding of the project (and of the PhD students who take part in it) are the responsibility of the principal investigator. The student tends to be assigned a part of the research project. Funding for the PhD in the social sciences is done individually by the student.

These two initial elements – scope of thesis and topic of the thesis – are seen as fundamentally different for the two types of PhDs above. They highlight the different levels of participation towards a final research project: one more individual model and the other which is a more collective model. And one of the main reasons why the nature and the practice of research in the social sciences is very different to that in the natural sciences. And therefore it is essential that different funding bodies understand the different nature of research practice in diverse disciplines.[3]

Other differences are that students in the Social Sciences tend not to have a their own place or desk. At times there might be a research room where computers and desks are available to students on a first-come-first-served basis, and many students work from home or in the library. Students in the natural sciences generally work in a lab and tend to have their own desk and computer facilities. They will also have a close contact with their supervisors who usually is the

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[3] This issue is discussed in-depth in chapter 9.

principal investigator for the whole research project and is therefore also based in the lab. In the social sciences though the students tend to need to arrange meeting with their supervisors and their contact is much less regular. In terms of contacts with other researchers (be it PhD students or postgraduate researchers) the same happens as with the supervisors: more contact between those in the natural sciences than in the social sciences.

Finally, in terms of length of the doctorate, the natural sciences tend to have better completion rates than the socials sciences. This is one of the main changes happening at doctoral level in the latter and is a very relevant issue which is discussed throughout my thesis.

3.4. Roberts Report, funding and conceptions of the doctorate in the UK

This research arises in the context of national and international shifts in higher education systems and of a questioning of its purpose. More specifically universities are standardizing their degrees and processes in order to try to gain grounds in quality and peer legitimation (Gilbert 2004; Gilbert et al 2004). The Roberts Report (2002) and the Bologna Process are examples of the opening up of educational systems and are a reflection of the international and widespread refocus on higher education and what its main aims should be. Economistic concerns prevail and considerable attention is given to the efficient use of funding and how a knowledge society will lead to an economically and financially strong society. And the competition for the high fee paying international students is getting fiercer. In 2007, the business of higher education in the UK amounted to

almost £21 billion (HESA 2008). Even though official figures do not separate total fees figures paid by non-EU international students the total amount paid by foreign students in university fees in the UK in the year 2004/05 amounted to £1.39 billion (Vickers and Bekhradnia 2007). Vickers and Bekhradnia further calculated that international students spent a further £2.5 billion on living costs for that same year. This very clearly shows the importance of attracting foreign students for the country's economy. And even though they note that numbers of foreign students coming to the UK has been increasing the increases are happening at ever reducing rates. Still, over 60% of higher degree students (both masters and doctoral students) in the UK are foreign students (BBC 2008). And they warn that: "there should be not presumption that this [increase] will continue".

As other countries begin to use English as the language of instruction, and as the effects of the Bologna Agreement begin to take hold, eroding some of our competitive advantage; as other countries start to market themselves more aggressively; and as better information becomes available that enable students to compare the value they receive for their money, it is quite possible that UK universities will begin to struggle to maintain numbers while charging the sorts of prices that are charged at present" (Vickers and Bekhradnia 2007:9-10). In order to appeal to international students, an increasing number of programmes (at all levels) all over the world is being offered in English in order to entice those highly desirable international students. Between 15% (for EU students) and 27% (international non-EU students) report they get poor value for money in their education in UK HEIs (Sastry and Bekhradnia 2007). This could further impact negatively on the attractiveness of UK universities for foreign students.

Kehm (Kehm 2006) notes some of the problems facing doctoral education in Europe and also the US. Of all the issues mentioned by her I would like to retain a few for further analysis and discussion considering the UK HE context: structure of doctoral programmes, funding, duration of doctoral studies, supervision and quality control and, finally, the transition into an academic career. These are issues that are being discussed for quite some time and optimal solutions are yet to be found and agreed upon. Economic interests and pressures are at times at odds with the personal and academic interests of supervisors and students alike.

Historically, the doctorate in the social sciences has been quite an individual affair. Students were often left to their own devices and meetings with supervisors were rare. The usual anecdote used in this case is that of the supervisor who tells the student to spend six months in the library and come up with a big and great idea. Little support was given and the students were supposed to learn by themselves and learn by mistake. But with increasing concerns over student support, accountability and imposed deadlines, there has been a shift in terms of the structure of doctoral degrees. It is now common that the student has two co-supervisors (arrangements over shared supervision vary greatly between departments and institutions), and the inclusion of some coursework is current practice. More, departments have more stringent rules as to how many times student and supervisor should meet per term or year and hurdles, such as the upgrade and the presentation of papers in research seminars have been introduced and are common practice.

The closer involvement of the department and the supervisor in the student's doctoral process is seen to prevent students from going 'astray' and complete their PhD in the 'allotted' time. So, the structure of the doctoral programme can be seen as intrinsically linked with the issues of supervision, funding and (consequently) of the duration of the degree. The latter though, is mainly influenced by economic factors and a rather limited notion of knowledge and knowledge creation. The onus appears to have been put now in the deadline for completion of the PhD rather than on the knowledge achieved and created in and with the PhD. It seems to be the case that in the UK it is the funding of doctoral degrees that represents the biggest drive for change.

Another crucial element and currently a considerable problem in doctoral education is that of students who want to pursue an academic career after completing their PhD. With increasing numbers of PhDs awarded every year in most OECD countries (Kehm 2006) and more specifically in the UK, the problem of academic labour market saturation is ever more present. The key issue is that there are too many PhD graduates for the vacancies available in academia and that is reflected in the "decline of academic work as a career destination relative to the number of doctoral graduates" (Gilbert at al 2004:379). Moreover, these positions tend to be taken by graduates from top universities in the UK. This has a further impact on the aspirations of PhD graduates from universities other than the ones belonging to the Russell Group. All of these issues will be developed and (re)contextualised further below.

3.5. The Bologna Process, change in Europe and the Lisbon Strategy

The future of the PhD

> Do we want to prepare novice researchers for the world of educational research as it is, or do we want to prepare them for the world as it might become?
>
> (Pallas 2001:6)

In Europe, a concern at the very core of the European Union (EU) is the mobility of its citizens within its borders. One of the important elements in achieving this is the recognition of degrees *inter pares*. Different European countries had considerably different higher education programmes and this at times made it difficult for a degree in one of the EU countries to be recognised and accepted as equivalent in another country. An example of this was the non-recognition of the UK masters degree as the equivalent of the Portuguese masters degree when applying for civil service jobs in Portugal. Hence the process of bringing together the wide variety of degrees offered in order to make them more similar and, thus, making it easier for a degree in one country to be recognised in another. This process came to be known as the Bologna Process, the city where the signing of the Bologna Declaration (1999) took place. The Lisbon Strategy and the subsequent Europe 2020 Strategy (2010) furthered this joint European view of development and put the development of skills for economic growth at the forefront of national educational programs.

Serbanescu-Lestrade (2005) in her study of two French and two German universities suggests there is a sense in European universities that the Bologna process is a top-down reform that 'nobody in universities asked for'. This reveals the independent spirit that is observable in academia everywhere in Europe, where academic staff revel in the independence that their institutional position offers them.

There is a sense that everywhere universities and staff are struggling with the new direction the PhD is taking and, in this transitional phase, we are still trying to understand what the direction is.

4. Methodological reflections

> I should like to ask … how my degree compares in significance with the training he received in the [Plato's] Academy. What does a PhD represent? What difference should it make to me to be welcomed into the ranks of that self-perpetuated, self-selected group whose members comprise the supposed aristocracy of our educational system?
>
> (Nelson 1933:234)

> Th[e PhD] is the antithesis of the whole of the rest of our education.
>
> (PhD student quoted in Salmon 1992)

4.1. Autobiographical account and reflexivity: the author's narrative

The period of doctoral research is one populated with anxieties and self-doubt (Salmon 1992) and this was clear from the interviews conducted with students. Prior to my PhD I was doing research for Blueskies University I became more and more familiarized with the problems concerning doctoral research and soon found myself 'knowing' what the PhD was about. And, almost in an arrogant kind of way, found it difficult to empathise with the problems and difficulties students were facing. Moreover, I faced with disbelief the statement some students made about not knowing what a PhD is, and how long it took to actually get to grips with it. I thought it was rather straightforward what the PhD was. I thought that students should have made more research before starting their PhD. Reality struck, though, when I started my own PhD.

At this stage I find that it is only possible to understand what a PhD is by doing one. The extent of individual investment and the intellectual demands of the PhD are unlike any previous educational experience I have had. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter says: "Th[e PhD] is the antithesis of the whole of the rest of our education" (Salmon 1992). The reason for a section in my thesis dedicated to my own doctoral experience is related to the fact that this PhD is a reflection and analysis of the PhD experience. As such, and as a researcher who is intrinsically involved in the process he is studying, it is of crucial importance to reflect about my own doctoral experience.

For me this process is one of the researcher-cum-subject in order to contribute to the analysis of the research itself. It is also a self-auditing process which has helped avoiding an almost *schizophrenic* relationship between researcher and research whereby a very close involvement in the process could lead to a tunnel vision and almost disconnection with the reality under study. By this auditing process the researcher aims to follow the path of doing a PhD on the PhD experience rather than doing a meta-PhD – a PhD about PhDs - which could be a risk considering the proximity to the subject and the previously mentioned attitude towards the PhD before embarking on my own. This has enabled me to become self-critical during the whole process of data analysis and writing up. When I deal with both the literature and my data, I have had to constantly ask myself with which eyes I am interpreting them. And by doing this I have called upon my doctoral-student-self to the fore. It has been as process of awakening, and developing, the PhD student persona. That is not to say that prior knowledge and experience in the field were put aside. They could not have been. Especially

because they enrich my perceptions and analysis of the data and the reality I am studying. What I see my PhD persona to be, the learning apprentice, is one that opens up possibilities, questions his own perceptions, and develops interpretations and arguments.

My position as a researcher and also subject is at the basis of the ethnographic approach of my PhD study, an idea which I will develop in a section below. But what is fundamental to distinguish, or at least clarify, is the methodological conundrum of my position as a research officer for Blueskies University and at the same time a PhD student. I was, at the same time, taking two roles, with two different research projects, which aimed to find answers to different research questions. And this chapter will aim to clarify these two positions, but also acknowledge that they have been extremely intertwined. There have been two considerably different moments in my own perception of my roles. An initial one, where different research objectives were very clear, but my own perception of my role in the two research projects was eventually less. And a subsequent moment when it became clearer what my roles were throughout the research process. Below I will clarify my roles by using a metaphor: that of 'duet'. But one thing became clear: after the initial intellectual struggle of knowing who was I in the research process I finally came to terms with the complexities of my role in the two research projects. And this I see as a strength of the research itself. This strength arises from the variety of positions and information I gained. This, as I said, did not come without intellectual struggle. This chapter will develop this idea of the closeness of the two research projects, the 'preliminary study' and the PhD study, and it will build on the strengths of the two projects. Even though they

constitute two separate entities they notwithstanding came to existence almost simultaneously. And therefore, almost reinforced each other's validity. How was this done? By setting very clearly what each project aimed to do, what questions and motivations drove the two projects, and this has reinforced their own identity. Of course this could have been made even more difficult if I was still in the same research position at Blueskies University. However, it has been a couple of years since I have been able to dedicate myself to the PhD project. And thus create a certain distance towards the initial, preliminary study.

4.2. How the doctoral research project came to be

My interest in academia as a field of sociological study stems from the important role that the university plays in the process of socialization and from it being a primary field for the reproduction and creation of knowledge (Barnet 1993, 2000) . School, family and other institutions also play an important role in the socialization process. However, the university holds a particular role in the socialization process: "higher education [is] a powerful contributor to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality" (Naidoo 2004: 457). Its undemocratic nature, behind the widening access discourses, makes it a particularly important field of study. Bourdieu takes the view that the university is an elitist institution (1979, 1988, 1989 and Bourdieu and Passeron 1985, Soares 2007). As one goes up the university ladder, the academic career is a hard one to get into and implies an extremely educated cohort. In the UK this characteristic becomes even more evident in research-intensive universities, namely those

belonging to the Russell Group[4] (Read et al 2003). If the reproduction of social inequality is true at undergraduate study level it is more so for doctoral degrees.

It becomes then important to analyse why students undergo doctoral studies: is it to belong to an elite or, for instance, a need to further knowledge in a topic of interest to the student? Or is it both? Or maybe other reasons come into play when deciding for PhD study. The literature suggests that students are interested in pursuing a PhD degree in order to go into academia (Rudd and Hatch 1968; Rudd 1985). This may suggest a choice for the known. What I mean by this is that students who have done their undergraduate degrees, then usually their masters degrees may feel at home in a university environment in the sense that it may represent a safe and known world. A place where they have been successful. More so in a research-intensive university, which constitutes my case study, where high competition for places makes it the more evident that these students belong to an elite: whether deriving from privileged social, economic and/or educational backgrounds as shown by Bourdieu and Passeron (1985).

There were two elements in my research: one was a preliminary study and the other the doctoral research. The agenda behind the preliminary study, a developmental research project as a research officer at the university was to understand whether changes were being implemented in doctoral programmes across some of the university's departments and how this was being done. These changes were linked to what is now known as Roberts Money/Funding to implement a series of transferable skills courses for doctoral students. In the

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[4] Russell Group 'represents the 20 leading UK universities'

previous chapter I explored and developed in-depth how this provision arising from the Roberts Report 'Set for Success' as been developed at Blueskies University. The agenda behind the PhD study was of a different nature: understanding supervisors and students' expectations and experiences of the doctoral programmes, and this created the tension between my role as Research Officer for Blueskies University, and a PhD student at UCL.

The preliminary project consisted of conducting interviews with supervisors and students. Considering the fact that since I had access to this cohort I negotiated the possibility of introducing a wider scope to the project because I had a clear desire to understand how the supervisors and the doctoral students were reacting to these and how the departments were responding and pressurising the former, if indeed they were at all. This scope was beyond the original one for the institution. The changes being introduced in the doctoral programmes have been mainly directed at making them more contained in time, and more structured allowing for more control over the individual's work and actions. And a lot of effort was put in place at Blueskies University to implement these changes.

My doctoral research project consists of the following aspects: review of the literature and policy documents (including participation in a nation-wide survey), and in-depth interviews with supervisors and doctoral students. A crucial element of the research is my role as 'observing participant' of the community I was studying. The following sections of the current chapter will also address the research aims and questions of my doctoral research; the reflexive and

autobiographical nature of my doctoral project, data collection and methodological issues.

4.3. The doctoral research project and its context

My interest in academia as a particular and unique social organization has been a constant for the last 14 years of my academic life. Within this context I have conducted several pieces of research looking at various issues concerning the university, its characteristics and function. Recently I had the opportunity to work as a researcher in a UK research-intensive university. My main research there was focused on understanding which changes were taking place on doctoral programmes, 'on the ground', arising from new funding policies. These have had as their main manifestations the Roberts Report (HM Treasury 2002), the preceding Joint Statement on Skills drawn by the research councils in the UK (RCUK 2001) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidelines (QAA 2004). For the purposes of my doctoral project and to keep the anonymity of the university where my study was conducted, it will be referred to as Blueskies University. As referred to above, data collection for my PhD study happened at the same time as the data collection for the preliminary study. Therefore in this section which refers to my doctoral research it is inevitable to talk about the research process for the preliminary study because of the simultaneity element at the time of the data collection.

My doctoral research aims to make a contribution to the literature by giving an active voice to supervisors and students, as well as contributing to the literature on doctoral programmes. I conducted in-depth interviews with doctoral students and

supervisors. While I was preparing and conducting the interviews I was working for a department at that institution as a research officer. I will henceforth call it 'preliminary study' or 'developmental research'. The department I belonged to, part of the central administration of the university, wanted to know how students and departments were adapting the/to the new rules and external pressures to change doctoral programmes. It was important for Blueskies University to comply with those rules and to see where/if these were, or not, being met. My brief was to interview graduate tutors (usually senior members of staff, who are also supervisors), supervisors and doctoral students. I used this opportunity and privileged access to the cohort to further the remit of the developmental research for that university. That was the birth of my PhD project. I will develop what constituted privileged access to the cohort further below.

Concerns over the effectiveness of use of funding come to the forefront of funding policies. The question of how we can equate effectiveness of spending and intellectual endeavour is surely a difficult one to respond to. What intrigues me is that the funding councils in the UK have since long funded doctoral students only for up to 3 years. The change in the rules which force departments into making their students complete their PhD in up to 4 years would not, in fact, affect the funding of individual students. Funding is still for up to 3 years, as it has historically been in the UK, independently of how long students might actually take to complete their PhD. These considerations notwithstanding, the fact is that changes have been made and new rules have been imposed. In this process it is important to assess whether supervisors and students have been disempowered. This disempowerment may have taken shape in the form of the ownership of the

process of change itself. Hence, one of the main goals of my doctoral project is to give a voice, which could be a voice of change, an empowered voice, to supervisors and students alike. To put it in another way, the PhD programmes and the new structures that they have been given by policy makers and research councils are said to have changed direction. This new route (not to be confused with the so-called New Route PhDs) does not appear to have been chosen by the main participants in the doctoral programme, namely the students and the academics that supervise them. One of the goals of my doctoral research is thus to assess what role, if any, the supervisors and students have had in the changing of doctoral programmes.

The original brief of the preliminary study intended to look at the practical side of the PhD namely at issues such as the number of meetings students held with supervisors and whether supervisors had a positive opinion towards recently introduced research training arising from the Roberts Report. Whilst I was interested in knowing how practitioners were adapting to how the PhDs were shaping up I was also concerned with what expectations, constructs and social, educational and subject-specific contexts were intervening in the doctoral experience. Even though I thought it was important to investigate the practices of doctoral students and supervisors in terms of quantifiable and easily measurable items (number of meetings, training and other items) I also thought that other aspects of the PhD experience should be looked at. Just knowing how many times the students met their supervisors or whether they had had any research training would not give enough information in order to capture the complexities of the experiences of my interviewees. Different students have different needs and

different supervisors will adapt differently to the changes being introduced in doctoral programmes. Other aspects need to come to the fore if one is to have a more complete picture of the experience. And this was the main rationale for the widening of the scope of the original developmental research project for the institution.

The concept of active voice needs to be explored. What I mean by it is that both supervisors and PhD students appear to have been disempowered over recent times in relation to their own doctoral projects. Rules have been imposed top down and thus it has been at the top managerial level that new impositions have been created. The Roberts Report (HM Treasury 2002), the Research Councils Joint Statement on Skills (RCUK 2001) and the QAA guidelines (QAA 2004) have driven the agenda in terms of doctoral programmes and the future of doctoral education. As explained in the previous chapter these initiatives came as a response of wider political settings and were in the making for quite a long time prior to 2002. This movement appears to have been led in a bureaucratic way where funders and policy makers have made decisions that affect those on the ground, namely PhD students and supervisors. In my doctoral research I will investigate whether this has indeed been the case. Some would counter-argue that many academics belong to the managerial level of decision-making that I am talking about. And that that is especially true in the decision-making boards of the research councils. However this may be the case to some extent, the prevalence of academic membership at such level is questionable. Weir (Weir 2008) shows how at the managerial level universities and other higher education bodies have been recruiting increasingly from organizations outside academia. Furthermore, he states that this is becoming

a prevalent practice in higher education institutions (HEIs). The main consequence of this is an increasingly economistic ethos prevailing at such high decision-making levels. What this means in practice is that considerations other than academic ones may be on top of the agenda. In my interview data I will explore how supervisors and students experienced this.

My preliminary study at the university also focussed on assessing departmental compliance with the new guidelines and orientations being put in place. The central administration was worried with the degree of implementation of the new rules but also wary that different departments could have different PhD arrangements and programmes. Ultimately, the institution's central administration wanted to put in place a system that would allow for a higher control of the doctoral programme and that by, amongst others, decreasing the influence of individuals over the process. By doing this, it was hoped that all those involved in the process would have to gain (Park 2007), and Blueskies University's administration, to which my department belonged to, seemed to agree with this view. The institution and the individual departments would comply with national and research council guidelines and thus avoid any 'penalty'. The supervisors would be able to have a higher control over their students through tighter selection process and by meeting the students more often hence avoiding students going 'astray'. And, finally, the students would gain because guidelines would be put in place in order to protect them from a certain ad-hoc view of the PhD. In my doctoral thesis I would like to explore more in-depth the explicit and implicit 'gains' at each level (national, institutional, and personal levels).

At the institutional level (including at the departmental level) the external pressures including how funding is allocated and which policies are in vogue are very strongly felt. And one of my roles in the department was to assess whether departments were complying with those pressures. There appears to be little in terms of contestation or, in fact, room for it. Their hands are tied to procure new solutions within the established educational and research paradigms. In the Roberts Report era HEIs have very specific guidelines which they have to abide by. Non-compliance can be punished by withdrawal or reduction of funds. This is not something the institution feels it can afford as this has huge implications in terms of teaching and learning but also in terms of research outputs and consequent national and international standing and prestige.

The ad-hoc nature – and nurture – of social sciences PhDs does not have a place within the current climate. What I mean by this statement is that traditionally social sciences doctoral research has been a very individual affair in the sense that relationships with supervisors have varied immensely, as well as times the students meet their supervisors, length of the PhD amongst others. But this appears to be fading away. Institutions depend heavily on external funding from the research councils and other public bodies. In the era of heightened concern over the "student experience" it is in the interest of the institution, in a narrow perspective, to set up compliance structures so that externally imposed rules can be applied and controlled. There is increased talk of "student experience". The way it seems to be interpreted is very much in the way of student-as-customer. The *fee paying* student, seemingly more important than the *learning* student, will make demands and give negative feedback if they do not perceive they are getting value-for-money. And

the PhD programme obviously fits within this perspective. The "*fee-paying student*" mentality is prevailing or gaining ground in higher education thinking. The focus has shifted from learning experience to student experience.

My argument is that in a "learning experience" context, universities, faculty and students focus on the learning outcomes, the learning process itself and in the creation and transmission of knowledge as valuable in itself. In a "*fee-paying student*" mentality, the onus is on the institution to provide *quantifiable* outputs that will allow it to comply with rules and to please current students in order to keep attracting new students and the inflow of fees. In this context, thus, faculty are mainly oriented towards research and publishing which leaves little time for contact time with their students with the consequence that "students at old universities often receive most of their small group teaching from non-academics" (Sastry and Bekhradnia 2007:4). This obviously refers to undergraduate students. But this fact reveals HEIs' practice of focusing on research outcomes rather than the teaching and, even, the students. This applies also to doctoral students. They provide considerable amounts of undergraduate class teaching and, at the same time, are also secondary in terms of getting the supervisors' attention and time. At the same time, the institution as a whole needs to provide impressive facilities in a bid to compete in the international market.

It is assumed that the institution as a whole and the individual departments in general would gain if stricter rules were put in place in their doctoral programmes. There is the view that historically the PhD in the social sciences has tended to be

very individual and that each PhD is a particular and unique case (Salmon 1992).[5] This diversity appears to be threatening first of all because it is not controllable. *In extremis* the individualistic nature of the doctoral process is not in the interest of any institution in the sense that the latter cannot exert influence both over the processes and the actors involved in those processes. Foucault's analysis of power suggests that power is present everywhere and superimposed to the individual (1975). He argues that the individual is controlled by the structures in place and little is given to each to fight it. This notion will be an important one for my thesis and for the analysis of how changes in doctoral degrees, especially the fact that they have been imposed top-bottom. If every individual supervisor and every PhD student have their one peculiar doctoral process(es) the question of what the PhD itself is becomes an even more problematic question that it already is. This is a question that I will develop later. But going back to the institutional interest in keeping the PhD within certain time limits and structure there is a tension between two views. The universities nowadays are competing for international students and their fees, for national and international prestige and recognition. To sell their products – degrees – they need to make sure that they match students' interests. Since many universities envisage their students as customers, and dread any bad publicity that could arise from an unhappy student-customer, it is hence necessary to create and enforce boundaries. It is felt important to make degrees more uniform normalized and more standardized. There appears to be a perception that a more regulated programme/degree will guarantee best (or safer) outcomes or results.

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[5] See chapter 3.

My expectations, based on Blueskies University and policy documents, were that in terms of what the supervisors would get within the new paradigm was less unpredictability, more control over their students, the opportunity to share some of the *burden* of supervision with a second supervisor, and a doctoral process that is intended not to drag *ad aeternum*. But they are also expected to meet their students a certain amount of times per term/year. Would these make their students' theses less complex and new and original. Their role appeared somehow to be to limit students' projects to a workable and doable scope. But then, this is not a new role for them. Supervision is, by definition, 'direction and control',[6] the supervisor being a 'superior authority'.[7]

For the students there is the promise of more sustained support from the department and the supervisor. The department, and the institution, will provide training to help develop various skills both research-related but mainly transferable skills. These are intended to prepare the students for life after academia. My project and the methodology used aimed to be a contribution to returning the ownership of the process back to those who are most closely involved.

4.4. Research Process

I would like to make explicit the timeline of this research project, from its inception while I was at the Blueskies University up to the present moment as a PhD student at UCL. This is of relevance in distinguishing the different phases of my research project. My job as research officer at Blueskies University started in

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[6] Oxford English Dictionary
[7] Idem

November 2003. I was recruited to work in a central administration department the aims of which are to improve student learning and staff teaching. As such, the student experience in the University is an integral part of its mission. The PhD experience was seen as an underexplored topic which needed to be addressed. In a period when the QAA was promoting institutional debates that led to its Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (2004) and after the publication of the Roberts Report (2002) and the Research Councils Joint Statement on the Skills Training Requirements for Research Students it was deemed appropriate to have a deeper look at how things were being done in various departments at Blueskies University.

The planning of the interview schedule started at the beginning of the year 2004 but the first interviews with students took place in May 2004. The interview schedule was piloted in January 2004. The interviewing process was a long one. The last interviews with students were held in May 2005. As for the interviews with members of the faculty interviews started in January 2005 and were completed by May of that year. Interviews were usually conducted by departmental cluster: students from the same department were interviewed in succession. Interviews were held with 14 supervisors and 26 doctoral students in various social sciences departments: politics, sociology, gender studies, development studies, geography, management/industrial relations and philosophy. Students were invited to participate via email after agreement from the head of the department to participate in this study. Uptake varied between departments. There was a concern that students at different stages of their PhD – first year up to awaiting for viva – were included in the cohort. And we were successful since

interviewees cover all the stages of the PhD. The aim was to assess whether students in different stages of their doctorate would have different views and expectations about their programme and their thesis.

The same also happened with the interviews with members of staff. There were, however, some exceptions to this. Prior to each cluster of interviews, I analysed in-depth the documents and rules made available by each department either on hardcopy or on the web. Interviews with staff members ensued. There were in-depth interviews with the graduate tutor of each department in order to familiarize myself with departmental procedures and practices. I was also interested in comparing the more institutional voice (departmental tutor) to that of the individual voices and practices of each supervisor. In the next section I will detail the process of getting access to the cohort and of having the interview schedule approved.

4.5. Access to the cohort and privileged access

As a research officer at the institution I definitely had an easier access to the cohort I wanted to interview than if I was an outsider. However, this was not without limitations and this is where the concept of 'privileged access' needs to be addressed. But in order to better grasp the extent to which privileged access also entails a certain degree of constrained access it is necessary to expose the process from establishing the interview schedule up to the interviewing of the cohort. For my preliminary study I was given a brief of what my department wanted to know about departmental practices in terms of doctoral programmes. As mentioned above, the initial objective of the developmental research project was to assess

whether the new directives were being taken into account by individual departments and by the supervisors, and consequently by the students. In order to assess this my department wanted to get information that would give very quantifiable data. It included number of meetings with supervisors, upgrade process, information given and made available to students and so on. But I took this opportunity to take this further, and create a parallel research project, which constitutes the basis of my PhD.

When confronted with this, the director of the department I was working in felt that there was the need for the approval of the study at a higher level, namely the directing bodies of the institution. This involved the academic board and the registrar amongst others. So there was a period of negotiation where we debated which questions I was allowed to include in the study. Finally the interview schedule was approved and I headed to the next stage: contacting the cohort. However, at this stage another *issue* came up. This time, instead of me being allowed to contact students and academics from various departments, it was seen as more *appropriate* that my director would contact some heads of departments directly asking them whether they were happy their department participated in the research. A detailed email was sent. Some departments responded positively and the study proceeded exclusively in those departments.

Finally I was allowed to contact students from each of the participating departments. On the side of the supervisors, there was an expressed wish that I would contact only those supervisors who had been suggested by the graduate tutor in terms of providing a wide array of supervisory experience: from academics

who had little experience in terms of supervision and had yet to take a doctoral student up to the viva up to academics who had been supervisors for more than twenty years. So, my access to the cohort was indeed privileged but that is not to say that it was totally free and unrestricted. I felt that the departments who were interested in being involved in the process, more than wanting to show off their merits in terms of how they had implemented the new rules, wanted to know the extent to which they were being implemented. They had some anecdotal evidence but lacked a more structured collection of data and analysis and saw this study as potentially giving them that.

4.6. Qualitative methodologies

4.6.1. In-depth interviews

My approach to this research project was from the beginning a qualitative one. The choice was a clear one from the onset of the research. The rationale behind this choice is the search of the individual's voice. Individual expectations and experiences in the particular context of my research can be better grasped by creating a space where each interviewee can express their feelings, their hopes and their beliefs. These have an impact on the way they experience their doctoral degree and the way they conduct their research. Interviews and analysis were framed by the questions that lead the research project.

The choosing of methodologies is partially dependent on what the research aims of a particular research project are (Hammersley 2007, Morgan and Smircich 1980). The quantitative paradigm has been losing its supremacy in the social sciences

(Fielding 2005, Culyba *et* al 2004) thus legitimating the notion that there are spaces for "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988 quoted in Mauthner and Doucet 2003: 416). It is clear that qualitative research is becoming increasingly widespread in sociological research (Culyba *et al* 2004; Fielding 2005) even though the problem faced by some qualitative researchers when applying for funding or getting their peers' approval (Miller *et all* 1998) may still persist. But the momentum that qualitative research has been gaining is due to a certain unease to let social reality, and its complexities, being framed in quantitative approaches to research. It can also be seen as the counter-paradigm to some positivistic views which are very present in higher education such as a managerial view of the university. This view reduces the particular context of the university and its role in the creation and transmission of knowledge to a corporate and organizational system that is taking the upper hand in the control over academic practices.

For Bryman qualitative methodology denotes a "commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor" (1984: 77). The way of getting to this is allowing for the actor(s) to express themselves, in their own subjective way. More than being in the place of the actor, it is the reaching and understanding of his point of view that are of crucial importance. The way I see this 'commitment' is not an attempt to be in the place of the actor, almost taking their place, but rather listening to their voice. It is a way of going about uncovering meanings of what is being studied. The social world is made of individuals' meanings and actions and these are extremely personal, even <u>if</u> they are a product of social and external experiences. But it is the closeness to the actor, the rapport and relationship set up

between actors and researcher, and the subject under study, that can open the doors to unveiling what it is that we are investigating.

"Because of the commitment to see through the eyes of one's subjects close involvement is advocated" (Bryman 1984: 78). This is in stark contrast with a more quantitative, *vide* positivist, view of research and enquiry. For the latter, it is the separation from the object under study, or the subject, that allows for a better understanding of the reality being studied. In a sociological research like this, it is the proximity to the subject, and a close knowledge of the community under study, that allows for a better understanding of the complexities, expectations, actions of the subjects as a well as of the meaning(s) and structure(s) within which actors play. Some may claim to view the phenomenon they are studying with external eyes, a distance from the object under study, which remain external throughout the research process. My point is that this cannot be the case for my particular research, where there needs to be a close involvement between researcher and researched. This involvement is one that arises from a certain closeness to the context and, obviously, an understanding arising from human interaction and which I think needs to be acknowledged.

The closeness to the context and the interviewees is multi-dimensional: a familiarity with the institution which arises from my involvement with it initially as a student and subsequently as a researcher, and now a closeness since I am currently a PhD student and am therefore experiencing some of the things that my interviewees talked about. My research is not one that can be done without a close involvement and direct participation of the researcher in the research process since

it is the voice of the actors that I am planning to understand. This goes as far as the researcher affecting, changing, the object under research. This is not to say that a more quantitative approach is not extremely worthy in sociological research. My point is that for this particular research, qualitative methods are the ones that will allow for a richer and deeper understanding of the realities under scrutiny. In using open-ended interviews and by being a 'participant observer' and doing participant observation I intend to collect data that finds both commonalities and differences. And this because using these methods in conjunction gives a valuable insight into individuals' experiences and gives them a voice. Bryman suggests that qualitative researchers usually express a "preference for a contextual understanding so that behaviour is to be understood in the context of meaning systems employed by a particular group or society" (1984:78). The main point here is that my choice of doing qualitative research stems from the fact that it allows to collect narrative rather than tabulate answers. It also allows the researcher to collect overheard communication between informants rather than 'artificial' answers to my questions.

Rist states that "[w]hen we speak of 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' methodologies, we are, in the final analyses speaking of an interrelated set of assumptions about the social world which are philosophical, ideological, and epistemological" (1977 p.62 quoted on Bryman 1984: 87). This implies that doing qualitative or quantitative research is not merely a question of method. More than questions about methodologies, what these choices reveal is something deeper. It is about one's perception of the social world, how it is constructed. By methods I mean the specific tools used to collect data. These are in-depth interviews and the duet participant observer/participant observation, metaphor which I will explore below.

By methodology, I mean the overarching grouping of methods that serve the epistemological approach used. I further discuss epistemological issues and concepts of knowledge in chapter 8. It is the bridge between the tools and the epistemological, *vide* ideological, position adopted by the researcher. In this sense, examples of methodology are: quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Finally, epistemology refers to the way researchers conceive the world and how they go about uncovering it.

In choosing a qualitative approach to my research, I am in fact acknowledging that in studying the complexities of people's choices, especially when they involve lived social contexts and strong socialization forces, a qualitative approach may be more able to shed a light on these issues. Moreover social research, more than looking at establishing long range theories, which are a paradox since the social realities I am focusing on in this project are local and circumstantial, should be looking at finding and establishing 'local truths' (Sousa Santos 1987) or mid-range theories in the words of Merton (1968). What this means is that my view of sociology is decreasingly a Comptian search for the *laws of society* and increasingly an attempt to understand social behaviour in particular social, educational and political contexts.

My doctoral study is based on qualitative methods because there was a need to assess perceptions, expectations, experiences, from the part of the supervisors as well as from the students. In-depth interviews appeared to me to be the best data collection method to achieve this. In developing an exhaustive interview schedule,

with both closed and open-ended questions, and a space for the interviewee to add any other thoughts they had, the objective was to gather as much data, and as varied as possible, from the interviewees.

4.6.1.1. Power Relations

When conducting interviews the researcher needs to have in mind the power dynamics present during the exchange of questions and answers. This may enlighten the way respondents answer the questions and also provide an interesting tool for researcher self-analysis and role in the interviewing and data collection stage of the research process.

Overall I felt there were 3 *states* of power during the interviews.

Firstly, one where the supervisors retain more power than me during the interview. This is due to the fact that they are senior academics and established ones in a prestigious university. Moreover, they are overtly giving their time to answer my questions and to provide data for my research. Last, but not least, they retain information and experience which is crucial for my research to proceed.

Concomitantly, and paradoxically, this power relation is not absolutely unilateral.

The second type/state of power arises from the fact that I belonged to a central administration department in the university, I could be perceived as an auditor, and as an assessor of supervisors' practices. As such, I also felt that I detained a certain power in this dynamic relation.

Thirdly, I felt that when interviewing students the power relations were more straightforward and unilateral. I could be said to have more power than the students, who may have perceived me as an institutional insider who had eventually more knowledge about the institution and its peculiarities. To this, I should add that I had the perception that students could also have felt as I was auditing/assessing their own PhD experience.

And it is interesting how these three levels of power at work affect data collection and data analysis. The awareness that interviewees might be telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, or I needed to hear relates to my awareness of what type of power was at play during the interviews. I had to assess constantly what I was being told and sometimes reframe the question if the answer I was given sounded too picture-perfect or too dark. These could have arisen from a view that I was 'auditing' practices in the former case, or arising from a huge dissatisfaction with elements of the doctoral programme in the case of the latter. But also important was that when devising the interview schedules I had to be aware of the dynamics likely to develop and thus ask questions that were in fact as open, and thus less leading, as possible. In this case I thought there would be more likely to obtain rich and reliable data.

When it came to the analysis of the interview data, the awareness of the power dynamics was also of elemental importance. When analysing data I was constantly monitoring the data. Had something been said because of the power dynamics, and the perception of my role as interviewer, developed during the interview? To

counter this there was a constant comparison to what other interviewees had said and also a look at what I knew were the departmental practices at the time of interviewing.

4.7. Qualitative methodology: Ethnography and Identity

> Participant observation is usually more appropriate when the study requires an examination of complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction; … when the investigator desires first-hand behavioural information on certain social processes, such as leadership and influence in a small group; when a major goal of the study is to construct a qualitative contextual picture of a certain situation or flow of events.
> (Warwick and Lininger 1978 quoted in Bryman 1984: 81)

The methodological approach to my research is an ethnographic one. It has been noticed (Culyba *et al* 2004; Morgan and Smircich 1980) that ethnography is at times quite a loose term and an umbrella for many a method. My ethnographic research is built on two methods: in-depth interviews and taking the role of a 'participant observer' (Alvesson 2003). Anthropology has methodologically influenced many social sciences disciplines so that now arguably "participant observation is the most favoured technique" for social researchers. (Bryman 1984:78). And an important component of participant observation is the interviewing of key informants (Blease and Bryman 1985). These two methods are hence closely intertwined.

Schwartz and Schwartz's (1955) draw attention to the fact that in participant observation the researcher is part of the context, of the reality, they are researching.

More, they suggest that the observer can take two different roles: either as an integral part of, or peripheral to, the social structure they are studying. In my case, I could be seen as having had a dual role at different stages of this research. While conducting my interviews my role was apparently peripheral within the institution for even if I was part of the institution I was researching as a research officer I was not directly involved with any doctoral programmes in that institution. I have been a doctoral student in another institution. On the other hand, I was part of the context, by which I mean I was part of the institution itself, even if not belonging to any of the departments being analysed. At the time of analysing the data in the context of my own PhD, my role becomes inevitably more integral in the sense that I am a PhD student in the Social Sciences researching other PhD students in Social Sciences. Moreover, I am a student at a university which is also a member of the Russell Group of UK universities, as was the institution where I conducted the interviews. Hence, both institutions share some common characteristics and that brings me very close to that same reality I am researching. Plus, the fact that I studied and then worked for some years in the institution under study allowed me to understand, and know, many of its idiosyncrasies and characteristics very closely for I experienced them too. Hammersley argues that some are of the view that social phenomena "should be understood from within, so that a deeper form of knowledge [is] available" (2007:296)

And this is why I would define my role in this research as both of a 'participant observer' (Alvesson 2003) and as doing participant observation: a role for which I will use the 'duet' metaphor which I will develop below. What is the difference between being a 'participant observer' and doing participant observation?

Alvesson's suggests that participant observation entails a certain aspect of exteriority, whereas 'participant observer' implies a view of the researcher as an insider. This needs clarification. In a traditional anthropological sense participant observation is a method where the researcher joins the community as an outsider. Through time and by creating closer links with the community they are studying, they investigate that same community. They try to learn their language, understand their rituals and social organization. The notion of 'participant observer', on the other hand, conveys a dimension of belonging, of already pertaining, of knowing and to some extent, of understanding at least some of the communities' characteristics, by being from the beginning of the research already a part of it. As I conducted my interviews, my privileged access to the group under study was in fact a consequence of me being part of that same group. A researcher in a research, and learning, institution, where I had also studied. The structure of the institution, the sense of belonging, the history and even the brand of the university, as well as its appeals, had all been part of my own experience. And I pertained to it. And this has been at the crux of one of the most difficult aspects of doctoral research: a student studying students. And it was the concept of 'duet' which helped me through the process. I will explore this concept below.

4.8. Participant observation and 'participant observer' – methodological duet

The role of 'participant observer' has at times given way to that of a researcher who is doing participant observation. My role slightly changes as well as my perception of the social reality I was, and am, studying. For Schwartz and Schwartz "participant observation becomes, in part, a *process of registering,*

interpreting, and recording. Since not all aspects of an event are observed simultaneously, the 'filling-out' or bringing into awareness of the components of the event, as well as the field within which it took place, becomes unavoidably a retrospective process" (1955: 344). Now, as a PhD student in another institution, my proximity and belonging to the institution where the data was collected have dissipated. Now my role is more that of someone from the outside, who is trying to understand and interpret what is going inside. So, at all times my involvement has been somewhat external and internal. In short, there have been two stages of my doctoral research: firstly as a research officer collecting data in the institution I was working for and at a later stage that of a PhD student in another institution but in a similar situation to that of the cohort under study. At a first stage my role was predominantly that of 'participant observer' and that then gave place to that of doing 'participant observation'. My participation observation occurred in the context of the interviews mainly. But as a student at Blueskies University, prior to start working there, and as a member of staff, I was familiarised with different elements of the life of PhD students at the university.

I use of the concept of 'duet' as a metaphor. As in a duet, where two instruments play either simultaneously or one after the other, but are always interdependent, this two methodological approaches have been *playing* in my research. They have been constantly present in the research process, especially during the data collection phase either simultaneously or in sequence. This represents not only a challenge but an opportunity. The challenge lies in the imperative that the researcher remains at all times aware of its position relative to the observed. The

opportunities remain in the richness and complexities that the conjunction of the two methods allow.

In letting this 'duet' *play* a form of methodological dialectic developed. One where a constant questioning of my position towards the data and the researched took centre stage. There were tensions because it did not come easily to know what position I was taking at every moment of the play. I had to learn where I stood, what I was playing, at various stages of the research. Sometimes I was indeed, and needed to be, doing participant observation. Others, I was in fact a 'participant observer' which gave me insights that helped through the analysis of the data. But it took some time, and some maturing, to grasp what was needed of me and when.

With time, and as I grew more confident with the doctoral process, and more familiar with the literature and the data, my position in the duet would come to the fore more naturally. And after the tensions develop into a suspension, so interesting and rich in music, but also in sociological research, my position, the chord, resolves.

4.9. Ethical Aspects of the research

Important ethical elements in a research project are those of voluntary participation, consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. One more element here was me being part of the institution I was researching. All the participants were invited to take part and there was absolutely no compulsion to participate. When contacted, many supervisors and students refused to participate, and this for various reasons, and

many others accepted. It was explained to those contacted the objectives of the research.

Before conducting the interviews all interviewees were asked whether they would agree for their responses to be included both for the institutional aspect of the research but also in what would constitute the date for my doctoral research. All interviewees gave their consent to both. They gave informed consent after being informed via email about the research agenda of the institution, and directly at interview about my PhD research agenda.

All interviewees were assured both anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Thus all data has been coded, all names (even of departments) have been changed, to ensure no response could be traced back to the interviewee. This is crucial in any research but even more relevant given my insider status in the institution.

5. Supervisors' Views

> There are young people still who really love doing research, love doing the reading, depending on the subject they are in, would like to teach, would like to write, would like to engage in symposia and seminars and see that as a good life. Really, almost ontologically, it is a nice way to be. I think we have absolutely culturally discouraged that.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore and analyse the views of the supervisors in relation to PhD programmes. The academics interviewed were contacted after the head of the department agreed their department participated in the study. Advice was then asked from the head of the department in order to get a diverse cohort of supervisors, from a junior member of faculty to senior members of academic staff. The heads of the department were all interviewed too. Overall, 14 interviews were held with faculty. Interviews with individual supervisors took up to two hours each. In the chapter 'Methodology' I have expanded on the specificities of the interviewing process as well as on the dynamics developed within the interviews themselves. This chapter thus intends to reflect upon the content of the interviews and listen to the voice of the supervisors.

In the quote above the supervisor embraces the view of a doctoral student, and of an academic, who enjoys their topic and a life of research and teaching. A life that values discovery and the sharing of knowledge. Somehow, there is a certain nostalgic sentiment in what the supervisor is saying. In a world of competition, of

economic priorities, of profit, there are still some academics, and future academics who see a life devoted to academia as the 'good life'. But, according to the interviews I did, they do not seem to represent the majority, or at least what is increasingly required from academics. Academia seems to have discouraged the enquirer, the intellectual wonderer according to the quote. This chapter will focus on the voices of the supervisors, and how they see the current situation of doctoral programmes and what they envisage the future of academic life to be.

The current chapter is divided into the following sections: views on the past, views on the current PhD programmes, views on what the PhD is, why do a PhD, views on their students and what they are looking for in prospective students. The main reason for the division into these sections follows from the fact that the analysis of the interviews focussed on listening to the *voice* of the interviewees. As I read through the interviews, some themes came through very strongly and repeatedly. And these shaped the chapter. There is an historical element to the way the chapter has been structured, as the quote at the beginning of the chapter so clearly illustrates. And this is due to how supervisors reflected upon the current situation of PhD programmes.

Some themes were created in the interview schedules for the interviews with both supervisors and students. Others arose from going through the interviews. They structured the whole PhD thesis and can be heard throughout the thesis. From a look at the genealogy of the PhD and what the PhD is supposed to be (past and current views of the PhD) to what the future of the PhD will bring in terms of

preparation of future academics, to perception of self and the other, all these have shaped the structure of my doctoral thesis.

The interviews were structured around themes perceived of relevance to changes occurring in PhD programmes. And arose from an analysis of literature, as well as conversations with students and academics, and some topics I thought were fundamental in determining what questions to ask the two cohorts.

The *voice* of the supervisors is of extreme relevance to the understanding of the PhD as a programme and as an intellectual journey. As is the students', which will be analysed in the following chapter. If the country, the university and even the department influence greatly the PhD experience and the PhD itself, it is notwithstanding the student and the supervisor who shape them most profoundly. They bring the individuality to the research and the thesis. Even if higher education and funding policies try to streamline programmes, and thus risking streamlining the individual PhD projects, learning processes are always individual and unique. More so the PhD programme with its longer term timeline (when compared to individual undergraduate courses or masters dissertations) which leaves more space for each student to make an imprint in their discipline. And their supervisor to take part in each research project.

This chapter, as well as the following one, is an exploratory one. Its aim is to explore and interpret some of the issues relevant to the interviewees. The other chapters in this thesis will analyse and explore more in-depth the issues, concerns, and theorise about what was said in the interviews. The following sections:

'Voicing the past. Voicing change'; 'loss' and 'Intellectual journey' will consider overall trends in PhD programmes. The remaining sections will look at more specific elements of the doctoral degrees.

5.2. Voicing the past. Voicing change.

> Things are very much in the process of change.
> [PhD Supervisor (OS)]

5.2.1. Loss

There was a general perception that things have changed in academia and in the PhD degree. There was an overall sense of loss and depreciation of the perceived value of the PhD. Many reasons were voiced to explain why this sense of loss prevailed. As the following quote suggests, the pressure to publish has increased and this consequently gives less freedom to researchers. And this equally applies to doctoral theses: "First of all the PhD should be written with as something from which you can extract two or three articles. Whether that is the chapters themselves (…) I think it cannot but change the nature of the argument" [PhD Supervisor (DG)] and therefore the orientation of the thesis and the research. To a certain sense of loss of freedom and tighter deadlines increase the feeling that things have changed.

> I think one of the problems that we have, and we are not unique in this, is that obviously the pressures to complete have become much, much stronger. [PhD Supervisor (KI)]

> But I think that is what you lose, potentially, this space is taken away from you, and it must make it a less enjoyable experience in some sense. When I did my PhD I didn't have any expectation that I had to meet all

> sorts of hurdles, it was never discussed at all. So I didn't have that sort of
> thing around me.   [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

The loss of 'space' as mentioned by the supervisor in the quote above was repeatedly mentioned by the supervisors interviewed. As I will explore in a chapter below,[8] for my respondents the PhD appears to have become more of a credential than a learning process. As such, they make reference to external elements to the research and the thesis themselves. Therefore in the aforementioned chapter I will develop the idea of the extrinsic value of the PhD having overtaken a perspective that values the intrinsic value of the PhD. The quotes above reflect one of the aspects of this shift. With an increased pressure on completion and on timeline, attention is increasingly targeted at feasibility and completion. This suggests that the process is thus being replaced by the product: the credential. A focus in the product takes away the 'space' for the 'enjoyment' of the research discovery. Students, and departments, appear not to be allowed this anymore. As such, one supervisor lamented the fact that there is no longer "those amateur PhDs, where somebody had one, very narrow idea, and I don't mean it in a dismissive way, but very narrow idea, but from that narrow idea came a view of the larger universe (…) I regret it" [PhD Supervisor (DM)].

"There should still be the capacity for those students who want to do that sort of PhD, the leisure PhD, amateur PhD, to do it" [PhD Supervisor   (DM)] this supervisor goes on to say.

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[8] Chapter 8: PhD: what value?

And that is one of the main concerns in the current state of affairs of PhD programmes. That there is now only one accepted way of doing things. No space for diversity appears to be what the supervisors most lament. And this because, as the same supervisor continued, and voicing the overall view of the supervisor: "[Academia] has lost something, but I suppose my argument would be it didn't need to lose that something, because there should be scope for both, what we call the vocational and the amateur or the leisure PhD" [PhD Supervisor (DM)].

As with many other items in this chapter, loss cannot be taken individually as it is linked to a series of other items, which are being analysed in the current chapter. All the elements (or almost) are linked. It is however important to disentangle the complexity of the inter-related items and understand how the supervisors see, and voice, change happening at doctoral level.

5.2.2. Intellectual journey

The process of doing a PhD is one that traditionally intends to allow students to develop research and analytical skills and also one of discovery of new knowledge and/or making an original contribution to knowledge.[9] Amongst the perceived changes in PhD degrees, the supervisors have discussed at length the implications that new funding policies have had on the ability of students to engage in an intellectual journey. The consequences of whether students will engage in an intellectual journey will be discussed below, especially in the subsections: scope and originality, and what is a PhD.

Supervisors feel that there simply is no time nowadays to let students wander intellectually during their PhD research. Due to increased concern over completion rates and timelines, supervisors now try to direct and focus the student so that don't 'lose time'. This has two considerable implications: an end to the intellectual *flânerie*, and to the freedom to follow one's curiosity, both so relevant in intellectual endeavours. As the following quote suggests the PhD is now less ambitious due to changes in doctoral programmes:

> Increasingly I think we are being compelled to push our students towards less ambitious projects. Which, you know, there are some advantages to that. You have to explain to them that the PhD has changed. From being a great work it has become a hurdle, on the whole.
>
> [PhD supervisor (KI)]

The great intellectual journey has been replaced by a closely *directed* piece of research where students are less independent, and where supervisors gained, willingly or unwillingly, an extra role: that of surveillance of students' progress. It could be claimed that this role was already being played by the supervisors. Undeniable though is the extent to which supervisors need to control very tightly student progress and monitor every step of their research. Directing closely the research project, directing students through the various 'hurdles' along the way, ensuring students are attending the training/research workshops they are meant to attend, and making sure students submit within a tight deadline. All are part of the actual monitoring which is increasingly required from supervisors. If supervisors gained an extra role, the students lost at least one: that of being independent PhD

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[9] See chapter 9 for a development of this idea

researchers. With an increased surveillance role supervisors suggested that students have become less independent and free to undertake their doctoral research.

One of the supervisors interviewed (and Head of Department) explained that the letting go of students' independence is mainly due to the risk of non-completion within the 3 to 4 years deadline as:

> Because it is the danger of pushing us towards discouraging them from doing things which are worth doing and extremely important, but we think, for practical reasons may not be able to be done within or sometimes four years.   [PhD Supervisor (KI)]

'Practical reasons' appear to be at the forefront of supervisors' concerns, they have become an absolute priority judging by supervisors' comments. Intellectual priorities, supervisors stated, can come later in the academic career:

> If you absolutely want to be an academic and do research then you have got forty years to do that. There is no reason why you should have to do it in the first three years. What you should do in the first three years is actually be trained.   [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

This quote reflects the opinion of the majority, if not all, supervisors interviewed. The sense of urgency in completing the PhD does not seem to allow anything other than being 'trained' as a researcher. However, it is of relevance in the voice of the supervisors to point out that the PhD is (no longer) the time to 'be an academic'. This begs the question of what it means to be a PhD student. Supervisors' opinions on this are quite straightforward: it is to prepare for an academic career, but rather than being an apprenticeship to become an academic, it became a step into that

direction, leaving it to the future academic to develop and learn on the job as it were and less so during the PhD itself. It is an apprenticeship to become a future apprentice.

How is this operationalized? By stripping the PhD away from some of its historical characteristics. The intellectual journey that the majority of the interviewees referred to appears to have been curtailed according to them. On top of that, and as I will explore in a later chapter, the PhD has now been increasingly valued for its extrinsic value, namely as a credential. The research process itself has changed. Thus the following statement:

> Well sorry, that is not what research is in my area. (..) And that is not what we are asking people to do any more. We are asking people to actually have the end of the narrative and then they fill it in with case studies.   [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

The demands made of PhD students have changed. And the following section in this chapter will analyse the various changes supervisors mentioned in their interviews. And the sense that the PhD is an intellectual journey has also changed. Some supervisors see this as a positive development, since it makes the PhD process more expedient.

5.3. Views on the PhD programme

Whereas the previous section looked at general trends of change as perceived by the supervisors, this section will analyse what supervisors said were specific changes occurring at PhD level. Academics interviewed expanded on issues

relating to scope and originality of the PhD, timeline and its implications, training requirements and a more structured PhD programme, what they thought a PhD was and should be, and they talked about how they saw their students, including why students (should) do a PhD.

5.3.1. Scope and originality

There was an overall sense that what was expected of a thesis was something that would not be too ground breaking nor too different. It is more an exercise of style, of *genre* as a supervisor put it. Importantly, there was also the idea the supervisors had of containing and controlling the thesis so as to not allow it to go off-course. It was seen as crucial to curtail students' ambitions in order for the thesis to be completed on time. What is expected is thus a certain fluency in research methodology and practice as well as a knowledge of the specific language of the students' subject. Even the reading has to be limited due to the explosion in the number of academic journals and articles. It is an exercise of exploration and limitation. In the extreme of this perspective, we can get supervisors that really take control over the students' projects as reflected by the following quote:

> It is far better to take someone else's models, whether they are formal or empirical models, and apply them to new situations, or replicate … apply something that someone has applied in one country, to another country. Rather than try and do something which is a whole new theory and a whole new set of ideas. So that, basically, is what I am trying to encourage my students to do. [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

Even if this view is an extreme example of supervisors taking control over the thesis it does notwithstanding reflect the overall view that supervisors feel the need

to be closer to the doctoral research of their students in order to prevent them from going *astray*. The consequences of this will be discussed in two subsequent chapters in the thesis. What is important to state here is that there is a sense from the interviews that there are two main positions relating to a tighter supervision: one that considers this to be a good thing (and illustrated by the quote above) and another that would rather students still have the degree of independence and intellectual freedom supervisors once gave them.

Another important idea was that supervisors were not expecting ground breaking work from students, in the same way that they felt that academics no longer produced much ground breaking work either. Somehow, there was this idea that with changing requirements in academia (increased competition and increased need to be public) there was definitely less time for researchers to spend on new research. The risks and serendipity that were more usual in the past are now not a priority.

> Yes, I think [the academic world] has lost, intellectually. Some of the biggest names in my (I 041) hardly published anything in their days. Now, there are two ways of thinking about this – they were able to produce these masterpieces because they had much more freedom to do what they wanted to do, instead of having to produce articles every five years.
>
> [PhD supervisor (DG)]

The scope of a PhD thesis appears now that of an exercise of applied research methods and literature. Students are expected to prove that they can do research. Not too original for it would be a risk for the department. Academics have to make their students complete in up to 4 years. As such, expectations are of work of a certain quality which is expected to be completed in 3 to 4 years.

5.3.2. Timeline

In terms of the timeline now imposed to PhD degrees, supervisors' opinions are slightly divided. Some supervisors think 3-4 years is a good thing whereas others believe it means that a tighter deadline impact on the quality and extent of the research being done. Interestingly though, the supervisors who agree with a shorter deadline are also those who think that the PhD should be an exercise of proficiency in research rather than that of creativity.

The following quotes reflect the views of the supervisors who believe that a 4-year deadline is a positive thing for students and for the department.

> You don't want to spend your whole life doing your PhD … I think it is realistic for students to finish in four years. And I think it is preferable.
> [PhD Supervisor (GU)]

> I think four years is a good thing. As long as we understand that that means that what you expect after four years is four years good work.
> [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

> I think, without exception, the best PhDs have been done in four years.
> [PhD Supervisor (OS)]

The last quote of that of a newly recruited Head of Department whose function was to 'shape up' the department. This shaping up included streamlining doctoral programmes, roll out research training for PhD students and improve submission rates. It is therefore not surprising that his view on PhD programmes is in line with the new requirements imposed to departments. The second quote is in line with the strong comments the supervisor made in his interview. This supervisor believes very strongly that the PhD should be an opportunity for students to develop

research skills and that they can then develop great research projects when they become members of faculty. I think the key to understanding the view that the PhD should be a very contained programme is in the word 'preferable' as the first quote states.

The new requirements are for some supervisors preferable because they mean students will not spend too many years wandering from intellectual question to another intellectual question, from one method to another. It is a view that professes that the PhD is *just* another university degree and as all others it should be contained, structured, and closely supervised.

"The more time you spend does not necessarily mean the best PhD" [PhD Supervisor (OS)] but the question should not be whether quality is a function of time but rather that different students and different projects may require different timelines, and some supervisors expressed the wish that some students could be given more time to allow for them to develop their research in a more profound way. The one size fits all approach in research degrees funding does not appear to have this in mind. Some supervisors have expressed the need to allow for some flexibility:

> As long as there is enough slack in it to allow things to happen to people. Because if it becomes too punitive … because people have lives, they get sick and their parents die, and all sorts of things happen to people, or, you know, they have children. And I think there should be enough flexibility to allow those things to happen. But I do think it is good to actually say four years is a good length to aim for.
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

Not all supervisors subscribe to the new deadlines imposed to the students. It is inevitable that the deadlines now will shape the type of research that is done at PhD level. Standards and originality have changed, or at least there is the need for examiners and academics to acknowledge that expectations should be different, as the quotes below illuminate.

> It is unreasonable to impose the same standards on somebody who has done it in three years or somebody who has done it in six years.
> [PhD Supervisor (ES)]

> In three years it might be unreasonable to expect some original, (…) work for a thesis. [PhD Supervisor (ES)]

Overall there was the sense that supervisors did not disapprove of tighter deadlines for the completion of the PhD. If anything, some regret the fact the these are blanket rules and that no students are allowed to do things differently. A strong sense that at least some students should be allowed to take more time was voiced in various instances throughout the interviews. An overarching feeling that expectations and achievement would need to change, or had already changed, was very much prevalent in supervisors' minds. The quote below encapsulates this mindset. Importantly the supervisor asserts that timing will prevail over 'great research' and this I will discuss and analyse in another chapter in this thesis.[10]

> I think three to four years makes sense, providing it is presented in a sensible way. And actually, what the university regulations say is that a thesis shall be a piece of research, and this is not verbatim, this is the sense of it, which can reasonably be completed in three to four years. So it is not that we construct some wonderful piece of research and then say – and you have got to do it in four years. But when you are constructing

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[10] Chapter 8

the research you bear in mind that this is something which can reasonably be completed in three to four years.   [PhD Supervisor (SC)]

5.3.3. Training requirements. Structured programme.

PhD programmes have become much more structured then they used to be, with the introduction of (compulsory or otherwise) research training, end of year reviews, more regular meetings with supervisors. Supervisors felt that there were too many things that students had to attend, and too many hurdles they had to overcome. However, there were two different ways of assessing these: some supervisors think this is a good change, whereas others felt that there was too much put on students these days.

> I know that some students find the current concern that we have with submission rates, with the date of submission, with the timescale, with upgrading, the tightening up of the evaluation at the end of the first year, I know that some students find that unsettling. But I think it is in their interests and I am unashamedly a defender of that.
> [PhD Supervisor (OS)]

This supervisor reflects the view that a tighter control of students' progress is beneficial. It is in students' 'interest' because they decrease the likelihood of students spending too much time doing their PhD and of students *losing* themselves in research avenues that can prove unfruitful. Hence this other supervisor stated:

> You have to get down on top of these things very quickly. Now, I think it is a good thing, because in the old system, where it was much more open, students did waste long periods of time not really doing anything, or a period when it was very easy for them to prove to the supervisor almost, that they weren't doing things, so I do like hurdles and the time pressures, but you do lose out.   [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

This notion of *wasting time* is one that was expressed by many of the supervisors interviewed. But still there was considerable concern for the amount of *hurdles* students have to go through now and this was voiced over and over again in the interviews with the supervisors.

> I think they might just have to go to too many things. If you read a current rubric it says you have to attend this, you have to attend that, you have to attend the other. [PhD Supervisor (EQ)]

> There are a lot of little hurdles they are jumping
> [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

> But we have much stricter review procedures now.
> [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

> Well we have a departmental norm, where we are supposed to see new students once every two weeks for at least an hour at a time.
> [PhD Supervisor (ES)]

Most supervisors think the reason to do a PhD is (solely) to go into academia. As such, students should start to get used to the pressures of life as an academic, with its administrative, teaching and publishing pressures. The PhD is thus seen as a *test* for the capacity of future faculty to deal with all the requirements of academia.

> If you are going to become an academic, the pressures on us have changed. I have been an academic since 1986 and even in that time the expectations and the pressures on the market are so different. If you don't get through this PhD with these tight deadlines you won't survive. You will get a job somewhere but you won't necessarily be successful because you need to continue to produce this research.
> [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

However, a feeling of ticking the box approach to training and other requirements appears at times slightly empty and outside what the purpose of what the University and PhDs should be:

> I don't know, I don't know, actually. I am not sure. I can see that a lot of things are auditable. I can see that a lot of students would find it very appealing. The idea of – I need to develop myself in this area – especially the Blueskies University students. This neo-liberal world that we live in.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

5.4. What is a PhD?

There is a very strong view, shared by the majority of the supervisors, that students do not know what a PhD is until they start it. Moreover, many supervisors also stated that they did not know themselves what a PhD was when they started theirs.

> But I didn't have a clue. It took me about two years to come up with a topic which worked, and I really did it hit and miss, talking to other people and so on.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (DG)]

> When I was applying to do a PhD I had no idea what a PhD entailed.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (FT)]

As for the students:

> It doesn't mean to say that they know what a PhD is
>
> [PhD Supervisor (DM)]

> What is the PhD? Because they don't have any conceptions at all about what a PhD is.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

It is important then to realise that this is a difficult question that is still begging for an answer. As one supervisor put it: "there is much more discussion amongst the academic community, whether it is at departmental level or school level, about what a PhD means." [PhD Supervisor (DM)]. It became clear throughout the interviews with supervisors that for many "part of it is learning to be an independent researcher" [PhD supervisor (QI)]. PhDs are also about competence as a researcher:

> I mean, PhDs don't have to be world shattering Nobel Prize winning bits of originality. They can be seriously analytical discussions which show a person's competence. And that is what I am looking for.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

There was also agreement that the nature and purpose of the PhD are changing:

> The nature of the PhD has changed and expectations of our further education has changed, and as it is becoming increasingly important, institutionally, for people to complete, to get something satisfactory at the end of a three to four year period, rather than a thirteen to fourteen year period, for sure there has been more and more institutional support.
>
> [PhD supervisor (DM)]

As will be discussed in a later chapter,[11] the PhD has now become a product, more than a process as the following quote states.

> The only thing I say to them in terms of that sort of cosmic advice is that one of my colleagues, Prof *Gov* has written this book on how to do it. And I say to them – look at the title, it is "How To….". And what you all ought to be thinking about is not … I mean, obviously you have got to be thinking about the research, but always remember you are working towards a product.   [PhD supervisor (SC)]

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[11] Chapter 8

5.5. Views on the students

This section will focus on how the supervisors think their students do PhDs and how they describe their students. There is the strong perception that the reason why people should do PhDs is only if they want to become academics. So PhD is seen solely as a step into academia. Plus, supervisors perceived their students as a quite specific lot: middle class background, good school (usually public school educated), and who have attended some of the best universities in the world.

5.5.1. Why do a PhD?

> If you are going to do a PhD, you might do it for fun, but all the studies show it is the worst way to improve your lifetime earnings or whatever, and if you have the ability to have that intellectual enjoyment and waste three years of your life, that is good.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

The quote above is one reflects a very economistic view of the PhD. Even if slightly ironic, its pragmatic element is one that is shared by the majority of the supervisors interviewed. And they project this onto their students: "For most of them they are practical students, they want to make a living, So that is the requisite." [PhD Supervisor (LD)]. For the supervisors, the (almost) only reason for anyone to do a PhD is to start an academic career, it is a credential that allows you into the academic ladder.

It needs to be made clear that what is expected of us is to guide those students through their PhD with a view to starting an academic career, because that is what most of them have come here to do."

[PhD Supervisor (DG)]

Most of them clearly have a vocation for a university based [career].

[PhD Supervisor (ET)]

Because that is really what you are trying to do, is get the PhD student to become an academic. [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

hopefully they will get academic jobs they want and we will be colleagues in the future. [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

But I think you should do a PhD if you really want to be an academic. And otherwise probably not. Unless it is a very specialist PhD and the city is going to hire you, and you are going to earn a fortune because you have got a PhD, it is a different … it means something different.

[PhD Supervisor (QI)]

And this pragmatic view is further confirmed by the following quote:

I would have to say to post graduates is that even if they really are good at their research they have to understand the pay is lousy and we no longer had the status that academics once had, if they ever did in Britain. [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

5.5.2. PhD students at Blueskies University

She did a first degree at Berkeley, she then did a Masters at [UK University] and then she came to do her PhD here. But this is what I mean about Blueskies University. Sort of in the caricature Blueskies University student. She had to do her PhD. It was automatic, almost not thinking. It wasn't – do I want to do one? Am I really interested in anything? Is it what I want to do? It was I want to do a PhD. I will do that at Blueskies University. And she just wasn't really an intellectual. She should have gone and

> got a job and she would have been fabulous. She is not …
> she will say to me – oh God, you have to do a lot of
> reading, don't you? I've never really liked reading. Shit,
> yes, this is it! You have to read!
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

Even if this quote can be read as a caricature of a type of student, it nonetheless presents a very crucial point, which was repeated by other supervisors: some students undertake a PhD as a natural step after being successful at undergraduate level, as well as at Masters level. In many instances supervisors stated that their students were at the top of their game in terms of intelligence and ability to work hard. Others also voiced the concern that doctoral students at this University appear to be less the genuine researcher/academic, but more the kind of student that goes through the motions and is a 'professional student'. This section aims to interpret how supervisors see their students.

> And I think sometimes that is to do with the history of the pressure they
> have been under, to be such high achievers, as they all, inevitably are,
> they usually have huge pressure from their parents and their schools, and
> to fail is the worst thing that could happen to them. To fail at something
> would just be devastating, absolutely devastating.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

And this idea was also very prevalent in the interviews with PhD students. The opinion of supervisors is that indeed they have very bright and hard working students but the two points I would like to point out is that at Blueskies University, it seems that there is a prevalence of *professional* students who are looking for a credential, the PhD. The following three quotes are examples of what supervisors

said about professional students, those that undertake the PhD because it was either 'meant to be' or the 'natural step' to take.

> The idealistic type of student, sailing along with bright ideas, (…) they are the minority really.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

> None of these people thinks they are stupid. They know they are not. They are quite successful in some way or another in the past, through the academic system.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

> I suspect he really shouldn't have been doing a PhD. You go through the system, you are good, and you think that is the next logical step.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (QI)]

> I have got a very low opinion of Blueskies University students I think they are really extremely tedious professional students.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (ET)]

For some supervisors the credentialist approach to undertaking a research degree is paved with disappointment and frustration:

> Whereas here they usually come very confident, very sure of themselves, very certain of where they want to go, and wanting to add something more to the CV.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

> A PhD will get you a job in a credentialist sort of way. If I have this piece of paper I can probably apply for certain types of jobs, I can probably do that job.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (ET)]

> That is why I am interested in a student who is looking at things that way, not simply a Blueskies University student who wants that credential (…). Which is what most of these students do. They have come from very privileged families, they have gone to lead schools, they have come here and got a Blueskies University branded PhD. And I am not interested.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (ET)]

This said, the overall majority of supervisors has stated they have very good, hard working and intelligent students. They regret a certain *professionalization* of the research degree, but notwithstanding appreciate their students, as we will see in the next section of this chapter.

> We get damn good students here. They are interesting to teach, they are a pleasure to teach, they are hardworking, they are intelligent, and on the whole they succeed. They are, they are very good. Yes, yes.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SC)]

5.6. Supervision

The process of supervision starts with the selection of students from the pool of prospective research proposals. Supervisors were asked what they looked for in a prospective student, and what a ideal student would be. Firstly there was the sense that choosing a student was a difficult task and that there are not objective ways of selecting students. No selection criteria is objective nor guarantees the quality of a student. Even if supervisors will look at previous grades, the research proposal and a certain 'spark', the fact is that selection is a 'lottery'.

> But getting good grades in your degree isn't necessarily going to translate into doing a good PhD.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

> You need to be able to think and be creative and work on your own. It is hard to assess those things.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

> They are all a bit one-dimensional, and you think – this person has not got a spark, this is all very superficial stuff. It is kind of at the level of the individual proposal that you work it off. I don't have a checklist of – ah yes, yes. Which makes it sound very subjective
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

> Is it a lottery? Yes, it is.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

> A research proposal that suggests that they have at least thought about the problem and they know something about the area, they know something about the work that has been done, and they have a kind of idea about what questions they might ask, what stories they might want to tell, and what sort of material they'd use. Beyond that there is a certain arbitrariness in it.   [PhD Supervisor (SC)]

And because it is a 'lottery':

> I am much more careful now. (…)And there were alarm bells. And I think, because I was really interested in her topic, I think this was my mistake. I thought the topic was so interesting. Not what she was actually planning to do with it, but just the topic.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

The following quote contains most of what the supervisors are looking for:

> That they can write, that they can think, they are asking interesting questions.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

The ability for students to be motivated was mentioned very often by the interviewees.

> Self motivated
>
> [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

> You have to be motivated.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (SH)]

Another characteristic that appears to be taken in consideration is that students are willing to be directed and follow the supervisors' advice and guidance.

> But I think because of that I tend to be more hands on when it comes to defining it. Then once the topic is defined and circumscribed and so on, then they have to work out how best to deal with it.
>> [PhD Supervisor (DG)]

> Guess people who do what you say, follow your advice, that is one thing I want from doctoral students.
>> [PhD Supervisor (LE)]

Interviewees all agreed with the fundamental role they play in students' research.

> The supervisor is terribly important. And the best supervisors in this department, or any department, are bloody good. They are inspiring without being domineering, they are helpful without being overpowering, and they create a genuine sense of shared enterprise.
>> [PhD Supervisor (SC)]

> There is the charismatic style, the wonderful supervisor who inspires her or his students and who instils great admiration for them. Then there is the sort of athletic training supervisor, I suppose, who really makes you do thirty press ups and so on and works you damn hard but gets a damn good thesis out at the end of it. Then there is the sort of conversational, egalitarian supervisor who is not charismatic but very bright, and constantly engages you and sort of draws you out and takes your stuff seriously.
>> [PhD Supervisor (SC)]

But despite the very important role the supervisor takes on the student's research, not all supervisors are the same, and not all supervisors approach supervision in the same way, as the quote above so firmly suggests. The question however is whether all these types of supervisor and supervision can remain in the setting of the PhD as very structured and time-constrained degree. What the interviews with supervisors

suggest is that I could place the different supervisors I interviewed in one of those three types. For some, what is required of them is to be an "athletic training supervisor" who pushes the student to complete, efficiently, on time. The charismatic supervisors I have interviewed (the opening quote in this chapter came from a charismatic supervisor) and the egalitarian supervisors feel that they have to change their approach to supervision. No longer is there a space for a 'conversational' approach, nor for an 'inspirational' approach. The interviews reflected that sense of size-fits-all also for the supervisors and not only for PhD programmes.

And overall, that the supervisor/student relationship is one that is not equal and one where the student is the weaker link:

> Everyone had an equal vote, there might be three people in this relationship, all with an equal vote, but quite clearly two people might have known each other for longer, so it is not an equal relationship
> [PhD Supervisor (DM)]

Even if all supervisors see the PhD as the first step of the academic ladder, and actually the main reason for students to undertake a PhD, it is interesting to note that at times supervisors did not think their students would fill the ranks of highly cultivated and intellectually sophisticated academics they perceive themselves to be. The following quote illuminates this perspective:

> I don't think everybody who does a PhD who does really well necessarily has to be my next generation.
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

Another interpretation could be that this supervisor would not expect all PhDs students are not necessarily the academics of the future. However, in this particular case this supervisor stated she prepares students who have, and will, become academics all over the world, especially in Latin America.

The following quote is one that encapsulates so much of the current pressures put on academics nowadays at the same time that it longs for something that is no longer (if ever it has been) there.

> And this is in the face of what the government has actually done to British universities. And what, in some sense, I feel Blueskies University has been massively complicit in. I am a professional intellectual. I have had an immensely expensive - but on scholarship - international education, I love doing research and writing, I love teaching undergraduate students as well as postgraduates. I am not an accountant, or an administrator, but frankly, if you saw what my emails look like, you would actually wonder what my job description is. And I do it, I am immensely efficient. I edit, run, found journals, I am always, and they would know this, some of them come with me, to international conferences and symposia (…) That is what the academic life is.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (KD)]

A life of intellectual work, freed from so many of the administrative and other burdens that are part of current faculty work. It also suggests that academic life should be one of Ivory Towers and for special beings. Whether this was ever the case, or whether this is desirable is not a question for this section.[12] What is important to consider is that despite all the talk of adapting to a new model of PhD programmes, there remains the strong feeling of change and loss referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Maybe this is the way academic life is. Maybe the nature of academic enquiry is one full of disquiet.

6. Students' Views

Maybe, in a way, because when I got the new supervisor and I had to start the whole PhD, almost, over again, and I was horrified by this. And I remember talking to my mother about this and it freaked me out. And she said – what is the worst thing that could happen? You don't finish the PhD, you don't get the PhD. And I said – that is pretty bad. And she said – it is not that bad. Who is going to think less of you for that? And I said – I would. But I think that was pathetic. It seemed to fit in to the sort of person I wanted to be. Nobody would think you were a loser because you didn't finish the PhD. And I wouldn't necessarily think that of other people. So I would think that of myself. ….. and you want to prove you can finish it. You want to show you can do it. Otherwise it is – oh you are smart enough for an MSc, but you are not quite smart enough. In my own mind that was kind of how it was, because I am a loser I can't finish my PhD. I just know I would stink of defeat!

[PhD Student (BC)]

6.1. Introduction

The quote above reflects the kind of students I interviewed. Very driven and with high expectations of themselves. The student states she would not think any less of someone who had not completed their PhD but would however judge herself as a 'loser' if she did not finish her PhD. At the time of interview she had already submitted her PhD and was going to have her viva examination a few days after the interview. She had taken almost 6 years to complete her PhD. And the PhD also appears to be seen as granting an identity to the student, the future graduate. The PhD is here seen as a confirmation of ability, a credential of personal achievement. Rather than a more immediate credential or proof of ability in

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[12] The role of academics will be analysed in chapter 9

research, or the opportunity to develop a research question in-depth. Going through the interview transcripts there is an overall sense that the PhD, seen as a 'natural progression', as I will explore further below, is the final step on the individual's achievement ladder.

This chapter will focus and explore the views doctoral students have on their PhD and PhD programme. In order to get a variety of PhD experiences, students from various departments and at different stages of their PhDs were contacted. As such, I interviewed students at the end of their first year of PhD as well as students who had submitted. One of the students had been doing her PhD for 9 years and had not yet submitted. Overall, 26 students were interviewed.

The *voice* of the students is very important in our understanding of the PhD as a degree but also as an overall life experience since they are, alongside the supervisors, the main actors in any PhD. This chapter will thus explore and analyse students' *voice*. As the previous chapter, this is an exploratory one. It will explore issues that are of relevance to the interviewees in relation to their doctoral experience. The supervisors' *voice* is one shaped by personal experience in a longitudinal perspective. Supervisors can think back to their own PhD experience as students as well as to the present as supervisors who have advised various PhD students. They have also had the opportunity to think about what the PhD is and should be. The *voice* of the students, however, is of a rather different nature.

The students have a very personal view of the PhD. In talking about the PhD, unlike the supervisors, they tend to see it and talk about it as their PhD uniquely.

This is unsurprising because of their limited experience of the PhD. The PhD for them is most and foremost their PhD. If or when they become academics and after supervising a few theses, this view will naturally change and they will be able to have a more encompassing and longitudinal view of the PhD. Even if their friends, partners or family have done a PhD, the students' views still remain very much focussed on their own doctoral research and experience. This however is not a weakness. The PhD brings together the student and the supervisor(s). It brings together two (very) different experiences of PhD (as all PhDs are different but also one historical and longitudinal view – the supervisors' - and another, discrete – the students'), two potentially different experiences of academia and of research, as well as two potentially different views of what the PhD should be. Both *voices* are however crucial and equally important for both belong to the main actors of the PhD.

This chapter will be structured alongside the following questions: why choose Blueskies University, why do a PhD, what is a PhD, what do you expect from your supervisor, what do you think of your PhD programme, specifically looking at structure and training, and what advice would you give to prospective PhD students.

6.2. Why choose Blueskies University?

> I think if I had gone to a university that wasn't [one of the top universities] then I am basically foreclosing any possibility of PhD type of work in the States. That Blueskies University sort of brand, for what its worth, is something that is recognised in the US.
>
> [PhD Student (JT)]

Blueskies University is a research-intensive university and rates consistently high in university rankings. It is a prestigious higher education institution worldwide and this is reflected in the fact that the students interviewed mention the prestige and the *brand* of the university quite often in their interviews. This may mean that a prestigious university would have very good academics who would be expected to be good supervisors, and that a degree from this university would open many doors in terms of future employment. Some students chose Blueskies University for the quality of research in a particular topic, as we can see from the quotes below.

> Oh it was definitely my first choice. I think Blueskies University is Blueskies University. I mean it is just a wonderful place to be and this is, I wanted to do [my topic] and therefore it was an area, this was an obvious place to come.
>
> [PhD Student (JS)]

However, it is clear from the interviews with the students that what appears to be the most important reason for choosing this university for their PhD was its *brand* and the doors that same *brand* would open in terms of professional career, academic or otherwise. The following quotes reflect this view.

> It wasn't a choice per se. I wanted to do a PhD and when [my BA tutor] suggested Blueskies University I was taken aback, but I thought because Blueskies University is a very prestigious university, I didn't know if I would get in. And [my future supervisor] said he was prepared to supervise me dependent on the results of my BA. And it was satisfactory and he got a reference from [my previous university].
>
> [PhD Student (CN)]

> I guess it was the particular time in which I was filling out my applications and stuff. I had a few applications in Canada and I just felt I guessed it afforded me the best opportunity probably internationally

> more so than in Canada so I kept my options open internationally and I guess it had a greater international cache than some of the options I had back in Canada, although not necessarily as lucratively funded here as it was in Canada. So yes, it was a tough decision but it came down to name recognition was a big one and I suppose bouncing it off colleagues I was working with at the time, they seemed to feel it was the soundest option.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

This perspective of the choice of university being shaped by a *brand* that would open doors in the future gains credence when we analyse the students' *voice* in relation to why they have chosen to do a PhD, as we will see in the following section. Reasons other than the intrinsic value of the PhD appear to be at the forefront of students answers. In the same way that the Blueskies credential was extremely important to students it appears that a PhD is important for credential and self-validation purposes.

6.3. Why do a PhD?

Students seem to have two main reasons to have undertaken a PhD. One could be seen as 'natural choice' and a product of serendipity; the other as an instrumental one, to get a credential to get a job. However, even for the students for whom 'natural choice' was part of the way into the PhD, a future career in academia was even more relevant. The overwhelming majority of students want to progress into a job in a university after they have completed their PhD, and some are already working in a university. It is interesting that even the couple of students that did not start their PhD with the intention to go into an academic career were at the time of the interview seriously considering that career.

6.3.1. PhD as 'natural choice' and as product of serendipity

> I wanted to continue the life of a student
>
> [PhD Student (FO)]

In the previous chapter I mentioned that some supervisors perceived their students as 'professional students' by which they meant students who come from privileged backgrounds that allowed them to study in good schools and then progress to study in famous and prestigious universities. Students who know how to speak 'university' in the sense that they are very familiar with academic language and how to do well. These students appear to be the majority of the students I interviewed. A considerable number of them are supported financially by their families, to the extent that some stated they did not apply for scholarships because that would take too long and that their families were supporting them.

For these 'professional students' the PhD comes as a natural step after their undergraduate and masters degrees. The life as university student is one that is naturally cherished by the students interviewed. The following quote voices this perspective shared by students.

> I was always on this track [to do a PhD]. Did my BA then MA then did a couple of years …. and then I got tired of that. I don't mind teaching, I like teaching, working in an academic environment. Whatever? I just want to do it for myself.
>
> [PhD Student (ED)]

On the other hand there seems to be an element of serendipity to students ending up doing a PhD. The following quote shows that the choice of the PhD comes as a solution to other, rather different, life choices.

> This is going to sound really awful, but I had come to London to do my MSc because I wanted to live in London and then I couldn't get a job so I thought I would do a PhD. Because I always liked university and schools. And I thought it sounds fun. And I had some research I was interested in, and I thought it just such a luxury, such an indulgence if you could afford to take a few years off and just find out about the stuff that you find interesting, and no-one to pay you for it. I just thought it would be cool. And since I had the opportunity I thought …
>
> [PhD Student (BC)]

Living in London for this student was the primordial reason to undertake her PhD studies. Interestingly it should be noted that she refers to having "always liked university and school" as having been important in her making the decision to do a PhD. Obviously a student that enters a doctoral degree needs to be familiar with universities and conversant with the kind of discussions and concepts that are at the core of intellectual and academic life.

The question that remains is whether these 'professional students' are those that naturally progress to postgraduate research degrees or whether the university privileges access to these students to the detriment of other, less 'university-fluent' students.

6.3.2. PhD as a passport into academia

> Do you really want to become academic?
> If not, there is no point in doing a PhD
> [PhD Student (BD)]

The prevailing view from the students is that the PhD is the credential that will open the door to an academic career. And that is the main reason they undertake their PhD. Some do mention the interest they had in researching a particular topic.

> Yes, I suppose, in as much as I wouldn't have undertaken a PhD if it wasn't something that I was interested in and engaged by and this kind of stuff so it's not exclusively a professional fascination by any – it's something that I do enjoy getting up in the morning and doing so in that regard it's not just a tough slog to get through the PhD to get onto something else. It's not just a way station. I mean it is something that in itself I'll hopefully be proud of and hopefully will .. me onto something. It also serves as a professional .. to start a career.
> [PhD Student (DI)]

In this quote which reflects the general view of the students interviewed it appears to be a secondary reason for undertaking the PhD. The main reason is to get a position in a university.

> In a way it was one, you get to learn a lot about the subject, and it gives you a qualification for a job that you want to do. And for me it was more the latter than the former (…) Yeah, I didn't choose the topic as the thing I have wanted to do my whole life and want to learn everything about it. I just wanted to do something that would give me [a job]
> [PhD Student (CI)]

The quote above describes a rather objective and instrumental reason for why students undertake a PhD which suggests a focus on the extrinsic value of the PhD. There is none of the intrinsic and idealistic view of research and academic life. A job is a job and in order to get there one needs to go through some hurdles. This is a very pragmatic view of the PhD and even if here expressed in quite crude terms one that is shared by the overall majority of the students and as I had the opportunity to mention in the previous chapter a view shared by the overwhelming majority of the supervisors.

The following quote reflects a view that embraces the two main reasons given by students as to why they have undertaken a doctoral degree: natural choice and serendipity on the one side and credential to get a job in the other.

> You know I have never actually sat down and thought about it. I have never sat down and thought about why I am doing a PhD. Now I'd initially come to the UK just to take a year out. I did my undergraduate education in Physics. Nothing to do with what I am doing now and my summer job is a job in a Physics lab and I have worked in the Physics lab on and off for about 4 years. And it just sort of came to a point, there was an opportunity for promotion and at that point I was like – well do I want to do this until I am 65, or do I want to just take a year out and think about it. Well maybe I want to take a year out, and maybe I want to go and visit a new place. And so I thought Belfast is a new place I'd like to go to Belfast but I don't want to just have an unproductive, just like go round and drinking pints of Guinness for a year. So I want to go and get a degree and what does one study in Belfast is politics. Even though I don't have a background, I've taken some modules. I applied, I got in and I did my year in Belfast, found myself in a Welsh town as a year after doing another Masters in International Politics and it just seemed like the natural progression to go from there to doing the PhD. That I'd sort of gotten into this, there was this sort of diversion from my initial intended path, and it just seemed sort of like the natural conclusion (…) The reason why I wanted to do a PhD I guess ultimately was the type of work I want to do, would be some sort of policy oriented think tank whatever work. And to do that type of work without getting a PhD, the PhD I see more as kind of like a passport I don't have that kind of almost like religious reverie of the PhD that some people… It is not going to be my masterwork I hope to have some subsequent work that I write, I research, I do but it is a passport to the type of work that I want to do. It is a chance for me, it will be the only time I ever get 3 or 4 years to

> research something, just one thing that I want to and it is the time where I pick up some of the life skills, learning about this quantitative methods and so on, which I am doing badly, but I am trying.
>
> [PhD Student (JT)]

This student clearly ended up doing a PhD at Blueskies University as a result of a certain serendipity but also clearly to get a 'passport' for his desired professional career. A 'union card' to used the words of Nelson (1993) (cfr. Chapter 2). It also encompasses the idea, shared by the majority of the supervisors as seen in the previous chapter, that the PhD is not a 'masterwork' but a credential at the same time that it is the opportunity to get 'some life skills'. This fits very tightly with the Roberts Agenda that argues for PhDs as preparation for a professional career where the focus on transferable skills is on the increase.

6.3.3. PhD as personal validation

Some students stated that the PhD was something they always wanted to do but not with the perspective of a 'natural choice'. Rather, it would be the culmination of a long held desire to achieve, to go back to academia, and complete a path they had not had the opportunity to walk when they were students. These are obviously the mature students that decided to go back to university, and have allowed themselves the 'luxury' of doing a PhD. They stated their financial situation had now allowed them to do 'what they always wanted to do'. These are certainly very different students from the majority of the students interviewed. However, due to the fact that 'mature' or 'very mature' students, as they classified themselves, shared this view, it does show a different approach from the approach of the majority of interviewees.

> Well from my point of view it is very personal. I am just delighted I am in this university. But I wanted a PhD for myself. It is an achievement for me. It is pushing out the boundaries for me. I never knew that I could actually quite do it. So wanting to achieve, yes, wanting to achieve. And it is very satisfying when you do achieve.
>
> [PhD Student (CN)]

6.4. What is a PhD?

In order to further explore students' understanding and conception of the PhD I asked them what the PhD was for them. One thing is understanding why students opted to undertake a PhD (career, credential) and another is to understand what the PhD is for the students. This section looks at how students define their PhD. As referred to in the beginning of this chapter, students' views tend to focus on their particular experience rather than on a more holistic view or definition of the PhD. It is interesting to see that in this section however the *voice* of the different students voice very similar things, representing thus a very strong unified *voice*.

6.4.1. Prior to starting the PhD

Before they started the PhD the students interviewed had very little, if any, idea of what doing a PhD entailed. Even a student who came from a family of academics was surprised by her PhD experience.

> [LAUGHER] That is a problem because when I was doing my PhD interview the person who interviewed me is actually the person who is my supervisor, and she was asking me some pointed questions about what did I think it was going to be like. And I didn't want to go in saying – oh it is going to be great, I am going to make lots of friends … And so I said I would imagine it is quite isolating, it is not like you are in a class with other students, it is a bunch of other people doing totally different projects and it could be frustrating blah, blah, the list goes on, money problems, whatever. And she seemed satisfied that I didn't have a lazy

> view of PhD that would be unrealistic. But still, it came as a complete
> shock anyway. I am not sure I could say anything to anybody studying
> PhD anyway, until they had actually experienced it.
>
> [PhD Student (BC)]

> I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. I had never read a PhD in
> my life. And I didn't know what I was letting myself in for.
>
> [PhD Student (CN)]

What is clear from the two quotes above is that neither of the two students, voicing a similar opinion to all other students interviewed, had a clear idea of what a PhD was, and of what doing a PhD entailed before starting their PhD. This reinforces the idea that the interest the students interviewed had on doing a PhD is of a rather extrinsic nature, as the previous section demonstrated. If one is only interested in doing something they really do not know what it is (and this may be more likely in the social sciences, humanities and the arts) then it is likely one is undergoing the degree because of the idea of what it represents (i.e. personal validation, a credential, and a 'natural choice').

Moreover, the first quote is quite precise in describing some of the main elements that may make the PhD a difficult endeavour to undergo, namely: loneliness, and financial problems. Still, the student states that it still "came as a complete shock". What becomes clear is that the students interviewed came into the PhD programme unprepared for what they were going to face. Some of the "shock" for these students appears to have mainly come from what doing original research actually entailed in intellectual terms, and the defining of a precise research question.

> I feel quite strongly about the fact that at the Masters level there wasn't
> enough information being given to future PhD students on what to expect.

> I, for instance, changed my topic entirely after two years, and I know a lot of people who did that. Sometimes you walk into a PhD thinking you know what you are after, but even in the first year it is not enough to have the seminars. You probably need something at the Masters level that prepares you for the type of work you will be required to do. Even to formulate your interest, because the interest sometimes doesn't necessarily just run from the MSc dissertation. There is probably an underlying idea that it will just carry on from there, which I think I did, but I realised I probably wasn't that happy with.
>
> [PhD Student (FO)]

This student voices some very important concerns: that the PhD thesis is not a 'carry on' exercise from the masters dissertation and that it is difficult to 'formulate your interest'. The PhD may thus symbolise a break with the previous academic experience. Doing a masters dissertation is in itself not a preparation *per se* for the doctoral research and by re-formulating and refining one's research question the students are, in fact, initiating , and not continuing, a path. What is clear from the interviews is the radical new academic experience the PhD represents in the sense that it is unexpected for being so different from the previous academic degrees. Next section will focus on how students describe the PhD once they are doing or once they have completed it, as it may be the case for different students.

6.4.2. As PhD students/graduates

> I think this has been a .. discussion in a number of conversations I've had. For me I think it's turned into a form of … The best way I can categorise it I guess is that it's a start rather than an end. I think traditionally a PhD was conceived as the ultimate thing, sort of this was your life's work and I think institutionally things have changed and I think peoples' perceptions have changed and helped shape the institutional perspective as well, but I don't think it's treated the same way by the institution,

> nor by those people taking it anymore and I think I'd fall into that category.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

Students appear not to see the PhD as an ultimate piece of research, a *magnum opus*. It may become a book in the future, or be a thesis from which a few articles can be published. "A start rather than an end" says the quote above. And in this view we can also see how this student (even if not the voice of all students) understands some of the changes through which the PhD has recently been through. So, the PhD for the students interviewed is not "the ultimate thing".

> Well I mean I see it in 2 ways, one way is as a piece itself, it will be my own book I guess.., in the other sense it will be a qualification from [Blueskies University] so I'm hoping to be able to use some … for employment or whatever.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

> The culmination of five and a half years, three years of hard work and two years of messing around. LAUGHTER No, I see it as the biggest thing I have ever done. Right now it is a book, but I hope to turn it into maybe general articles. Not a book.
>
> [PhD Student (BC)]

> I think the work of my life will take all my life.
>
> [PhD Student (CI)]

> It's a start for a research career. If it turns into a book…
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

A few students also voiced the desire that their PhD would be something that they would be proud of, something that would be new and original.

> Yes, but myself, I want to write a PhD that doesn't just sit on a shelf and nobody ever reads it, so on the one hand I want to get it done, two pressures and they go in opposite directions, one is to get it done as quickly as possible and the other one is to, I mean for financial reasons, for just my own – getting myself worked up about the project, and then the other one is to do a really good … which will take more time so..
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

> What is … PhD? Something that will create some new ideas, somebody thinking … built older ideas, and something that people will read and say "okay well maybe that's.." Yes, and you know, its something I won't be ashamed of, you know, I did this 3 year – this is my PhD I designed something really … back and find it not very interesting and nobody would want to read but I got it done in 3 years, I mean some people do that but I couldn't keep myself motivated with that.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

The two quotes above show that some of the students interviewed do believe, and want, to do a PhD that will make them proud, and which will be, to an extent, new and groundbreaking. And that a possible audience will read and, even, admire. They want their PhDs to be read and appreciated. They do not want to be 'ashamed' of it. However, producing an original and new research on the one hand, and finishing the PhD in the timeline allotted, may be viewed as two objectives which are in tension with one another. Another thought arising from these quotes appear is how they convey a view of the PhD that is empty of content. What I mean is that students are not referring to specifics in their research and thesis. They refer to their objectives in a way that is devoid of references to their topics and particulars of their research project, but rather to the perception possible audiences might have of their quality as researchers.

The quote below sees the PhD as one element of a life experience, that of a student in a big cosmopolitan city. The PhD is an element of growing and living. If able to

do that, the student believes they will maybe become "a better academic, a better person".

> Well a thesis that will be passed, as I said. Everybody I talk to who is older says – don't rush it, it is the best time of your life. So I don't know, instead of also enjoying what you are doing, there is a working thesis, but in London I know a lot of people, I started playing cricket. And get to finish this chapter and get the thesis in three years, but also I am there and I have the money now. It is a job. If I was working I wouldn't say I have to work 75 hours a week. It is enjoying life as well. So in the end I have a thesis but I also can look back and say that was a good experience. I read things, I met people. And maybe I am a better academic, a better person. [LAUGHTER]   [PhD Student (ED)]

It was not very common in the interviews I conducted with the students this kind of view. The majority of students conveyed a sense of working in the PhD to become an academic in the future. To work hard. To focus on the thesis. To do a good job. These are all obviously important to the students interviewed. However, very few had a more holistic approach to life as a doctoral students nor conveyed the perception that to become good academics they need to focus on other things, on other elements of their lives. This does not mean they did not consider this, but rather that this was not an aspect often mentioned in the interviews. Besides love relationships, partners and family, there are very seldom any references to things outside the PhD.

So the PhD for my respondents, as we have just seen, is a lot of hard work, is the preparation for a research and academic career (on top of a credential), a degree that is changing and also an achievement to be 'proud of'. One student though saw the PhD as an opportunity to start developing and focussing on ideas for future research as an academic.

> I think the PhD in this sense… I don't know if it is a good way of saying it but… as providing me with empirical bases to show that you've done some rigorous work on a particular area… hum… that will then, after that, allow you to do more hum…. more theoretical work afterwards, to branch of into other areas and a lot of things I'm really interested in and can't really deal with within the context of a PhD I think…. Once you get this out of the way, which will then hopefully give me the ability to more theoretical work on the topic and do kind of .. stuff
>
> [PhD Student BE]

The quote above is one that portrays a student with a more defined view of the PhD. They perceive it as an opportunity to develop intellectually, rather than only seeing it as a credential to get into academia. The PhD is in this case the beginning for building oneself an intellectual and skills frame for future research and personal and professional development.

6.5. What do you expect from your supervisor?

Students were asked what they were expecting their supervisor to be doing in the particular phase of the PhD they were going through. Above all they want a supervisor that gives support, that questions their choices, and that edits their work.

> You mean what things they should do? I don't know. Just to check that you know what you are doing. Not to take things for granted, but to question what you are doing.   [PhD Student (BC)]
> Well at this stage ideally he should be helping me nail down my structure, nail down what I'm writing, helping me with editing, helping me with the next step forward, helping me basically find out … the next one or two more years.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

> I think it should be to review your progress and advise you on the good and the bad things you are doing or not doing. They should encourage you to plan things. Mind, I say that, but I am a planner anyway. I think planning is quite important. To set yourself goals and do something by a

plan. I think it is important. when you are doing a PhD to set yourself milestones, whether it be when you complete your first chapter. Well, you have got to do your aims and methods, so when you complete your first chapter. Milestones are important and it is important to set milestones.

[PhD Student (CN)]

I think increasingly his role is to work as an editor, what I am doing is I am beginning to produce [Inaudible] I think that is what he is interested in doing so he reads the stuff that I write and comments on it and suggests more ways of presenting it.

[PhD Student (NH)]

Ultimately, they need support not only in the sense of academic guidance but in many cases the reassurance the students are going in the right direction.

I think, in the first year, in my opinion, it might help, even if it is only for twenty minutes, to pat you on the back or reassure you you are going in the right direction, and you can tell them something even if there is nothing to mark. You are very lost in your first year, I think. For non English speaking students it must be worse. I am a bit older so … but I still found it daunting. So I think in the first year it might help.

[PhD Student (CN)]

From the supervisor many things are expected. Mainly that they look at the work and give productive and helpful feedback. But in a degree where so much self-questioning happens, especially when it comes to the ability to do a PhD, it is sometimes helpful for students to get that 'pat on the back'.

6.6. What do you think of your PhD programme?

Some of the students interviewed were aware of some of the changes happening at doctoral level, namely, tighter deadlines, more hurdles, earlier upgrades, and the

inclusion of research training set within the frame of the Roberts Report, but not all were experiencing them as will be shown below. In the interviews I was particularly interested in knowing what were the perceptions of the students in terms of the structure of their PhD programme as well as their experience and views on the training they had received, if any.

6.6.1. Structure

My focus was to ask students what they thought about the various hurdles they had already gone through in their PhD and whether they thought they had been helpful in providing them with paths that could improve their PhD projects.

> I'm not [research council] funded so they advised me that unless I really needed to go for [the upgrade] and I was really ready to do it then just to wait.
> [PhD Student (BN)]

The quote above is interesting as it makes clear that some of the hurdles introduced, or the new tighter deadlines, can be of little help to students in the way they have been set. Demanding that students submit their upgrade paper a set time after they begin their PhD may be of little help, and therefore the student above was told they did not need to do it. The reason for this is that they were not research council funded. This means the student, and the department, do not have to answer to the research councils and therefore the rules, which should apply across the board, can be flexible.

Students were aware that doctoral programmes were undergoing some changes and it appears that the main concern was to have students complete within the 3 to 4 years deadline:

> I think it's fairly clear that the indications come from, I guess in terms of time management they've been I think more regimented than historically perhaps. You certainly get that sense from people alluding to it or commenting to it and I think that's been – I think more than anything they've put out a bit of an impetus to get things going which I think was my understanding of what was the goal … process to begin. I guess it's expediated [sic] things so in that sense in so far as that's a good thing or if it is a good thing then that is what they do because they keep the deadlines moving relatively quickly and I guess in that sense otherwise not much because it's very hands-off as a PhD I guess traditionally is.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

Some students also expressed a concern over the hurdles they had to go through in order to abide by the new arrangements departments had put in place to try and make students complete their PhDs in 4 years.

> Well, to define your aims about the PhD at the end of the first year is I think a bit naïve. It also strikes me as a bit of a – I mean within – I guess I understand the administrative reasoning behind it but I think as a document I don't think mine will be entirely that useful. The process wasn't necessarily – I think it just rushes things, it forces the hand of something. I think maybe a more modified version of that would be useful, certainly at the end of the first year, but for it – well it struck me and this might be just my understanding about rather difficult things that come up and figure exactly what it was you were supposed to be doing.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

In this quote the student voices their concern in terms of how the structure of the PhD programme may not fit the research process itself and may seem rather a tick the box exercise rather than being a useful, and even organic, process. The student here is referring to a document students at the end of their first year need to hand in

that defines the aims and methods of their PhD. However, the student feels that at the end of the first year it may be to optimistic to have these already set. It shows how some of the changes that were being introduced in doctoral programmes appear to be of mere administrative interest rather than in the interest of the development and improvement of the doctoral research itself. And also that the changes may have forgone the interests of each individual subject/discipline in order to have blanket rules across the board.

6.6.2. Training

There were various concerns students had over training, namely the quality of the provision and the time spent in training. There were also some references as to whether there should be a blanket compulsory training programme to all PhD students.

One of the concerns voiced was that training took time from focus on the research itself:

> In the first year there were too many demands made on my time, and quite high expectations, so in particular I had to complete all the masters qualifications and at the same time complete all the PhD qualifications and especially around – I just find this time of year I had to do all the exams and submit a chapter of my PhD, so I was extremely stressed out by this time.   [PhD Student (BN)]

Some departments at Blueskies University require students who have not completed a masters degree in that university to complete the coursework required for a masters degree. As such, the student above felt overwhelmed by the amount

of work they had to do in order to keep up with the PhD work at the same time they had to complete the masters degree requirements.

Another issue was that of who should be doing the training and whether there should be a requirement for all students to complete research training.

> But it's partly because my background wasn't as strong as perhaps it should have been, had I come from a stronger background I would have found some of it a bit annoying, I would have found it quite a duplication so in a sense I benefited because I came from a weak background but if I'd come from a stronger background I would have found it annoying.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

This student clearly thought it was appropriate for them to undertake some research training in their perceived weak research method background. However, the majority of students felt otherwise as the quote below illustrates.

> And also it shouldn't be automatically compulsory for everyone who doesn't have a [Blueskies University] masters.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

Some students who feel they are well-prepared for undertaking doctoral research would not welcome the idea of compulsory research training.

> I think it is important for Masters students, if they are going to go on, and I found it very useful at Edinburgh just for a whole range of reasons, having stats and qualitative skills and all that kind of things. But, I think this year, I mean, last year, I would find it a bit of a distraction to be really honest with you if I needed to do it.
>
> [PhD Student (BE)]

And the following quote confirms this idea

> I don't know. I would assume that at this point – I would imagine the PhD students would have strong enough research skills although that might be a bit of a fallacy. But no, I didn't expect one and I imagine in some ways I might have resented one in the sense of in a similar way that I felt the ….. class to be a bit excessive or just not necessarily useful and I think were there to be a structured process, it might do as much harm as good given I think the facilities that seem to be already here and from what I gather from the research methodology institute and this kind of stuff, I gather that the courses are strong but they would be able to give people what they needed. So I think a blanket one across the first year research students is not necessary and wouldn't be necessarily effective for those who already have research skills. For those that don't and I understand there are many who don't for various reasons can probably find what they need elsewhere I would imagine.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

Students were aware that not attending the required research training (with the exception of those who were completing the masters requirements) would not result in any penalty.

> It was, I believe, compulsory, but you knew there wouldn't be a sanction. And I just felt that at that level people needed some freedom. And what I would say, now, in retrospect, is you probably need freedom to research, but also a different structure to feel you are getting something out of the course. So I wouldn't say you don't need these workshops anymore, because I think they are probably quite important, but the line of these workshops would have to be changed around to make students more comfortable. From my generation I knew quite a few stopped going to these workshops because they felt they were not getting anything from it.
>
> [PhD Student (FO)]

Importantly too in the above quote is the sense that the training was not appropriate for their needs and so they decided to stop attending the training.

There was also a sense that PhD students should be independent in the sense that they should be able to decide which training they needed to attend, if any at all.

> No not particularly. I think if somebody has gone as far as a PhD they can probably make their own assessment as to whether they know how they are going to tackle the research and they know what training they have done. If somebody has done statistics at 'A' level or maybe their first degree has been something involving a lot of qualitative work then it is a bit foolish to then make them go and do a specific statistics course, which may nor not be relevant to what they are doing. Equally if you are doing quantitative work well you either know or understand quantitative work you have to assess I think, I think you trust somebody who has got as far as to undertake a PhD. Then they may need more training but I think that there shouldn't be any compulsion involved.
>
> [PhD Student (JS)]

And also that supervisors are there to help when methodological issues appear, which suggests that some students would rather discuss and learn with their supervisor rather than attending training courses.

> My sort of experience has been that a lot of the questions and so on have been answered directly to my meetings with my supervisor and my advisor and not via the modules.
>
> [PhD Student (JT)]

The main concern though was the perceived quality of the training provided. Students overall felt that what was being offered to them was not of very high quality.

> It was a complete waste of time, it was terrible. Because hopefully we were learning interview techniques to use as a research students, bearing in mind that probably none of us had experience, like you are doing on me now, none of us had experience, and we had some people from the BBC talking about …. It was a waste of time.
>
> [PhD Student (CN)]

> There wasn't really any, not much of any, focus on the coursework and the course itself was relatively disappointing.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

> There wasn't much that I heard in the sessions and the seminars that I did attend that I didn't already know or couldn't find out relatively easily through sort of self-directed enquiry into the resources provided. So in that sense yes, I would say – I mean certainly I've come across various research shortfalls as I've gone through but I've been able to work them out.
>
> [PhD Student (DI)]

There were however some interesting points raised by the students. Many stated that they had missed an opportunity not attending or not taking the training too seriously.

> I can't remember now. Had I really written the exam, and I think it was a mistake not to do that, it would have been more useful. But I would sit in on the lectures and then in the beginning I was doing classes and some homework, but as the term went on I stopped, I kept going but I stopped doing the work.
>
> [PhD Student (ED)]

And also that having a common training with your peers has disciplinary advantages:

> I think there should be. At least you would be on level ground, everyone would roughly know what you were up against. And also because research design and methodology varies from country to country, continent to continent, and for the background of students coming in who are generally not from the UK, that would be immensely helpful, people would know what they were doing (…) I probably would complain about it but I think at the end I would find I would be happy to do it, yes.
>
> [PhD Student (FO)]

Despite all the criticisms students directed to training, some did suggest that they would have gained if they had approached training in a more holistic way.

> Now sort of like looking back and two years after the fact I do sort of envy the type of training, type of goods or transferable skills type of training that the M Res students have. Coming from the States it's very, very, it's kind of familiar to the North American system for people to take these two years of classes even if they don't need them. But you know maybe two years down the line, or five years down the line, you might need that skill and you don't have it and in a sense that kind of picking and choosing something that is applicable to my own project now is a very short sighted way. It would have been nice to have a more sort of structured programme.
>
> [PhD Student (JT)]

This student suggests the advantages of having research training that takes the approach that future academics should have a common language, or at least, understand the language of their peers. And this could be gained by sharing training programme that allows for this common body of knowledge to be understood by one's peers.

6.7. What advice would you give to prospective students?

I asked the students what advice would they give to prospective PhD students. The intention of this question was twofold: on the one hand to find out what needs the students interviewed might themselves have felt when they started, and on the other to assess their own perception of why other students would/should undergo a PhD.

One recommendation is that prospective students should enquire about what the PhD really entails. The amount and sophistication of work that one has to produce at doctoral level.

> I would ask them why they want to do it, what they think it is and then I would suggest that they do more research than I did before they come, you know, I didn't really realise, I don't know why, that it was basically writing a book, I don't know what I thought it was but, yes, and its fine, I'm fine with that now.
>
> [PhD Student (BN)]

> They have got to be absolutely committed to whatever it is they want to research and they have got to be very resilient because it is a very long process and you go through all sorts of highs and lows. I'd tell them it is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity, fantastic, you learn so much, and you never realise …. and very lonely because you are on your own and you have to make the decision and you have to plan your work and you have to drive yourself forward, nobody else is going to do it for you.
>
> [PhD Student (CN)]

> If they really want … first make sure that they certainly, really, want to do a PhD. And then ask them to apply somewhere where there are people who are really interested in what you are doing. And I think that is it.
>
> [PhD Student (CI)]

> I would probably just say to be prepared for the fact that it is quite, it can be quite solitary and that you are on your own schedule in a lot of senses and you are kind of responsible for deciding how much work you are going to get done and doing it in your own time and it can be long days I guess but I would recommend to do it.
>
> [PhD Student (DQ)]

The quotes above reflect some of the elements that current or recently graduate doctoral students thought were important for their prospective peers to be aware of. The loneliness, the sheer commitment needed, the downside that independent and solitary research brings, and the need to have a support base ("people who are really interested in what you are doing"). But other elements were mentioned. The

constant questioning of one's ability, the lack of confidence, the ups and downs of

research:

> But what you possibly are not prepared for, and maybe I see a lot more of this in female students, who are not prepared for the loss in confidence. And that is a huge problem, which is where a support network is important, because most of us have spent days bemoaning the loss of our intellectual faculties. The seeming lack of reason, the inability to come up with a clear sentence … You lose your writing skills, you lose your reading skills and it all becomes magnified doing a PhD. And a lot of the time you are sitting there thinking you are the biggest idiot in the world. And it really hinders your work to some extent, which is why I think you need the support network. It also gives you a realistic impression of this is what you are aiming for, and this is what will happen, so if this takes place in your mind, don't panic. I wouldn't say people should say it is all wonderful, but just to normalise the process, just to say this is what will happen.
>
> [PhD Student (FO)]

The above quote illustrates some of the dilemmas and difficulties that PhD

students face. Especially the self-doubt that appears to be so common amongst

PhD students, even the very confident ones, as paradoxical as this may seem. The

PhD is a very different experience from the previous degrees, requiring a degree of

involvement, persistence, confidence, intellectual ability and originality that

students had not encountered before. In this sense the PhD is an extremely difficult

and demanding endeavour.

The following chapter will be a reflection on the views of supervisors and of the

students as reported in the current and previous chapters. It will focus on some of

the most relevant themes and thoughts expressed by the respondents. It will

attempt to make links between the two cohorts where that is possible, and reflect

on differences in their approaches and views of the PhD and the PhD experience.

Furthermore, it will attempt to analyse some of the consequences that those views might have in the experience of undertaking a doctoral degree.

7. Post-scriptum to chapters 5 and 6

Reflections on Supervisors' and Students' *Voices*

7.1. Introduction

This post-scriptum chapter intends to reflect and structure some of the main issues that the two previous chapters referred to. It will also focus on some of the similarities or otherwise between the *voice* of the supervisors and that of the students and also within the two cohorts. This brief discussion is given a different chapter so that those *voices* could speak for themselves in the previous two chapters. As referred elsewhere the main aim of this thesis is to give the two main actors in the PhD a space where their opinions can be heard. Therefore each of two previous chapters were left to speak for themselves. However, it is important to structure the relevant and important ideas present in them.

The following two chapters will be an opportunity to reflect on the value of the PhD and on the PhD as a contribution to knowledge. This chapter aims at being an opportunity to synthesise the two previous ones and to develop some of the issues arising from the interviews with the two cohorts. It is also a chapter where my own doctoral narrative will be called upon. There was an opportunity to develop at length the methodological implications of my position as a PhD student doing a PhD on the PhD experience and how the systematic reflection on my position as a researcher throughout this process has been paramount. As I collected the data I was not a PhD student and this separation of roles has been extremely important.

At this stage though, I believe that my *voice* can be called upon in order to contribute to the framing of the respondents' *voices*. But most importantly, my reflections here arise from the interpretation of all the elements of the research I have conducted, namely the interviews and the literature review. It is the structuring of my own ideas, views and interpretation. It is also about finding my own *voice*, my narrative.

Due to the nature of the two different interview schedules for the two cohorts, different sections arose in the previous two chapters. The subsections in this one are an attempt to group different categories together and at the same time to bring in the structure of my own narrative.

7.2. Change

It was clear that both supervisors and the majority of students were concerned with going through a process of change. A process of changing practices as well as the need to change expectations. Some supervisors were obviously resisting these changes, in the sense that they had resistance strategies to the changes being imposed. The overall tone, however, was that it was inevitable that changes were being put in place and that little space was allowed for flexibility. For the students it did not appear that the concern was too relevant. Quite a significant number of the students interviewed had already gone over the 4 year deadline and thus for them this was of little relevance even though they were aware that things had changed since they started their PhD. For the students in their first years however, the setting of clear deadlines was not of concern *per se*, just an acknowledgement of a fact.

Supervisors were more aware of the substantial differences introduced for doctoral degrees, and of the attempt to make the programmes more structured. Also of different expectations in terms of the thesis itself, that it no longer was the *magnum opus* but a piece of academic work that should above all demonstrate the students' ability to do research. They also voiced, at times with concern, that no longer was there the opportunity to use one's PhD time for embarking in ground breaking research, and the space for serendipity had been lost. To this, opinions diverged. A group of supervisors believed that it was good to have a speedy PhD degree, and these interestingly were mainly those with responsibility over the PhD programmes. They were the current, or had recently been, graduate tutors for the doctoral degrees in their department.

Graduate tutors at Blueskies University oversee the running of the programme, are responsible for the research seminar for first-year students, and are the port of call for both faculty and students if problems arise that students and supervisors were not able to settle. They are also responsible, in conjunction with individual supervisors, to assign incoming PhD students to their supervisor. Therefore they have an eagle-eye view of the state of affairs in PhD programmes in their department. And ultimately need to answer to their department in case completion rates decline. It is therefore expected that they are quite aware of the responsibilities of the department in maintaining high completion rates.

As far as my experience is concerned, I would say I have had a rather unusual one. Or better, that maybe my PhD experience follows a more *traditional* path than that of the students I interviewed. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the fact

that I am funded by the Portuguese Research Council means that I do not have to attend any particular research training. On top of this, I have had the opportunity to do considerable research training not only in my degree and masters, but also while I was a research officer in another university. My main supervisor and I, both sceptical of the 'skills agenda', agreed I would not follow a particular training *regime*. Paradoxically my more traditional PhD path could be said to arise from my position as a slight outsider in the sense of my foreign funding, having worked prior to PhD, and somehow free from the stringent PhD programme rules at my university, the latter due mainly to the nature of my funding.

My department at UCL is rather unusual academically. Without going too much into detail, which I think would be inappropriate, the department went through a series of changes which will culminate basically with the end of the department as it is now. It is more driven towards service delivery at the University than towards academic research. The few PhD students it has are therefore less part of the usual PhD programme elements than students in other departments at UCL. On top of this, all the PhD students at the department, with one exception, are mature students studying part-time for their PhD. All in all, completion rates and training requirements are almost absent from our PhD experience at my department at UCL, which is unusual.

My perception of change has thus not arisen directly from my own doctoral experience, but from my work experience prior to embarking on my PhD, research issues surrounding PhD programmes and through my PhD research: via the literature and the data collected. In my role as a researcher at Blueskies University

I had the responsibility to investigate whether departments had put in place the new PhD requirements. I collaborated in the production of the postgraduate handbooks for all departments.

It was quite interesting to analyse all these changes, and talk to students and supervisors, yet not really having experienced them myself. To a certain extent though, I always wondered where I would like to fit, were I given the choice. In the sections below I will try to answer this question.

7.3. Why do a PhD?

There is an overwhelming sense that the PhD is a preparation for an academic career. As such doing a PhD is seen as working towards a credential that will open the academic ladder. In this, both supervisors and students appear to be in complete agreement. The supervisors particularly seemed especially adamant that this should be the case. They are preparing the future generation of academics even if at times they appear to be believe that the new PhDs are of a lesser quality than their own was. If anything, some suggested that other kinds of students should be accepted; those who would like to do a PhD for pleasure; those who would like to do it for personal development and interest.

There were some instances where students expressed their intention of trying a career outside academia. Or a career for which a PhD could be seen as a valuable credential. But the overall idea is that both PhD students and supervisors see the PhD as a passport into academia. Doing a PhD for the sake of the discovery of new knowledge or for the intellectual exploration of one's interests are not at the

forefront of the reason why students do a PhD. Students stated they had obviously an interest in the topic they were working on. A couple of students even believed their PhD could be groundbreaking. But the overall sense was one of pragmatism and instrumentalism.

As a sociologist, there is little or no value in assessing whether this practical view of the PhD from the interviewees is a positive or negative development. As I said elsewhere, the main problem is the lack of plurality rather than the lack of intellectual ambition. For this is a time of change. And, if anything, the PhD process may be following the path that academic careers in general are taking. Due to funding and to organizational and managerial duties, academics too face a career restricted by time, by less freedom, and by less space for serendipity. As I suggested in chapter two, my focus on PhD degrees stems out of a view that it can be the place where academic dynamics could be seen more clearly since they are more exacerbated. This could be the case for admission, training-led approach to learning, streamlining of students' doctoral experiences, an increased managerial arm controlling intellectual production and the dynamics between students and faculty. In the same way, it may be possible that supervisors are reproducing their current experience as academics onto their PhD students' experiences. The most prominent driver for change notwithstanding remains the funding and managerial policies in directing the value of the PhD as that of a credential rather than of an original and unique intellectual experience.

The PhD is very clearly seen almost uniquely as a step into academia, a step into a career, a step to become a credentialed apprentice. For me it is also the case that

the PhD is a credential. But, as for many other students, the PhD came as a natural step. "I always knew I was going to do a PhD" was something I heard in the interviews with the students. And this I felt was very much a reflection of how I saw the PhD. However, due to the fact that my department does not fit the profile of a typical academic department, and that the training and completion pressures are not felt, maybe I did have the opportunity to embark in a unique intellectual endeavour. I did follow my intellectual interests without pressures from my supervisor not to 'waste time'. If anything, it was the opposite I felt. That this was my time and that I should take this opportunity to make the PhD I wanted to do.

7.4. Which students do a PhD at Blueskies University?

In the interviews with both cohorts I had the opportunity to explore some of the characteristics of the students who were at Blueskies University to do a doctoral degree. This is of particular relevance since it may be that the actors shape the screenplay. Or is it that the screenplay shapes the actors?

7.4.1. Students

One of the supervisors describes Blueskies University students as professional students. By this he means students who have been to prestigious universities and who have had good results in their previous degrees. The PhD is, for these students, a natural step in their academic life. Undergraduate degree followed by a masters degree and then a PhD. And there is an overall perception that these students are privileged and ambitious. However, this is not without its caveats. One question

arises and it is whether the PhD is only for the privileged few or whether only the privileged few want to do a PhD.

7.4.1.1. Selection and privilege

There is little doubt that a prestigious university like Blueskies University ensures it gets very good students who have achieved excellent results in their previous degrees. These students are perceived to come from very privileged backgrounds. They have managed to study in very good universities and many of the interviewees were studying with the financial help of their families that could afford to support them. Some stated they had not applied for financial support because it was very time consuming and thus relied on their families for support. Some American and Canadian students interviewed had, on top of the help from their families, taken student loans.

It appears that Blueskies University privileges this kind of student and thus it does not seem that there is space for other students to enter a PhD programme at this university. The requirements made from applicants may be out of reach to many cohorts of students. And in this sense it seems that the PhD is for the very few. This suggests a perpetuation of the Ivory Tower view of academics, which are distant from the 'real world', clichéd view maybe but for a reason. In this sense, the university is maybe demonstrating how a particular culture reproduces itself.

On top of this, it can also be the case that only a particular kind of student wants to do a PhD at this university. This is difficult to prove empirically as we would need to have access to the applications to the University as well as initial contacts with

university supervisors to assess which students enquire about applying for a PhD at this university.

This is not to say that these professional students are not extremely good or potentially extremely good research students. The issue though is whether privileging a particular kind of cohort the university means excluding a different student body to be part of its doctoral programmes. This lack of diversity (independently of there being a cosmopolitan cohort already) may be cause for concern. By accepting a particular set of students the university may be narrowing the kind of research projects and ideas it should be promoting. On top of that, it reinforces its aims of avoiding risky, because they may be too different, research topics. Instead of diversity it appears the university is looking for compliance. Instead of originality, the university seems to be looking for predictability. This came clearly from the interviews with the supervisors, who appear to look for 'interesting' students, with very good grades in their masters degrees, and not for 'original' and 'creative' students.

The data also suggests that students lack a 'map' of how to be an effective PhD student. This is reflected in both the interviews with the supervisors and the students. The students stated that due to the nature of the research degree, so different from a masters or an undergraduate degree, they did not know what they were actually expecting. Supervisors confirmed this notion by suggesting the intensive guidance students need in their first degree. In his case study of a group of doctoral students in Education in a UK university Busher suggests that there is a

lack of a "map of how to be a student" (2001: 2). And my study seems to confirm this view.

Interesting to reflect on whether I fit the description of the students. Educated in a private French school back in Portugal, I studied in a state university (which are seen in Portugal as substantially better than private ones) for my BSc, then at Blueskies University for my Masters degree and now at UCL, a research-intensive prestigious university in the UK. Am I a professional student as described by one of the supervisors interviewed? To a certain extent I think I may be. In other aspects I am not. I studied in good schools and universities. On the other hand I worked before starting my PhD and have been doing so all through my doctoral studies. I never worked full-time on my PhD. I am sponsored by a foreign research council and by work. These are characteristics that distinguish me from the cohort I interviewed. On the other hand, I want to pursue an academic career. The question remains of whether mine is just a different path but heading towards the same destination.

Overall it appears that, both from the interviews but also from the literature that I have explored in other chapters, it may be the case that both the PhD appears still to be for the privileged few but also that only few (even though the number is steadily increasing) want to embark on a PhD.

The intellectual journey and the space for the enjoyment of the research and for serendipity cannot be understood without considering the more factual elements of

the PhD programme, namely completion deadline, structure of the programme and introduction of a research training *regime*.

7.5. Completion deadline

The main element of compliance in PhD degrees was that of the tight deadline for completion of the PhD. This remained a concern for both cohorts of interviewees. It appears that to a certain extent it has become the fulcral element in the PhD process. Much attention is now given to students completing 'on time'. This raises some concerns. Of particular relevance to my research are the kind of intellectual journey students are allowed to embark on, and how structured programmes affect the PhD experience.

7.5.1. Intellectual journey

Supervisors are now looking for students who will be able to complete on time. Practical reasons are now overtaking academic ones in the choice of future PhD students. The risk element of research is being replaced by assuring that little space is given for intellectual *flânerie* and freedom. By risk I mean the natural progress of research with its ups and downs. Avoiding risk means avoiding risky topics. This means that departments are looking for topics and methodologies that can guarantee speedy delivery of results (as far as any can guarantee this).

The intellectual journey, even if still persisting (it has not been eliminated), and the creativity historically present in doctoral research have now been substituted by the training of researchers that can deliver (a certain) quality of outcomes and

publications. There is therefore a sense of loss. The move from the intrinsic value of the PhD, and knowledge, to the valuing of the extrinsic value of the PhD is now prevalent. Supervisors and students are both very clear that the PhD is most and foremost a credential to get into an academic career. It is the preparation for an academic career. This is not new, however what is new is the lack of focus on the development of the academic and the intellectual. Supervisors voiced this notion of loss quite strongly even if some do think that an expedient research degree has advantages and that taking many years to complete a PhD may have little, if any, beneficial aspects for both the institution and the student.

As far as the students were concerned not much was stated in the sense that the PhD was losing some of its more ambitious characteristics. Alongside their supervisors, the students showed a very pragmatic approach to the deadline and were very focussed on the deliverables of the PhD.

This focus on the product of the PhD rather than the process, the learning that the intellectual journey allowed, is being discouraged, discouraged both inside and outside academia. Outside academia there are policy and economic factors that have pressured higher education institutions to adapt their doctoral practices and making them more accountable for students' progress. The concern with economically viable research (independently of what this may possibly mean) is reflected on the focus and prioritisation of research outcomes. The aim of research degrees appears to be the preparation of effective researchers and little space, if any, is being given to those who want to break the mould.

As for my own experience I feel that I have had no pressures in terms of completion, even if at times I would rather have had some. I feel that it was very much in the mind of my supervisor that I should explore different avenues and never rush. That I should make this PhD to be an opportunity to find my own academic voice and my academic path. And from the beginning I never felt that my research ambitions were being put in a secondary position. If anything, at times I felt I should reign myself in and be pragmatic, and consider this PhD to be part, and just a part, of a longer term project. As I was reaching the conclusion of my thesis however, I felt that more than anything I was thinking in a very different way. I had indeed gained a voice. I had become a more independent thinker and a more critical one. This I believe was a consequence of my doctoral experience but also of being a lecturer elsewhere. In the process of writing the thesis, as well as in the process of teaching, my confidence in my voice grew.

My PhD has indeed been a considerable intellectual journey. One that involved getting back into academia and to an academic way of writing, that of finding a voice, to develop a more sophisticated critical and analytical approach to my own thinking and my findings. I think, however, that the students I interviewed would think the same about their own experiences. They, like me, are in a different place intellectually and the distance of the journey is not physically or intellectually measurable. The important point here is that of the individuality and uniqueness of the PhD experience. And that trying to structure and streamline it will have an impact on the process AND on the final product.

7.5.2. Programme structure and research training

A strong point arising from the interviews was that, despite the loss of the space to enjoy doing research, the 3-4 years deadline was ultimately a good thing, and that not having students taking too long would be advantageous for both the students and the departments. There appeared to be very little contestation of this. What was more problematic though was how the research training was viewed by both cohorts.

Even if some supervisors stated that the university provided good training for its students, the overall sense is that it was a waste of time and that they would rather have their students focus on their specific research rather than on more general research training. This was mirrored by the students who showed a lack of engagement with the research training opportunities offered to them. What is more is that the research training component was seen as unimportant for students who were not funded by a UK research council since the department did not need to prove they were providing training for them. And these students were happy not to do the training.

In a Roberts Report era training, especially in transferable skills, is seen as fundamental for PhD students. However, both supervisors and students appear not to have bought into this. A reasonable amount of funding is allocated to these activities yet they do not seem to be responding to the needs of the population they should be catering for. And catering appears to be an appropriate metaphor. The University as a service provider has clients (the students) and staff. The students

come in with a particular service in mind, the university is increasingly seen as having to provide a particular service which needs to be seen to be an added value.

8. PhD: What value?

> I think that the role of the PhD has changed in the context of the changing nature of the academic world, the changing nature of the job market and so on … I got my first job without having my doctorate and although I started and abandoned three projects before I chose the one I wanted, I took my PhD to be the work towards an intellectual framing for myself, and that my doctorate thesis was going to be my first great book. But now I think that that is an unrealistic model for almost everybody. And the idea of a thesis of a grand intellectual journey is probably not viable these days.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (OS)]

8.1. Introduction

The quote above reflects some of the issues now at stake in the debate over the changes introduced to PhD programmes in the UK. There is a widespread understanding that the doctoral degree needs to change in a changing world and consequent changing academia. The changes expressed by this supervisor are the need to have a doctoral degree to go into an academic career, but also that the PhD itself has changed and is still changing. There are other important elements that play a crucial role namely the research councils and other public bodies. But it is often the case (HEFCE 2005, Park 2007) that the discussion surrounding the developments and changes (needed) in PhD programmes give priority to funding bodies and general policy changes. This in spite of the fact that the two parties that are actually in the field producing the thesis are the supervisors and, most importantly, the student whom responsibility it is to do the research and write up the thesis.

8.2. The changing PhD programme

In previous chapters we have looked in-depth at what has changed in doctoral programmes. I refer to them in the following two sub-sections in order to contextualise the argument.

> It is unreasonable to impose the same standards on somebody who has done it in three years or somebody who has done it in six years.
>
> [PhD supervisor (KI)]

> I think four years is a good thing. As long as we understand that that means that what you expect after four years is four years good work.
>
> [PhD supervisor (SC)]

8.2.1. Timeline and completion rates

Departments are very concerned with their completion rates and the impact of punitive action from research councils may have if rates are not kept. As such, the demands over PhD outcomes have changed. To complete a piece of research in 3-4 years, and to plan such a research, imposes a new approach to doctoral research. "Good intellectual project is always a time consuming thing" (PhD supervisor) and it should be this way that research is planned: first the research then the timeline. However, if the timeline is prioritised over the research, it is as if the research process is inverted and that students and supervisors have to think about the outcomes of the research before they started the research itself: "we are asking people to actually have the end of the narrative and then they fill it in with case studies" (PhD supervisor). The inversion of the research process itself will have an impact on knowledge production and achievement.

8.2.2. Training requirements

> It is quite important to get on with your thesis and then pick up skills as and when you need them, rather than spend a year focusing on training.
> [PhD supervisor (QI)]

> They do have training needs. Sometimes it feels a bit artificial, when you have to fill in the funding form. And you think – shit! Got to say something here. And actually they don't have any. But you think – I had better put down a qualitative software package, but you know they are not really going to use that. Sometimes it feels very artificial, and you feel you are jumping through hoops.
> [PhD supervisor (QI)]

Following the publication of the Roberts Report a whole range of transferable skills training has been introduced. Students are expected to attend various training events and some universities even demand that students do a certain number of transferable skills training credits in order to proceed to the following year. Even though it is valuable that students are being trained in a variety of skills what has happened is that this is happening in a ticking the box kind of way rather than taking an holistic approach where students and supervisors reflect on the long term rather than on the very short term.

8.3. Changes to doctoral degrees

> Contemplation, the exercise of curiosity, and consideration of the purposes of higher education are often seen as luxuries that can no longer be afforded in the business that now characterizes higher education.
> (Rowland 2006:1)

'So what is a PhD now? It is something that is original, it has to be original, but if you like, it is bounded originality. You read as much secondary material as you need to …you do the theory. That is the easy bit. But your general background reading, at least initially, is now going to be narrower. And you also do, if you like, less coverage of the original sources. You can't be expected to have investigated all the materials which you have looked at, but what you need, on the balance of probability, is to have looked at a good range of sources that will give you the different perspectives.

[PhD supervisor (ET)]

These two quotes convey the idea that changes happening in higher education also bring a sense of loss. Loss of freedom to think and of loss of a certain intellectual space. However it is sometimes not clear what has really changed when we look at the outcome of the degree itself: the thesis. Some other changes are clearer, like the inclusion of a research training component, a focus on transferable skills and a tighter deadline for completion. The PhD has become a more structured programme and hurdles such as end of year reports and mini-upgrades have been introduced. These changes are, somewhat, external to the thesis itself and their materiality makes them clearly visible. In terms of the doctoral thesis itself, changes are less clear. Students in the departments studied are producing pieces of work and research to prepare them to go into an academic career, as their predecessors did. As a supervisor put it: "most of my students at the moment, most of them clearly have a vocation for a university based job".

Previous studies have confirmed that the career of choice for a majority of doctoral candidates has traditionally and consistently been in academia (Eggleston and Delamont 1983, Rudd and Hatch 1968, Rudd 1985). Booth and Satchel (1995)

concluded that the main destinations for doctoral graduates in British universities are universities and research and development. The data collected for this study confirms that students are not being prepared by their supervisors to develop research to take jobs in industry but in universities as lecturers and/or researchers. This has been one of the main contradictions this study has found. On the one hand there are external pressures to make doctoral programmes more market-oriented (labour market outside academia) and, on the other, supervisors are still preparing students for an academic career, not the least because this was what they experienced themselves as PhD students. The following quote expresses how the supervisory process still focuses on the academic career:

> The profession has become much more a profession. And the PhD students… will tend to want to go on to academia. And they have to think about how to go about finding a job before they finish their PhD.
>
> [PhD supervisor (SC)]

If, on the one hand, changes in doctoral programmes were being externally driven to comply with the labour market pressures referred to above, on the other, what the supervisors and the examiners are expecting is a piece of research, and also importantly a piece of writing, that is clearly a preparation to become an academic. This echoes the findings of a previous study (Hockey 1995) which concluded that supervisors were in doubt over whether examiners changed their expectations in relation to the PhDs since an earlier introduction of changes in the doctoral programme. And this was also a concern for some of the supervisors interviewed for the present study. They believe that examiners are not prepared to lessen their expectations especially when they are examining theses of students coming from research-intensive universities. Supervisors have shown a degree of commitment

to adapt to the new rules and practices, what Hockey (1995) views as pragmatism and calls 'the art of the possible' despite an existing sense of creative loss. Examiners, however, appear to be still far from changing their expectations in terms of what a PhD is, change deemed necessary by the supervisors to respond to the changes that have been introduced in the doctoral programme.

Are students working for a career in academia in the same way their supervisors are preparing them for one? The short answer is: yes. The majority of students expressed a clear will to become academics, and those who did not still saw it as a main contender for their career of choice. When everyone around you has a similar objective there is certainly some kind of peer-pressure at work. For the supervisors too, the PhD's main *raison d'être* is preparing students for an academic career. As the following quote demonstrates, supervisors often think that failure in the PhD could only impact negatively on an academic career and do not show awareness for negative consequences elsewhere.

> In a way his situation is easier to deal with because he doesn't want to be an academic, so if he doesn't get a PhD it doesn't ruin his professional aspirations.
>
> [PhD supervisor (ET)]

It is increasingly unlikely that one can get into the academic career ladder without a PhD degree. However, in the view expressed in the quote above is the absence of three essential things. Firstly, the view that the PhD is valuable in itself – so success in it is an important thing in itself, without any instrumentality attached to it. The PhD as a piece of research that aims at furthering the frontiers of knowledge, as creating new knowledge, should not be dismissed as such whether

the PhD graduate goes into academia or not. Universities describe their PhD programmes as opportunities to make 'a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject' (University of London), 'a significant contribution to learning' (University of Cambridge), 'an original contribution to knowledge' (LSE 2005) and 'a significant and substantial piece of research' (University of Oxford) which all point to the importance and value of the research project and outcomes as such.

Secondly, the sensitivity to understand that, for an employer, the fact that someone spent some years working in a project that was unsuccessful does not seem to be something to be proud of in a job interview. This is not to say that some employers do not value scholarly values but may rather focus on the fact that the student has not completed, or failed, their PhD.

Finally, the negative impact a failure can have at the personal level, especially in an institution where students and supervisors alike do not seem to deal well with failure of any kind, all being or having been highly successful, respectively, in their studies and in their career. In cases where students expressed the concern about the limited amount of academic jobs available to them, they notwithstanding believed that *they* would be able to get into the academic ladder. Moreover, some of the students interviewed stated they could not envisage not finishing their PhD because it would constitute some sort of failure in their life which they think they would not be able to overcome.

On the side of the supervisors, they are accomplished academics who had often studied at top universities in the UK and Europe and are now members of the

faculty of one of the most prestigious universities in the world, thus very successful in their careers.

What *appears* to have changed, according to the supervisors interviewed, is the scope and depth of their work. But the reasons why this is the case appear to show something less definitive. Supervisors stated that the 'new' PhDs they are supervising have to be less ambitious than what PhDs used to be because students are now spending more time in training and are constrained by a four-year deadline. However, the vast majority of faculty interviewed did spend three or four years on their PhD so it looks that the time argument as the reason for a *lesser* dissertation does not seem to hold: both cohorts seem to spend similar amounts of time on their PhDs. But important also is the notion that 'time constraints can be productive' as one supervisor lucidly put it. Another stated 'the more time you spend does not necessarily mean the best PhD'. More, supervisors said they spent considerable amounts of time in parallel issues to their own thesis which was enriching intellectually but would many times not be of any use to their own research. As one put it:

> On the other hand I also feel there were certain things I did in my PhD which my students don't have the freedom to do. I spent six months exploring certain [thread] of Marxist theory within my PhD. Which ended up with one footnote OK? And in some ways that just sums up the lunacy of the way we used to do PhDs.
>
> [PhD supervisor (ET)]

Now it is said students cannot afford to do this. The time students spend on research training could, however, be seen as equivalent, or even less, than the time their supervisors spent on 'tangential' issues. This suggests that the time argument

as a reason for a lesser piece of research in the part of the current students might well not stand. But it is definitely a pressure the students are feeling, as the quote below demonstrates.

> I think it's fairly clear that the indications come from, I guess in terms of time management they've been, I think, more regimented than historically perhaps. You certainly get that sense from people alluding to it or commenting to it … – I think more than anything they've put out a bit of an impetus to get things going … I guess it's expediated things … they keep the deadlines moving relatively quickly.
>
> [PhD student (BN)]

It was common to hear from the supervisors interviewed that theses now were narrower in scope and in breadth and were thus different from what they had done when they were PhD students. I suggest that the purpose of a verbalised perceived difference is one that is self-serving. It creates a hierarchy of achievement that could belittle newcomers' intellectual achievements and experience. This embedded common perception on the part of the supervisors, this *esprit de corps* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1985, Bourdieu 1989), crystallises their own sense of self-worth. Some of the supervisors interviewed talk of their doctoral students as colleagues. One supervisor stated that his 'let-out is – it is your PhD. This is how I see it. By year three the student is the expert. Bound to be'. My overall conclusion is that this does not do more than cover their own sense of greater achievement, as is clear from this statement from the same supervisor who also said, talking about balance within the student-supervisor relationship: 'no relationship is an equal relationship'.

Overall, what in fact appears to have changed, on the basis of the data collected, is that the main differences introduced in the doctoral degree are: an imposed deadline; 'the fetish of the four or five years' as one supervisor put it; a more structured PhD programme including research and transferable skills training; more accountability, both on the side of the students and the supervisors (including several hurdles throughout the process like upgrades, exams, end-of-year reports and others); less time to diverge through means of a tighter supervision (to avoid *wastes of time*); team or joint supervision and an increased pressure to publish. Supervision nowadays is growing increasingly away from the '"secret garden" model in which student and supervisor worked closely together without a great deal of external scrutiny or accountability' (Park, 2007:28-9). These changes, however, were not all implemented in the nine departments researched. The way joint or team supervision was implemented varies greatly. In some departments students have a main supervisor and a second supervisor, where the former is responsible for the whole of the supervisory process and the latter is only responsible for reading and advising on the upgrade paper. In other departments, supervision may initially be shared but at later stages of the PhD it becomes the whole responsibility of one supervisor. The number of times supervisors are expected to meet their students in a term or academic year varies widely. Also, the training made available to students is sometimes chosen by students and other times imposed on them, which suggest that at times training is in certain departments taken as an ad-hoc arrangement. Pressure to publish, on the other hand, varies within disciplines and on the kind of final thesis the students are producing, whether a monograph or a series of (previously published) articles brought together in a whole piece.

8.4. PhD and employment

It is becoming increasingly common in the departments studied that, before applying, prospective PhD students are asked to send a very detailed research proposal as a way to help detect students who might not have the skills to undergo a PhD course and complete within the timeframe expected. Moreover, some departments demand that their PhD candidates have undergone the departmental masters course. In some of the units, the MRes is becoming increasingly popular and has the added bonus of allowing students who end up not succeeding on their PhD to have some kind of degree out of their experience.

> It would be quite nice to have the reverse situation, where if they started on their PhD, but you felt, if you had evidence, that they weren't quite going to make it, it would be nice if you could send them back to just a Masters programme, rather than an MPhil. Because the problem with an MPhil is you have still got to do quite a lot of work. And then they would have some sort of formal qualification instead of losing a year of their life. Because I am very conscious of that, but on the other hand, the problem is, if you take people on, you allow people to stay and when you have concerns about them, the chances are they might be here for six to seven years, as opposed to one. So harsh decision to take, but it could be being more unkind to them. But it would be nice if they could go away with something. And the MPhil, at the moment, is too much.
>
> [PhD supervisor (EQ)]

This quote shows a focus on the student which sometimes seems to be missing from institutional rules and practices, more geared towards *protecting* the department from unsuccessful students. What appears to be missing are actions to prepare and protect the prospective students themselves. Firstly, the majority of doctoral graduates are not able to go into academia for lack of positions available. There are far too many doctoral graduates for the places available in universities (academic positions and others) (UKGrad 2004, Purcell et al 2008) and these are

many times taken up by students from the elite universities. But even for the latter the situation is worrying with many graduates staying outside academia. This means that fifty percent did not get into a university position. It is not possible to know if these fifty percent tried to get an academic position. However, considering that the majority of PhD students envisage a career in academic, it appears likely that even for graduates from top universities it is difficult to go into academia. For the other UK institutions the numbers are even more worrying if an academic career is the main reason to undergo a doctoral degree.

According to UK Grad (2004 mentioned in Park 2007) one third of doctoral students in the UK pursue academic careers while the remaining seventy-five percent are employed in the government, corporate and non-for-profit sectors. Secondly, and as one of the students interviewed suggested, there could be some kind of preparation and information at masters level so that students can know what they would be likely to encounter at doctoral level. It is clear from the data collected that a majority of students interviewed (60%) had no idea what to expect when they started their PhD. As a sixth year female student put it: 'everything came as a complete shock'. Equally it would be important to inform and prepare students for the responsibilities and various facets of a career in academia since, as pointed out above, many note the lack of understanding of what is involved in an academic career.

Against these arguments it could be said that the labour market in almost all sectors is very competitive and that many graduates stay out of their career of choice. However, a PhD involves a great deal of personal, time and financial

investment. This puts PhD graduates in a different position when compared to their undergraduate counterparts, especially when they compete, as they often do, for the same positions in the labour market outside academia. This is not always the case for research positions in industry – especially in the sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, among others) who often find jobs in research and development in private companies such as pharmaceutical and chemical industries– but this thesis focuses on social sciences PhDs. And for the latter, labour market does not appear to be prepared to embrace the specificities of PhD graduates' skills. So, if on the one hand we are aiming at preparing students for industry jobs it remains unclear whether industry is prepared for them.

8.5. State of Play

The previous two sections focused on some of the changes being introduced in higher education in Britain, especially in what concerns the doctoral degree. Important trends were found: the external pressures of the research councils are shaping the development of new, and restructuring of existing, doctoral degrees sometimes without listening to both supervisors and students. This has created some kind of resistance that is shown by the ad-hoc adaptation of rules, leaving still some space of manoeuvre to departments and supervisors. Maybe this is a positive outcome. However it can provide very different doctoral experiences for doctoral students studying in different, or even the same, departments within the same institutions. The main thing to have in mind though is to understand that changes are still in the making and there are still some to be put in place.

Another concern that is apparent in the interviews is that students need to be more aware and prepared for the labour market, considering the limited number of vacancies in academia. Students, who are still, maybe worryingly, very much oriented towards an academic career, need to be told that it is highly likely they will not get a job in academia and thus ponder over whether a PhD is what they really want, and need, to do. The institutions, too, need to take responsibility over this issue and, despite their *need* for doctoral students, should provide full information to prospective and existing PhD students about the limited amount of positions available in academia at the same time as preparing them for a career either in academia or outside it.

It is clear that doctoral programmes have changed. This begs the question of what are the funding bodies, namely the research councils, looking for in terms of doctoral graduates. In shifting the PhD experience, and the PhD programmes, there certainly has to be a shift in what the PhD is. The following section will address whether the doctoral degrees in the departments studied have changed the focus of their PhDs from its intrinsic value to its extrinsic value.

8.6. The PhD: intrinsic value or extrinsic value?

> We are living under the power of rationality and production
> (Marcuse 1968:168)

The quote above expresses Marcuse's awareness and critique of contemporary society. He blames it for not giving space to nor value the role of 'high culture'.

Modern society is one of mass-culture and at the same time one of lack of liberty. Intellectuals, or in Julien Benda's (1927) words the clerks, have betrayed their function to "defend the eternal and disinterested values of reason" and now favour "a celebration of practical interests" (Engel 2007:3). In academia the change of focus from the 'disinterested values of reason' to 'practical interests' has had an impact at various levels. From the 'widening participation' mantra to the structuring of assessment the university has had to change, and adapt, to an audit society that revels in individuals' and institutions' compliance. Doctoral programmes have also had to change and adapt as we have seen in the previous section of this thesis. In the current section however, we will consider how the new prevailing ethos impacts on the doctoral research experience and on the final thesis as viewed and perceived by the supervisors.

I would like to introduce here two concepts to serve as a guide in the analysis of the data: those of intrinsic value and of extrinsic value of the PhD. Intrinsic value will be understood to be the value the PhD has 'in itself' whereas extrinsic value is to be understood as that which values the PhD "for the sake of something else". The traditional view of the PhD is one that prioritises the creation of new knowledge and universities include knowledge creation as a main element of their doctoral programmes (e.g. Cambridge, LSE, UCL). It is also a preparation for an academic career in the sense that doctoral programmes are expected to prepare students to do research and to make it public: theorise a problem, review the literature, collect data, analyse and write up the thesis. These elements, whether conjointly or separately, pertain to the view that the PhD has an intrinsic value.

The university thus shows a commitment to creation of knowledge and academic and research training.

Another view, increasingly present in the literature and in doctoral practice (Park 2007), is that the PhD should be mainly a preparation for a career, whether or not in academia. This change of perspective has brought about a new priority: skills. These skills are described by the Joint Statement on Skills (RCUK 2001) and universities now provide a wide array of training for the doctoral students in so-called transferable skills. The 1993 Government report *Realise your Potential* and the 2002 Roberts report both consider that the PhD should be more oriented towards the needs of the market. I would like to point out an important element that differentiates both valuations of the doctorate. I mentioned above that the view of the doctorate as a preparation for an academic career reflected the value of the PhD as intrinsic. Now I am saying that a different view of the PhD as a preparation for a career is a change of perspective and has an overall change of focus.

At this stage a clarification is needed in order to understand the differences between the two. In a framework where the PhD is part of the preparation for an academic career, and here being 'part of' is of elemental importance, the fundamentals of the doctoral experience are the creation of new knowledge as well as experiencing the ropes of the academic job. The second view, where the onus is on the marketization of the doctoral degree, provides the ground for a doctorate which has measurable outcomes, *vide* transferable skills prominence. In a sense, it sees the PhD with an extrinsic value: it is no longer the creation of knowledge that

is at the forefront but a more pragmatic approach to the degree where employability is of the highest importance.

The literature on doctoral degrees is populated with comparisons between two types of PhDs, and they somehow reflect two views on the PhD: the *old* PhD and the *new* PhD. And they express the opinion that as academia has changed it has lost some of its historical value and function. Hence, there is the argument that the *old* PhDs belong to an era of high intellectual achievement whereas the *new* era is one of lower expectations and standards. One of the most current typologies is the classification of PhD as process and PhD as product (Young et al 1987). The former values the educational and research value of the PhD *per se* whereas the latter focus on the deliverables. I do not find this distinction as totally satisfactory for it conveys a simplistic approach to the PhD programme. Both paths suggested, - one privileging the intrinsic value, the other the extrinsic value of the PhD - affect the PhD process as well and the PhD product. One other classification of the PhD is that of an apprenticeship seen usually as pertaining to an *old* model of PhD. Again here I do not think it totally encapsulates the doctoral experience since it is more of an idealistic view of a PhD rather than something that could be seen in practice. Traditionally, and especially in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, the student was usually left to their own devices so I do not see much space for the student modelling themselves on their supervisors. Maybe it was a more realistic description for the sciences PhD model, where students work closely to their supervisors, but it fails to describe what the PhD experience in the Social Sciences has historically been.

In the following section I will be looking at how the creation of new knowledge, a fundamental characteristic of doctoral programmes, is now being perceived in the case study. The changes mentioned in section 2 of this chapter have had an impact on the changes referred to below. In imposing tighter deadlines, by including various hurdles in the programme, and by imposing research and skills training, doctoral programmes have had to re-assess their conception of doctoral research and doctoral achievement. Students have now less time to focus solely on their research: skills training often takes a considerable amount of time, especially in their first year.

8.6.1. Topic and scope

> We can't talk about the intellectual stuff because we need to do these pragmatic, practical things. Because the deadlines are much more severe now, and our department has to meet these deadlines.
>
> [PhD supervisor (SC)]

This quote is a reflection of what the supervisors interviewed stated. In order to comply with completion rates supervisors are avoiding demanding topics or topics deemed too original. Moreover, the supervisor's role is increasingly one of imposition and control rather than of guidance. As one supervisor clearly put it he is looking for people that "do what you say, follow your advice, that is one thing I want from doctoral students".

According to some supervisors little space is now allowed for creativity and widening knowledge. Specialization and narrowing of ambition for the doctoral

research have taken place. Intellectual production at PhD level is to deliver 'some originality' and be a certificate of research ability. Or as a supervisor put it: "It is an idea. The thesis is one idea. More than that it is too many". However, as McAlpine et al (2009) has shown, PhD programmes are not delivering that either. She has demonstrated that new academics, who have recently completed their PhD, are sometimes perceived as not being prepared for an academic career.

8.7. Conclusion: PhD and original contribution to knowledge

Doctoral degrees are shifting from a focus on valuing the intrinsic value of the PhD to valuing its extrinsic value. The creation of new knowledge is being undermined by compliance with regulations. If the value of a degree is no longer what the degree entails but rather what that degree should be seen to represent, then universities are emptying the traditional and historical purpose of the PhD. According to Fuller "the more that credentials are required for employment, the less the knowledge content associated with obtaining those credentials matters to prospective employment" (2009:10). This being the case, what can we expect from academia for the future and what kind of intellectuals do we want?

There does not appear to be a clear answer to this. However, government policies, funding and what the supervisors have said appear to show that we are heading for a university that prepares efficient researchers. An efficient researcher is narrowly focussed, pragmatic in their approach to problematizing issues, and in producing outputs quickly. It is unlikely, contrary to what supervisors stated in their interviews, that the big research will come after the PhD. With increasing administrative and publishing demands put on academics the time is limited for

ground-breaking work. Moreover, if the students are not expected and trained to produce ambitious and novel projects, how can it be expected that when they become academics they will embrace greater research ambitions? This question will be addressed in the following chapter.

Since these practices are quite new to Social Sciences doctoral programmes we have yet to see what the results will be. What we can be certain though is that applying the sciences doctoral model to the Social Sciences and the Humanities is problematic. Research processes vary greatly in different disciplines. Maybe, after the antithesis we are experiencing – a focus on the credential *per* se - a synthesis will come that re-values the intrinsic value of the PhD.

9. PhD: an original contribution to knowledge?

> The university … no longer participates in the historical project for humanity that was the legacy of the Enlightenment: the historical project of culture.
>
> (Readings 1996:5)

> One untoward effect of the outside pressures for speedy completion of the doctorate was said to be the tendency for departments to play safe by avoiding, where possible, the applicants with an unorthodox approach or an unconventional topic. Such applicants tended to be seen as high-risk, in that they could prove unduly demanding on supervisors' time and were liable to find it difficult to bring their research to a rapid and satisfactory conclusion.
>
> (Becher, Henkel and Kogan 1994:97)

> In recent times it seems that 'stratospherically intelligent semi-crazies' have been made less welcome in academia as speculative and risky projects have been shunned and the safe and compliant recruited, the 'moderately intelligent dullards'.
>
> (Mroz 2009:5)

9.1. Is the University turning its back on the University?

Mroz' quote illustrates some of the feelings expressed in the literature and also by the academics interviewed about the state of British academia. Evans (2004), Conrad (1993) and Furedi (2004) amongst others have expressed their concern with the pressures that universities are subjected to by being dependent on state funds. "The principle of academic self-government… was meant to protect academic work from distortions of governmental control" (Levine 2000) but the reality is that government intervention in the running of universities is increasing. Funding is increasingly dependent on deliverables such as implications and benefits for the public of such and such research project. Less consideration is

being given to projects which do not seem to deliver quantifiable outputs that are not deemed as of immediate benefit to the wider society. In the case of American universities, and according to Kirp (2000) "While the public has been napping, the American university has been busily reinventing itself. In barely a generation, the familiar ethic of scholarship - baldly put, that the central mission of universities is to advance and transmit knowledge - has been largely ousted by the just-in-time, immediate-gratification values of the marketplace... Gone… is any commitment to maintaining a community of scholars, an intellectual city on a hill free to engage critically with the conventional wisdom of the day" (Kirp 2000 quoted in Levine 2000). Kirp's quote is equally valid for British universities.

Academia and university managers have slowly been surrendering to the pressures of state funding, especially the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the research councils. The Social Sciences and the Humanities have suffered considerably from this policy frame and they received a considerable blow in the last Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008. The RAE is HEFCE's tool for assessing departments' research quality outputs and is used to allocate research funding to universities. In the latest exercise, the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) saw their overall funding increased whereas the Social Sciences, the Arts and the Humanities saw a decline in the funding they will receive in relation to the funding allocated in the previous RAE in 2001. HEFCE stated they were "protecting the position of science subjects" (HEFCE 2009). It was not that the sciences were rated higher than the Social Sciences and the Humanities but rather that despite the latter results

increased funding was attributed to the sciences in detriment of no-sciences subjects.

The reduced funding attributed to certain subjects is just one in a string of decisions that illustrate an economistic approach to knowledge production and to academia. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake appears to be increasingly shunned by policies that privilege a market-oriented approach with a distinctively utilitarian and pragmatic flavour. Currently it seems that "the search for knowledge as an end in itself is seen to be no longer justifiable" (Rowland 2006:2). Universities, victims of "anti-educational forces" (id.:3), are now seen (and forced to be) one of the partners in a market economy. This is "a new model which makes much more explicit the economic role of the universities" (Evans 2004:19). Their value is calculated by taking into account links with businesses, by numbers of students, numbers of articles published, funding gained and other such quantifiable outputs.

Barnett (1994) discusses the issue of competence in higher education in the UK. And notes that the concept *per se* needs not be problematic. He distinguishes between two types of competence: one which is an "*academic* form of competence" and the other "now being pressed robustly – is an *operational* conception of competence, essentially reproducing wider societal interest in performance, especially performance likely to enhance the economic performance of UK Inc." (Barnett 1994:159). The problem with the "competence" discourse arises according to Barnett when the following occurs: when competence is "construed over-narrowly" and/or it has become the main aim of higher education

obfuscating others. This focus on competence currently in fashion goes beyond the learning and teaching element and has pervaded all elements of university life.

Competence and managerialism go hand in hand. Universities and funding bodies need to demonstrate their investment is of (short-term) benefit to wider society. "The economy needs skills and it is the function of higher education to provide them" (Barnett 1994: 55). Within a managerialist approach the university will therefore focus its attention in delivering those skills. To be sure they are delivered (if ever it would be possible to be sure of this) regulations, forms, and clear pathways are put in place. In undergraduate courses and taught postgraduate courses these are clearly visible through exams, essays and presentations that students are expected to deliver and hand in. At postgraduate level the compliance models put in place are of a slightly different nature as we have seen elsewhere in this thesis.

Martin Rees, president of the Royal Society between 2005 and 2010, confirmed the importance of the sciences and their role in the improvement of a country's international competitive standing in a recent article in The Guardian newspaper (Rees 2009). For such he argues for an increase in investment in the science subjects and in furthering links between them and business. Moreover, he believes that in order to get out of the current economic situation it is imperative that investment be made in the STEM subjects. This is one of the many voices that state that progress, knowledge and skills are intimately related to the development and quality of the disciplines in the sciences forgetting that the Social Sciences play an important role in the understanding of society and in the creation and

diffusion of knowledge. Importantly, the Social Sciences do contribute to the implementation and application of scientific research. In a complex world disciplines should be seen to complement each other rather than being perceived as pertaining to different realms. As Rowland puts it "providing water in an undeveloped region, for example, requires sociological and ecological knowledge and probably political and botanical knowledge, as well as engineering" (2006:23).

Knowledge creation would better be conceived as a continuum where different disciplines contribute to human progress rather than be seen as the sum of discreet variables, the latter representing the different disciplinary contributions. But the importance of STEM subjects is further reaching. They are increasingly influential in the way research is conceived. As we will see below, the prevalent practices in research in the sciences are being imposed to the Social Sciences as well. It is, however, a model that, at best, fits uncomfortably with research in disciplines in the Social Sciences. There is a decreasing policy and funding awareness that not all knowledge is reached in similar ways. Research questions can vary from being very focussed to being abstract and philosophical and should not always be the search for "immediate solutions to practical problems" (Rowland 2006:2).

In adopting the sciences approach to knowledge creation funding bodies are forgetting the way disciplines have progressed and even the nature of disciplinary discipline by which I mean the process(es) and framework(s) in which each subject has traditionally laboured in. As one supervisor worryingly put it: "We are now moving, in political science, we are now really in normal science, the trouble is the doctorate, traditionally, has been seen as this great work, the student comes

in and writes something completely original, and they can take years and years to do it. And no - we need them submitting in three or four years" [PhD Supervisor (LE)]. Kuhn described this approach to knowledge production. In the Social Sciences it is not without its problems especially because, if taken to the extreme, the rules of scientific rationality cannot "not account for the creative side of science—the generation of new hypotheses" (SEP 2011). This supervisor is thus defending a PhD that foregoes creativity, originality and innovation.

In denying specific disciplinary traditions research councils, and increasingly academics, may be denying some subjects their *raison d'être*. Are they unwillingly redefining disciplinary boundaries and scope? Disciplines share "premises in the choice of research topics, the style of scholarly enquiry" (Wallerstein 2004:28) and embrace "a tradition, a particular set of values and beliefs, a domain, a mode of enquiry, and a conceptual structure" (King and Brownell 1966 in Becher 1989:20) and these appear to be missing in the research councils impositions to doctoral programmes, but also in the way funding applications are working for research grants submitted by academics. A big focus on deliverables and on the immediacy of making research results be shown to be of practical benefit to society is also changing the way research is conceived in later stages of academic research, distracting researchers from research and flooding the research process with managerial and auditing concerns and rules. That research funding should not go unaccounted for and that funding should be controlled and managed is not being disputed here. The issues of concern here are in relation to the way managerialism, accountability, output-driven regulations may affect research quality and scope. And that the pervasive nature of an audit culture impacts on research quality and

output at various levels of academia, and not only at PhD level. Bourdieu's (1989) view of the university as a "kind of knowledge production that was secured by the national state and isolated from the immediacy of economic imperatives" (Delanty 2001a: 101) has little or no room in the current economic and political context.

At present university programmes have to specify learning outcomes, assessment is stringently regulated and a managerial ethos prevails in academia. Once the reserve of a selected few, the PhD has now also become a focus of this regulation-centred approach. No degree in universities has been left to its own devices and so a variety of new impositions and rules populate the PhD path. The Roberts Report (HM Treasury 2002) has become very influential in all things doctoral. The initial aim of this report was to analyse science doctoral programmes and the skills of PhD graduates. It concluded that there was a mismatch between the skills of doctoral graduates and those employers were looking for. It proposed a transferable skills drive for doctoral programmes. This report had a considerable political impact in universities and PhD programmes. It is important to note that, as said elsewhere, this report focussed on the skills of PhD graduates in the STEM subjects.

It is thus curious to note that its impacts were felt all across the disciplines, even those which were not part of the scope of the report. One can only conclude that an assumption was made towards the skills the PhD graduates in the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts had when they completed their PhD. Interestingly, and considering that fundamentally PhDs in these disciplines and those in the STEM subjects have very little in common, a blanket skills training policy was

implemented despite that difference. Moreover, employers of STEM subjects graduates are likely to be not the same as the employers of the Social Sciences graduates, so a study of the skills that employers of the latter should have also taken place either as part of the Roberts study or in parallel. It is likely that PhD graduates in the Social Sciences need some training in transferrable skills, or at the very least an awareness of the skills they may need in their future career. But also likely is that there are other (sets of) skills that may be more appropriate to them than those arising from the Roberts Report.

Mc Alpine et al (2007) have demonstrated that Social Sciences PhD graduates are not perceived to be prepared for a career in academia which is an issue of particular concern since in the Social Sciences the percentage of PhDs who pursue an academic career is higher than in the STEM subject. One more reason to ponder whether the transferable skills agenda and programmes, especially in the way they were conceived, departing from the STEM point of view, should not be re-evaluated. The point here is that, again, the sciences model is taken for granted and henceforth applied across the board. Arising from its conclusions funding, commonly known as Roberts Money, was allocated to universities for the development and delivery of transferable skills programmes. Concomitantly UK research councils, the main PhD funders in the UK, set new rules for PhD programmes. In an efficiency-obsessed drive, they imposed a 3 to 4 year PhD deadline which departments have to abide by. The consequences for the non-compliance with this rule may be the withdrawal of scholarships for future PhD applicants to departments which fail to observe that rule (Conrad 1993:70).

These events have had a considerable impact on PhD programmes and on the PhD experience of both students and supervisors. My aim is to assess whether these policies have had an impact on the quality and depth of the doctoral research now being taken by students. More, it looks at what kind of knowledge can be expected to be created within this new framework.

Readings' (1996:5) strong statement alerts us for a change of direction for the University in the sense that it has changed its 'project'. A project that envisaged an institutional role in the development of culture and, inevitably, that of knowledge. There are innumerable signs that this is the case. Universities in the UK, as well as in Europe, are shifting their focus to a knowledge market that is assessed by number of students, number of publications, in short, by numbers. An academic is, too, assessed by numbers. As one of the supervisors interviewed clearly put it:

> I was lucky, when I did my PhD universities were not completely obsessed with the research assessment exercise yet. We finished in '97, so the situation was better than it is now. (…) I was able to do my PhD without worrying about publishing bits of it, whether the topic would be sexy enough for a job.
>
> [PhD Supervisor (DG)]

The key message here is that an academic, and increasingly PhD students, have to strategically consider the 'sexiness' of their topic, or how publishable it would be, when conducting their research projects.

> I took the view that the marginalization of intellectual passion in higher education was the unintended

consequence of a new ethos of managerialism that dominates intellectual and cultural life.

(Furedi 2004:2)

Universities are being forced to implement new regimes of management that more closely resemble businesses than the traditional sites of autonomous knowledge… Universities are increasingly forced to operate like businesses, competing with each other for students, the best professors and their share of the state's diminishing budget.

(Delanty 2001a: 106)

Both the supervisor's quote above as well as Furedi's and Delanty's words illustrate a university that has shifted. A shift that puts in a secondary position the role of intellectual creation. Rothblatt (1997) and Delanty (2001a) have extensively demonstrated how the university and academic departments are becoming administrative units rather than academic locations of research. Delanty refers to Dominelly and Hoogvelt (1996) and their description of new managerialism in the university as academic Taylorism. The features that are increasingly apparent are "the compartmentalization of tasks, full managerial control and systematic costing of each step of the process" (Delanty 2001a:107). Ultimately, the new academic managerialism is about the predictable control of flows, including knowledge flows, through the university.

As McDowell, many equate research career with "career profile of published research". Plus, knowledge is at times seen as transitory in the sense that to publish one has to be aware of the "durability of research knowledge" and problematize 'knowledge duration" and "knowledge obsolescence" (1982: 752-3). It is as if knowledge, if not constantly being published, is not valuable knowledge, or

considered knowledge at all. Readings' (1996) assertion that one of the pillars of creation of knowledge, the University, is foregoing its historical role has wide-ranging implications. If the university does not fulfil that role, then what is its role in the beginning of the twenty-first century? And if it has changed, what has indeed changed? And are we really losing something with a changing university?

It is important to look at the changes that have occurred in terms of knowledge creation occurring in the University. There are obviously other areas where changes have taken place. Internationalization of student markets, especially at undergraduate and masters levels, the Bologna Process aiming at standardizing university degrees across Europe, increased competition between higher education institutions to attract wider markets and widening participation agendas are some of new realities universities brace themselves with. In this chapter however, I would like to consider if the role of the University as knowledge creator and knowledge disseminator has shifted and I will do this by looking specifically at how knowledge, or 'new knowledge', is being conceived at PhD level. As I have discussed in another chapter, there has been a perceived shift in demands being made to doctoral students and their doctoral theses. The latter are increasingly said to be less far-ranging and less demanding then theses produced a decade or more ago.

In this chapter my aim is to contextualise this less ambitious and creative doctoral thesis with a view that universities have historically had a role in being at the forefront of innovation and knowledge creation. If the doctoral thesis is a lesser piece of knowledge production and creation, as Becher et al's quote above

suggests, this will certainly impact on society and knowledge development. Even if the focus of my research is on PhD theses in the Social Sciences, doctoral programmes in other subjects are also being changed and standardized therefore the issues and concerns expressed here are valid for other disciplines and for what the University stands, or aims to stand, for. The streamlining is occurring across all doctoral degree programmes and more stringent deadlines are not only to be applied to the Social Sciences and the Humanities. However, historically, deadlines have been worse in the latter and thus the restructuring of PhD programmes may affect these quite considerably. I will consider the following proposition arising from my interpretation of the interviews with supervisors: that departments and supervisors are censoring newcomers to academia in novel ways and with potentially very serious consequences to knowledge creation. Prior to that I will contextualise and discuss knowledge, its conceptions, and its (different) disciplinary practices.

9.2. Knowledge and the University

In this section I will be exploring some fundamental questions relating to knowledge production at the university. Firstly, I will argue that at present the social sciences are moving towards mid-range theories, or even to a postmodern view of the discipline, one which is local and contextual. Secondly, I will consider how knowledge production is being conceived by authors and academics. And finally, how knowledge production is impacting on the techno-economy.

9.2.1. Knowledge and meta-narratives

Bloor notes that Popper argues that "it is impossible (..) to predict future knowledge" (2005:178). This chapter is not an attempt to predict what future social knowledge will be. It is not about what new frontiers, new paradigms will be set. It is instead concerned with the scientific practices that will set the terrain within which knowledge production will take place. It posits that scientific practices greatly impact in scientific outcomes. It intends to question how the changes in these practices, as shown in previous chapters will affect scientific achievement. If, as Lal (2002) states, disciplines are seen to grow incrementally, then a politics of knowledge that compartmentalises, and separates, will thrive under this circumstances. In this context then, a social science which advocates smaller research projects that complement, or supplement, existing ones, will, therefore, flourish. More than creation and innovation, the onus seems to be that of replication.

Wright Mills defined Grand Theory as "seeking to construct a systematic theory of the nature of man and society" (Wright Mills 1959:23 quoted in Skinner 1985:3). Skinner states that Wright Mills saw this prevalence of Grand Theory as an impediment to the progress of human sciences. Wright Mills argued for the importance of "empirical theories" (Skinner 1985:4). Skinner argues that after a period of refusal for a Grand Theory approach to social sciences research, namely addressed by Wright Mills, human sciences, via the contributions of names such as Derrida, Feyerabend, and Gadamer, amongst others, are returning to privileging a non-positivist stance. They agree with Manheim in that anti-positivist position. For Manheim "positivism [is] an essentially deluded school (…) because it holds that

human knowledge can be complete without metaphysics and ontology" (Manheim 2005:16). Furthermore, "positivism's goal is to accumulate social knowledge by suppressing extra-logical factors that might influence the investigator, and by suppressing the extra-observational aspects of the context of explanation" (Reed 2010:24). With Gadamer, we came to understand that the one way of understanding social action is by interpreting a text. Little space then, if any, is left for Grand Theories and all-encompassing explanations of social action. The focus is thus transferred to "the local and the contingent" (Skinner 1985:12).

This view is strongly supported by Sousa Santos in his Um Discurso Sobre as Ciências (1987) where he acknowledges the need for a science that understands the contextual nature of scientific endeavour, and thus that of scientific *truth*. This is in line with the Enlightenment namely that in the social and human sciences there has been a move away from grand theory as teleological 'grand narrative' towards studies and analyses that are (a) not in the positivist tradition and (b) not the result of any necessary compliance with a general theory of socio-historical outcomes. Haldane (1997) and Griffin (1997) have both acknowledged the end of meta-narratives in an academic world more oriented to utilitarian knowledge (Griffin 1997) or to "convenient modes of [disciplinary and knowledge] organization" (Haldane 1997:56). Therefore, these local narratives, or *petits récits* to use Lyotard's expression (1984), "need no validation by meta-narrative. They are their own sufficient justification" (Blake 1997).

Thomas Kuhn (1996) showed that scientific communities, more than attempting a Popperian approach to science, one that is intent on falsification exercises, attempt

instead to seek confirmation of existing theories. Scientists resist refutation of general theories as they seek theoretically predicted parameters What they do, according to Kuhn, is avoid uncomfortable counter-evidence, hoping to explain it or explain it away later. Small research projects and small research ambitions appear then to be the order of the day in scientific endeavour. (There are obviously immense experiments under way like at the CERN accelerator in Switzerland as well as small experiments but often they do have to be interlinked in order to gain funding). Science, in a Kuhnian perspective, avoids defiance to prevailing research truths.

9.2.2. Knowledge production: the individual and the collective models

> Foucault defines authors as those figures to whom the production of a text or a book, or a work (including a discourse or line of research) can be legitimately attributed (…) this kind of authorship defines scientists.
>
> (Knorr Cetina 1999:6)

> The individual has been turned into an element of a much larger unit that functions as a collective epistemic subject.
>
> (Knorr Cetina 1999:168)

Knorr Cetina here is looking at the referencing and authorship practices for academic papers. However, this is far-reaching in terms of impact and research practices. Indivisibility, and authorship *vide* individuality and creativity, are being put aside or, at least, are out of common practices in science research. As Okely notes, though, the model that favours intellectuals working in groups is based in a laboratory method and is, hence, "irrelevant to much research in the humanities,

social sciences and even some sciences" (2006:2). This collective model, increasingly seen as the ideal model of scientific practice is transversal: it applies as much to senior academics as well as junior ones, including doctoral research students. It also de-responsabilises social scientists that participate as part of projects and not as fully responsible for individual, and complete, research projects. "Scientific education as we know it today has precisely this aim. It simplifies 'science' by simplifying its participants" (Feyerabend 2005:119).

9.2.3. Knowledge production and the techno-economy

Knorr Cetina denounces many authors who tend to see "knowledge as an intellectual or technological product" (1999:6). She suggests it should be seen as a "production context in its own right" (1999:6). She does suggests an emphasis on "the construction of the machineries of knowledge construction" (Knorr Cetina 1999:3). This comes to represent very appropriately what are the academic practices now prevalent at doctoral level.

> The history of science will be as complex, chaotic, full of mistakes , and entertaining as the ideas it contains, and these ideas in turn will be as complex, chaotic, full of mistakes, and entertaining as are the minds of those who invented them. Conversely, a little brainwashing will go a long way in making history of science duller, simpler, more uniform, more 'objective' and more easily accessible to treatment by strict and unchangeable rules.
>
> (Feyerabend 2005:119)

As discussed in the previous chapter, HEFCE came to the 'defence' of scientific subjects, the so called STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The rationale is that the *hard* sciences yield a bigger impact in the

economy and an increase in the those subjects is, it is argued, an investment in a better economy. However, a closer scrutiny of this statement will reveal that it is tenuous. There is literature that shows that the link between scientific discoveries and progress, and technical innovation by industry has not been proved. Langrish *et al* "paid particular attention to the relation of basic science to innovation". Their "failure to find more than a small handful of direct connection is the more striking for the fact that [they] set out deliberately to look for them" (Langrish *et al* quoted in Mulkay 2005). This is further supported by evidence from a study carried out under the sponsorship of the Materials Advisory Board of the U.S National Academy of Sciences which concluded that "in none of the cases studied could the innovation be seen as direct consequence of advances in basic science" (Mulkay 2005).

Mulkay, based on conclusions of eminent studies from Price (1965 and 1969), argues that science seems to accumulate mainly on the basis of past science, and technology primarily on the basis of past technology (2005:191-2). There has been an obvious attempt to "codify intellectual practice, so that it may be economical and rational, value for money" (Myerson 1997:144). The political and funding prioritization of the hard sciences in detriment of the social sciences and humanities strictly based in the supposedly bigger direct contribution of the former to national economy does not appear to stand. Ultimately, what is relevant for the university, or in the university (including new PhD programmes), becomes externally defined by the market, by events and by government policy rather then by the historical narrative and trajectory of individual disciplines.

9.3. Censorship?

> It appears that social influences can intrude into the actual intellectual content of science only when science has been distorted by non-scientific pressures
>
> (Mulkay 2005:185)

If academic disciplines discipline (Lal, 2002: 122) then academics are the face of such disciplining. Derrida (2004) considered the issue of censorship "as institution" and censorship "in the university, or at the limits of the university". In doing so he equated the following questions: "can reason be censored? Should it be?" (p.44). In recalling Kant, Derrida reminds us that at the end of eighteenth century Germany "official theologians authorized by the State (…) had the right and the power to determine what should or should not be censored" in the University (2004:44). In the University of the twenty-first century we do not have such institutionalised censorship. However, Derrida insists in the point that even if there is not, at present, a 'censorship commission' that would censor academics' research and publications, notwithstanding "it would nonetheless be naive to conclude from this that censorship disappeared" (id: 46). He goes on to suggest that there are topics and subjects that cannot be studied in certain universities or in certain departments.

The way in which this censorship happens is eventually less formalised or overt but equally brutal and definitive. The limits imposed may perhaps not be the absolute proscription of certain topics of research and study. But imposing limits on the range and extent of research can equally impair individual's research

freedom and creativity. And have an impact on the role of the University as the privileged locale for knowledge creation. "Censorship exists as soon as certain forces (linked to powers of evaluation and to symbolic structures) simply limit the extent of a field of study, the resonance or the propagation of a discourse" (Derrida 2004: 46).

This is what is happening at PhD level research. One of the supervisors interviewed, echoing a general perception by the supervisors interviewed, stated that "I look for something which doesn't proclaim itself as anything too different" [PhD supervisor (DG)]. By limiting the scope of students' research projects, by not accepting prospective students with 'ambitious' and 'risky' research projects, supervisors are censoring entrants to academia and therefore censoring and limiting the scope of research undertaken by the students and in their department. In fact, supervisors are 'just' the executors of such censorship. It is the departments or the universities who have to enforce such tightening, or subversion, of entrance rules. Obviously there has been selection at universities throughout its history. The university has always been a place for 'a selected few'.

Bourdieu (1988 and 1989), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1985) have shown the extent to which the exercise of exclusion at university entrance is imposed or enforced on those with low social, cultural or economic capital. What is happening now, however, is a different level of exclusion. The exclusion of students not because of lower social, cultural or economic capital, which is still prevalent, but on top of that, students who may become a risk because they may not complete their doctoral research in a restricted, and imposed, amount of time. The question

of quantifying what the 'ideal' amount of time may be, or even that of standardising the duration of PhD programmes across different disciplines has been discussed in a different chapter. What the concern here is is the implication of such selection and censorship, in Derrida's word, of such an exclusion. No space then is allowed for what Skinner reminds us that Feyerabend suggested: "we ought to remain as unconstrained and imaginative as possible in dreaming up alternatives to existing bodies of alleged knowledge" (Skinner 1985:8).

This Derridean censorship, if one could call it that, a censorship of 'subjects' but also of 'range' within a 'subject' is becoming increasingly prevalent in social sciences departments. In order to increase publication numbers, which is the means through which career progression is made, academics tend to limit scope and breadth of their own research. It is not uncommon to see various articles from an academic (and here I am not referring to *a* particular academic but to the academic as an ideal-type in the Weberian sense) which are very similar papers between themselves. "Yes, I think [the academic world] has lost, intellectually. Some of the biggest names in my [time] hardly published anything in their days. Now, there are two ways of thinking about this – they were able to produce these masterpieces because they had much more freedom to do what they wanted to do, instead of having to produce articles every five years." [PhD Supervisor (DG)]. The focus is, as mentioned in a previous paragraph, on the number of articles rather than on the originality and diversity of the research. This is due to a culture of assessment of departmental and academic staff by publications. Staff need to publish a certain amounts of papers to progress in their career and departments exert pressure in order to get staff to publish in peer-reviewed publications.

In a sense, then, academics are extending a certain self-imposed - because it may be seen as essential for their career survival - censorship to academia's new entrants and future faculty. In this context, it is of interest to recall Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* and his suggestion that "systems of thought and knowledge (epistemes or discursive formations, in Foucault's terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period." (SEP 2008). Allying this concept of boundaries of thought to Foucault's (1975) suggestion that control, in contemporary societies, is done by self-monitoring we can then envisage a very powerful system of exclusion and control that is prevalent in any institution and any actor. In this context, the University is no different from other institutions analysed by Foucault.

In his analysis of Kant's foray into the university as "an institution of reason and place of the growth of rational science", Derrida clarifies that "what we call science (..) cannot be founded technically (…) because of the contingent applications that can be made of science" (2004: 59). The fundamental idea here is that science cannot be led by utilitarian ideologies. Science should first and foremost be founded on the centrality of the concept of knowledge creation rather than that of knowledge application good. If the latter is at the forefront of university research and university practice, then more than creativity universities and academics are professing imitation.

> It is far better to take someone else's models, whether they are formal or empirical models, and apply them to new situations, or replicate … apply something that someone has applied in one country, to another country.

> Rather than try and do something which is a whole new theory and a whole new set of ideas. So that, basically, is what I am trying to encourage my students to do.
>
> [PhD supervisor (LE)]

However, Feyerabend warns that "the world which we want to explore is a largely unknown entity. We must, therefore, keep our options open and we must not restrict ourselves in advance" (2005:120). And "the power of imitation (…) is not the power of production or invention" (Derrida 2004:60). Is the University-as-imitator replacing the university-as-creator good? If so, then maybe what we are witnessing is a shift of focus: from creativity and knowledge creation the university becomes a bureaucratic institution that aims at applying existing knowledge and transforming it only cosmetically, reinforcing its own structures and power. Intellectually that may mean that new academic endeavour "is an idea which you transport from one place to another" [PhD Supervisor (LE)]. The attainment of new knowledge thus "consists in incorporating new facts into the old framework of definitions and categories, and ascertaining their place therein" (Manheim 2005:15).

Manheim's argument by no means suggests a focus in pre-existing models but rather in *new* facts that need to be interpreted through the light of a particular discipline 'imagination', to borrow from Wright Mills' expression which posits that disciplinary practices should relate to disciplinary history. In other words, in Wright Mill's terms, there is a body of work, and history of practices that make a discipline what it is. It is by relation to those that new knowledge, new techniques, are produced. "The course of science is immensely influenced by the sequence of the solutions for it determines the development of technical possibilities, the

education of researchers of the future, and the formation of scientific concepts and comparisons" (Fleck 2005:81). Even when a new paradigm in science takes the epistemological upper hand, it does not deny *per se* the history of the discipline. If anything, it may address different (newer) problems, or suggest different (newer) methodologies. So, whether we see scientific knowledge as cumulative or as the subject of scientific convulsions and jumps (I am intently avoiding Kuhn's expression 'revolution'), science develops, progresses, always based on previous, proved or otherwise, knowledge. As such, not only the ways and mean of the solutions are subject to scientific style, but also the choice of problems, and at that even to a higher degree. (…) Recognized scientific practices become co-determinant agents in the formation of scientific reality" (Fleck 2005:81).

Knowledge is produced within specific trajectories, and my analysis of the interviews and the literature suggests that PhD are currently being censored of much of their ambition. No ambition means deliberately stalled and halted history as the abandonment of progress within disciplines as more and more research is being cultivated by government on the basis of external economic and political agendas. A very relevant example of this is the suggestion that the AHRC has recently agreed that in order to keep its funding levels, one priority would be to research projects that focussed on the 'Big Society', an idea proposed by the current prime minister David Cameron. AHRC chief executive has denied these claims in an email to the *Research Fortnight*. However, the delivery plan states that "Connected communities [one of the funding streams approved] will enable the AHRC to contribute to the government's initiatives on localism and the 'Big Society' in the following areas: […]". This has led the AHRC's Peer Review

College to launch a petition to remove all mentions to the Big Society from the delivery plan.[13] The external political agenda has substantial power in determining research priorities. The more the university agrees to this, the more likely it is to stop the development of disciplines because they will continue to lose their independence and connection to their history.

The following quote reflects what the opinion of the supervisors interviewed is. In order to comply with completion rates, supervisors are avoiding demanding topics or topics deemed too original.

> We can't talk about the intellectual stuff because we need to do these pragmatic, practical things. Because the deadlines are much more severe now, and our department has to meet these deadlines.
>
> [PhD supervisor]

Deadlines, training requirements and completion rates are inhibiting intellectual development. Moreover, the supervisor's role is increasingly one of imposition and control rather than of guidance. As one supervisor put it he is looking for people that "do what you say, follow your advice, that is one thing I want from doctoral students".

Little space is now allowed for creativity and the widening of knowledge. Specialization and narrowing of ambition for the doctoral research have taken place. Intellectual production at PhD level is to deliver 'some originality' and be a certificate of research ability. However, as McAlpine et al (2009) has shown, PhD

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[13] http://exquisitelife.researchresearch.com/exquisite_life/2011/04/ahrc-will-not-remove-big-society-from-its-delivery-plan.html accessed in 14/04/2011

programmes are not delivering that either. As a supervisor put it: "It is an idea. The thesis is one idea. More than that it is too many" [PhD supervisor (LE)]. As such, doctoral students are not being allowed to develop as competent and complete academics.

Doctoral degrees are shifting from a focus on valuing the intrinsic value of the PhD to valuing its extrinsic value as discussed elsewhere. The creation of new knowledge is being undermined by compliance with generic regulations. If the value of a degree is no longer what the degree entails but rather what that degree should be seen to represent, then universities are emptying the traditional and historical purpose of the PhD. This being the case, what can be expected from academia for the future and what kind of intellectuals does society want?

There is not a clear answer to this. However, government policies, funding and what the supervisors have said appear to show that we are heading for a university that prepares *efficient researchers*. An 'efficient researcher' is timely, narrowly focussed, and pragmatic in their approach to problematizing issues. "Often knowledge is conceptualized as a ready-made digestible product that can be 'delivered', 'transmitted', 'marketed' and 'consumed'" (Furedi 2004:7). And the PhD is part of this new culture:

> I think perhaps the main thing to impress on someone is that this is, in many ways, a technocratic exercise, rather than a creative or expressive one.   [PhD supervisor (GU)]

> Increasingly I think we are being compelled to push our students towards less ambitious projects. Which, you know, there are some advantages to that. You have to explain to them that the PhD has changed. From being

> a great work it has become a hurdle, on the whole

<div align="right">[PhD supervisor (KI)]</div>

Some supervisors however argued that although the PhD was becoming more a run-of-the-mill exercise, this did not mean that great and ambitious research would not take place: this would, however, happen later in the academic career of the graduates. The question remains as to how doctoral students can be prepared for great and ambitious research when some supervisors do not allow their students to fully develop as *intellectuals* rather than as efficient researchers. Intellectuals have a "vision of totality" (Manheim 1936 in Delanty 2001a). An intellectual is a "constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader', and not just a simple orator" (Gramsci 1971 quoted in Delanty 2001a). As a group, intellectuals bear "a culture of critical and careful discourse which is an historically emancipatory rationality" (Gouldner 1979:85). The role of the intellectual is that of a "dispassionate critic" (Chomsky 1969:251). Morin defines the intellectual as the one "that works on ideas, and particularly ideas of human, social and moral importance" (Morin 2004:241) (my translation).

It maybe of some concern for the future of academia that some supervisors take control of the doctoral research project as the following quote suggests:

> I will tell a student – I only accepted you because your research area looks interesting. But what you want to do is not doable and you are going to do something else. <u>I would like to move much closer to a system where I design the doctorate</u>. I have been doing research for a long time, I have got a lot of research grants over the years, I can design research. But students find it very difficult to design research and I think you spend a lot of time, you can spend a year, even two years, getting the

> plan of the doctorate and the research questions sorted out, if you are not careful. And it is much better if that is sorted out in three months.
>
> [PhD supervisor (LE)]

However, "few forms of academic freedom are more central than the freedom to choose research topics" (Conrad 1993:76).

> If you absolutely want to be an academic and do research then you have got forty years to do that. There is no reason why you should have to do it in the first three years. What you should do in the first three years is actually be trained.
>
> [PhD supervisor (LE)]

Considering that students are not being prepared for ambitious research, and with increasing administrative and publishing demands put on academics, the time is limited for ground-breaking work. Moreover, if the students are not expected and trained to produce ambitious and novel projects, it can hardly be expected that when they become academics they will embrace greater research ambitions. They have to be trained as intellectuals as well as 'researchers' from the start; otherwise it is unlikely that they will develop as intellectuals.

The development of one's academic identity follows one's experience of academic work (Paré *et al* in McAlpine et al 2009:98). It is not clear therefore that if students are prepared for research work of limited scope, they will then develop into becoming academics that will look at wide-ranging issues on their disciplines or at projects of considerable intellectual ambition. It is the general view of the supervisors that the PhD is not, at present, the space to produce a 'magnum opus'. They suggest that time will come in the doctoral graduates careers where that major piece of work can take shape. However, in not allowing students to engage,

while students, in distinctively original and challenging research, the question remains of whether this is will happen later in the academic career. Supervisors were quick to express that the kind of time students have to do their doctoral research should be cherished since students will never have the opportunity to devote so much time to a single research project. Supervisors expressed concern that their own time is taken not only for research, but also for teaching, publishing, applying for grants and administration. The question of whether the PhD students, future academics, will have the time to engage in ambitious research after the PhD remains a problematic one.

> You have to do it to get into jolly academia, I think there is still a great deal of enjoyment to be had, but it is no longer the free, intellectual journey, if you want, in the way, perhaps it was, in the whole golden era of academia.
>
> [PhD supervisor (DG)]

Knowledge creation is changing and the producers and creators of knowledge, namely academics and doctoral students, are at the crux of such change. It is hence important to consider what kind of intellectuals academia is producing. My research suggests it is producing efficient researchers rather than intellectuals. A new page in the history of disciplinary practices and knowledge production may therefore need to be written.

10. Conclusion

10.1. The journey

My doctoral research attempted address the issue of the intellectual life of the PhD student. It did so by assessing the PhD experience of supervisors and students following a series of (funding) policy changes aimed at streamlining and arguably reducing the unpredictability of PhDs. My thesis focused on the PhD experience in the Social Sciences at Blueskies University. From my initial project as a research officer for a central administration department in the University I developed my own doctoral project by considering widening the scope of the 'preliminary project'. This concluding chapter will revisit the main elements of this thesis as well as highlight the most important conclusions. Finally, it will set some future steps for further research both based on the current data or based on further collection of data.

10.2. The University

Chapter 2 focused on setting the scene for my research. Its aims were to contextualise the discussion of the whole thesis. In the first part of the chapter I explored the fact that the university, as discussed in this thesis, is eminently a European institution. And I then developed this idea, looking at how the university was 'exported' to the New World with the Discoveries. It is relevant to look at the development of this institution because it has been, for centuries, the locale for the creation and development of knowledge, and also for the reproduction of the social status quo. Moreover, this look at the development of this institution is important because it is the place where degrees are conferred, namely the PhD. The PhD is

one of the most important foci in the study of academia because it is the stepping ground for an academic career, it may be seen as a ritual of passage from being a student to becoming an academic, and it is a the highest degree the university grants to its students. All these characteristics make it a fundamental piece for the understanding of how the university works and what its aims are.

The university is the second oldest institution in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church. The university throughout its history has kept some of its important original characteristics. However, the institution could be said to take different models. From its inception in the middle ages, in Paris and Bologna, it is clear that there is one unique institution we can call university, but that there are diverse models of universities. The Paris model was a 'university of masters', where the masters ruled the university, whereas the Bologna model was a 'students' university' since it was the students who annually contracted the masters. And the two universities were created for very different reasons: in Paris its creation was seen as a necessity due to the proliferation of various schools there, whereas in Bologna the need to create a university arose from the fact that political and social developments needed a legal frame to the 'renewal of urban life'. Some important elements though were similar and these are eventually what has made the university such a universal and long lasting institution. The right to teach was seen as universal and the holder of the *licentiate docendi* could teach anywhere in the Christendom, the degrees of *masters* and *doctor* were recognised everywhere no matter which university had granted them.

With the advent of the Discoveries, the Portuguese and the Spanish initially, and later on the French and the English, brought the university to the Americas. Whereas in Central and South America the model used was very much in line with the model brought from the metropolis, in North America a variety of models were developed. However the case was, the main function of the university in the New World was the education of the settlers and not of the indigenous people. As such, the university was an instrument of reproduction of power and social inequalities. It thus reinforced the power of the dominant minority.

The period from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century was one of crisis and turmoil for the university in Europe. The period of the Enlightenment was one that questioned the role of the university in reproducing the elite and criticised the fact that knowledge had remained based in old Greek and Arabic books. Going into the eighteenth century the universities saw a decline in their prestige and popularity.

In the second half of the eighteenth century European nations turned their attention to themselves and a spirit of nationalism spread throughout the continent. This was followed by a focus on each country's own history and tradition. This caused a decrease in intellectual and academic exchange between European nations to the point that some Europeans were forbidden from studying at foreign universities. This period was one of suspension of one of the most important characteristics of the university: the universality of degrees and interchange of ideas across borders was to an extent interrupted. On top of this, Latin stopped being the main

intellectual lingua franca as nations across Europe made their own language the official language at university.

From the period of the Enlightenment until the end of the nineteenth century another crucial change happened: the loss of the dominance of the Church (Catholic and Anglican) over the university. The principles of secularity took hold in universities and scholasticism was substituted by principles of empiricism and practical application.

The nineteenth century saw two important events that have shaped the history of the university since. The creation of the University of Berlin by Humboldt and the shift to a centralized university system under Napoleon. Humboldt's university aimed at valuing research for the sake of itself, and the French model valued social utility.

During the nineteenth century the influence of German universities in America was very strong. Scholars would conduct their doctoral studies in Germany and would go back to America implementing the same university system. However, with an increase in funding mainly arising from alumni, some American universities started breaking away from the German model. There was an increase in faculty numbers and departments grew more specialised. This allowed for multi-professors departments in stark contrast with the German one-professor model. During the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century American universities developed to become the most influential in the world.

This section of chapter two finally concludes that even though there are different models of universities it is possible to say that, as an institution, the university has kept some very relevant characteristics throughout its history: wide recognition of degrees, creation and dissemination of knowledge remain at the core of the remit of the university, the increasing importance of research from the nineteenth century, and the dominance of the American model in twentieth and twenty-first century.

10.3. The PhD

This section of chapter 2 dealt with the state of the art in the PhD literature, looked at the genealogy of the PhD, reflected upon the PhD in the Social Sciences, it then contextualised doctoral programmes, especially looking at policy changes affecting PhD programmes in the 2000s and how they may impact in the future of doctoral studies in the UK.

The section started by noting that a considerable amount of the literature available on the PhD is concerned with the 'how to do' market niche. Students have a plethora of choices available when looking at 'how to do the PhD', 'how to write a PhD', 'how to manage your time', 'how to prepare for your viva'. However the literature lacks contributions that focus on the PhD experience, especially in the time of change that has happened since the Roberts Report. This thesis thus aimed at listening and giving voice to the main actors in the PhD: students and supervisors. There is some literature that looks at supervisory relations, at completion rates, especially coming from the US. But the literature is otherwise absent when it comes to dealing with the changes affecting doctoral education at

present. Reflections on the future of the university as an organisation exist, but they take mainly the form of near-political manifestos or remain personal reflections of the state of affairs. By giving voice to the main actors in doctoral research my aim was to contribute to the discussion from a different angle, one that has been silent for a considerable time.

This section went on to focus on three very interesting contributions to the literature from the first half of last century. I have chosen them because the issues they discuss could be said to have set the ground for future reflections on the PhD, its functions and structure. The initial contribution, in 1928, was made by Eaton. He makes a typology of doctoral degrees. He suggests three types of PhDs: one that sees the student as an employee, another as in independent learner, and finally another that assigns the student a certain independence after an initial probationary period. He discusses how different types of PhD allow for different levels of research and how they differently prepare the student as researcher. These questions remain important and the types of doctoral degrees defined by Eaton remain relevant.

A couple of years later, in 1930, Dale questions whether the PhD is a good preparation for teaching positions at the university. He concludes that the PhD was not in fact a good preparation for teaching at university and that new structures should be put in place in order to prepare students for that particular role. His contribution is important because it places the PhD at the centre of the preparation for future academics and not just as the creation of knowledge and furthering of a discipline. It conveys a rather instrumental view of the PhD programme and this is

very much in line with current discussions about what the role of the PhD is especially in the context of policy and funding changes in the UK.

Later, in 1933, Nelson published an article which discussed two fundamental questions relating to the PhD: that of the PhD as a 'union card' for an academic career, and that of the servility of PhD students towards faculty. These could be seen as linked. The completion of the doctorate is very important for PhD students in order to get them onto the academic ladder and, because of this, the power relation between students and supervisors can be said to be rather unequal. More important for the context of my research is the view that the PhD is a 'union card' for an academic job. As I have explored in chapters 4 and 5 the question of why students undertake doctoral research remains fundamental to understanding what the PhD is and the expectations supervisors can have on the quality and depth of PhD degrees.

This section of chapter 2 proposed two different typologies of PhDs, and PhD experiences, by contrasting what a *typical* PhD in Social Sciences with a *typical* PhD in Sciences are from the point of view of the student.

10.3.1. Doctoral programmes in context.

The final section of the chapter explored issues as funding of PhDs, which underline particular views in terms of how one conceives the PhD, and it also looked at recent developments in bringing together different European university systems with the aim of streamlining degrees across the continent. It questioned the role of English as *lingua franca* in higher education and further developed the

issue of the destination of PhD graduates. This is again a very important issue since HE policy for doctoral programmes is increasingly focusing on the labour market in detriment of the view that the PhD is about the creation of new knowledge for the sake of new knowledge. Again, it could be said that increasingly there is an instrumental and economicist view of the PhD that appears to be foregoing its historical role.

The Roberts Report and the Bologna process are the two core elements of this section of chapter 2 since they not only have had quite a considerable impact on PhD programmes across the UK in the first instance, and across Europe in the latter but, moreover, because they are two of the most significant recent changes of direction in higher education which also reflect wider political, economic and social concerns over the role and purpose of higher education.

10.4. Methodological reflections

This chapter firstly presented my two roles in two different research projects. Data collection for the doctoral research project happened simultaneously as data collection for another research project I was involved in, which I have called 'preliminary project'. The latter was within the remit of my position as a research officer at Blueskies University. It also sets the intellectual tribulations I have gone through in the process of clarifying and separating the two roles. The objectives of the two different research projects were always very clear to me. What appears to have been more problematic was the intellectual frame within which I was analysing and interpreting the data. And chapter 3 intended exactly to do that. To

separate two different voices, and make the doctoral student voice the one to be heard throughout the thesis.

But clarifying the two positions I was in in no way means a denial of the actual advantages this had for my doctoral research. I needed to be in constant awareness of my role but this also provided me with a knowledge and proximity to the data and the subjects that I see as a strength of my research. The two research projects are two entirely different entities; however they had a common starting point.

My doctoral research project originated mainly from my interest in academia as a peculiar social organization. In the past I have had the opportunity to conduct a series of different projects researching the university as an institution. Especially the concepts of knowledge creation and knowledge reproduction have been in the forefront of my research interests. In particular I had started to consider issues surrounding disciplinary conceptions of knowledge. At the time I was a research officer at Blueskies University. I was working for a department belonging to the central administration of the university that wanted to assess how policy changes introduced in the wake of the Joint Statement on Skills by the research councils in the UK (2001), the Roberts Report and the QAA guidelines for research degrees (2004).

The methodology chosen was to interview students and supervisors in various departments of the university. I took this chance to suggest a broadening of the scope of the preliminary research in order to include questions that I was interested in addressing in the context of a doctoral research project. After lengthy

discussions and after obtaining permission from some university bodies, I was able to take the opportunity to start collecting data for my PhD.

At the core of my interests were not only what the changes in doctoral programmes meant for the practice of a discipline, but mainly what those at the core of the doctoral experience, supervisors and students, had to say about these changes. It had become clear to me that these voices had not been heard and that changes had been suggested, and were being introduced without having taken in consideration the actual contributions the students and supervisors could have made to the process of change.

The university was feeling pressured to put the changes in practice and therefore wanted to audit practices across the departments. Whereas the preliminary study focussed on practices and views on the structure of doctoral programmes, on views and practice on research training, on how the organizational procedures that were put in place in order for each department to comply with the new rules, my doctoral study was focussed on understanding to views, experiences, and expectations of the PhD as students and supervisors felt them.

Of principal concern were two issues: whether it was possible or desirable, in the views of my interviewees, to streamline PhD programmes in the social sciences, and whether other considerations, such as the 'student experience' were taking pride of place. The former concern arose from the fact that it was felt that research councils were trying to control and tighten the way PhDs in the social sciences were organized by modelling them in accordance with PhDs in sciences. This is

possibly an evidence that the PhD as a learning process was being changed into a PhD as a degree where factors other than research were taking prominence.

Another methodological issue discussed in chapter 3 was that of my privileged access to the cohort. Considering I was working at the institution I had access to information and to do the interviews in a way that an outsider might not have had. Especially because, as is explained in the chapter, individual departments were very interested in getting the results of this research since it would avoid them having to do the research themselves. In a way, it was in the interest of the departments to take part in the research since they will benefit from it. It was clear from the onset that results from individual departments would not be shared nor made public to others. Each department would receive their own results and aggregated results for the university so they could benchmark their practices with the wider university.

Notwithstanding this ease of access to the cohort there were a few hurdles I had to go through in order for the institution to approve the questions I wanted to include in the original preliminary interview schedule for the purposes of my doctoral research. They had to be discussed and approved, via my head of department, with higher instances within the university.

The chapter goes on to explain the research methods I used for my doctoral research: in-depth interviews, participant observation and my role as participant observer. I chose to conduct in-depth interviews because I wanted to capture the richness of the individual voices I was interviewing and in chapter 3 I explained

why it was the most appropriate method for the research purposes of my doctorate. Therefore in my interview schedules I included closed and open-ended questions and also allowed for space for inclusion of points of view and issues that might eventually not had been included in the interviews.

The use of in-depth interviews was set in a context of an ethnographic research. But in this I took different roles: one as doing participant observation and another as being a participant observer. In chapter 3 I used the 'duet' metaphor to explain these two different roles and how they played throughout the research project. And this was due to the nature of my position throughout the PhD process: from collecting the data at the institution I was working to analysing the data in another institution as a research student. While I was collecting data I was a participant observer as I was part of the university I was researching and where I had been a student. Moreover, I had closely worked with some of the departments that I was researching so I was somehow an insider. When I left the institution and took my PhD position in another university, my role became that of the researcher who does participant observation: I was an outsider trying to understand and make sense of the group being studied. But this dual position, even if chronologically distinct, was present intellectually throughout the PhD.

10.5. Supervisors' views

 In chapter 4 I explored and analysed the views of the supervisors interviewed concerning the PhD degrees in their departments. The aim of this chapter was mainly to give voice to the supervisors, one of the voices, alongside the students', that have not been heard in the process of all the changes happening at doctoral

level. The chapter focused on 6 main topics: views on past PhD practices and research, views on current PhD programmes, views on what the PhD is, why do a PhD, views on their own students, and finally what supervisors are looking for in prospective students.

In terms of supervisors' views of the past it appears that there is a sense of loss and of depreciation of the value of the PhD. Moreover, it could be said that there is also a sense of loss of academic and intellectual freedom. This loss seems to have arisen from the fact that the PhD is seen to have become above all a credential. The focus on the product - the final thesis – appears to have detracted the attention from the actual research process and the enjoyment of such process. More, there is a sense that diversity and creativity are no longer part of the PhD programmes. And finally some supervisors lamented the fact that students who wanted to just do a 'leisure PhD', for the pleasure of doing research for the sake of their own personal development, was no longer acceptable by the institution.

 One of the main consequences of this loss is that the space for an intellectual journey has been curtailed. This is not to say that the supervisors stated the PhD is no longer an intellectual journey. What they said was that the space for the intellectual wandering of times past had been lost. The great piece of research, the *magum opus*, has now become a more directed and more constrained research project and it is up to the supervisors to operate this constraining. The main reason behind this is the stringent deadlines imposed to PhD degrees. Students need to complete in up to four years so departments and supervisors alike have thus been focusing on training efficient and good researchers rather then preparing the great

academic minds of the future. Students need their PhD to become academics so the prevalent notion is that it is important to get them the credential so that they can 'move on and upwards' in their career.

As for their views on the PhD programmes supervisors voiced their opinions on the scope and originality of the current PhD theses, on the timeline imposed, and on the structured nature of their programme and the training requirements for PhD programmes. In terms of scope and originality there was the sense that the doctoral research could no longer be too original or ground breaking. And because of this they had to select very carefully from prospective students and equally had the role to control the students in order not to let them go off-course. Different degrees of control over their students' research were voiced by the supervisors but the need to a tight supervision was widespread.

In terms of the strict timeline imposed supervisors expressed two different opinions, and demonstrated a division between them. Some supervisors argued that it was beneficial for both the institution and the students that PhDs did not take longer than four years and that the big research project, the *magnum opus*, could come at a later stage in the academic career. Others complained that making students complete in 3 or 4 years would imply a change in the expectations and the type of research students can undertake.

When thinking about the structured nature of the PhD programmes, with hurdles present throughout the degree and the training requirements, it appears that supervisors have somewhat contradictory views. If the inclusion of hurdles such as

the upgrade and the imposition to take on research training can be seen by many as a *waste of time* it was nonetheless stated that the former are essential to keep the PhD students on track.

When asked what a PhD was many supervisors voiced the concern that they themselves did not actually know what it was when they had started their own PhD and they believed this was still the case for their current students. However, there was a shared view that the nature and purpose of the PhD are changing. PhDs should no longer be "world shattering Nobel Prize winning bits" according to one supervisor but should instead be "something satisfactory at the end of a three to four year period" according to another.

I asked the supervisors to reflect on their views on their students namely why they thought their students had decided to do a PhD and also what profile they had. The overall impression is that supervisors assume their students are doing a PhD for the purposes of becoming academics. In terms of student profile supervisors defined their students as intelligent and hard working. Some supervisors voiced the concern that Blueskies University attracted 'professional students', students who had gone through previous academic degrees and thence undertook a PhD. Many of those students had not had a real work experience outside of academia. A certain regret for the *professionalization* of the doctoral degree was voiced.

In terms of what supervisors look for in prospective students they stated that in general it was a very difficult task to select which students to take on the degree. However, there seems to be a certain unanimity in looking for excellent previous

grades and a strong research proposal, even if some supervisors just take the latter as an indication of students' capacities rather than as the actual doctoral project. Despite all the care taken in selection, some supervisors voiced the concern that selection still remained 'a lottery'.

But not all supervisors are the same and therefore different types of supervisor look for different students, or at least approach supervision differently. I suggested therefore in chapter 4 a topology of supervisors, following from a suggestion of one of the head of departments I interviewed: the "athletic training supervisor", the charismatic supervisor, and the egalitarian supervisor. No longer is there space for a 'conversational' approach nor for an 'inspirational' approach.

Finally, there appeared to be a certain contradiction in what some supervisors said: one the one hand they felt their role was to prepare students to be academics but on the other hand many supervisors felt that their students would actually not become the highly intellectual academics of the future.

10.6. Students' views

The results from the interviews with the students are rather different from those with the supervisors. And the main reason for this is that when thinking about PhDs supervisors have a more longitudinal view of the doctorate whereas students have a more discrete view of the PhD. This is mainly due to the fact that faculty have a considerable experience that involves not only their own PhD but also those PhDs they have supervised and examined. The students on the other hand have a

more limited view of the PhD which usually tends to focus on their own PhD research.

When I interviewed doctoral students I wanted to hear their views on the following points: why they had chosen Blueskies University, why they are doing a PhD, what the PhD was for them, what they expected from their supervisor, what they thought about the PhD programme at their department, and what advice they would give to prospective PhD students.

Many students chose this university because it is a prestigious one with a very strong and marketable brand. This would, in students' opinion, open the doors to good academic job opportunities. There are also some students who came to work with particular supervisors because they were leaders in their field and would therefore be able to open some doors in terms of future careers.

When considering the issue of why students decided to do a PhD three main reasons came to the fore. The most important one, and the most widely mentioned, was that the PhD was a passport into an academic career. This definitely conveys a very pragmatic and instrumental view of the PhD: a view that the PhD is mainly a credential. Other important reason was that the PhD is a natural choice for the students, a natural step in one's academic degree *portfolio*. Another reason was that for some the PhD was some sort of personal validation exercise.

On the issue of what the PhD is it became clear one main distinction needed to be done: that of the different responses when describing the PhD prior to starting it

and when thinking of it as PhD students or (almost) graduates. In the first instance, it became very clear that before started their PhDs students had very little idea of what it entailed, and this tallies with what the supervisors had stated when asked to explain what the PhD was. This lack of knowledge made the PhD itself a 'complete shock' said one student. The main reason for this *ignorance* is that the PhD is very different from any previous degrees students had undertaken. This difference arises from the perception that the PhD is a very lonely endeavour and the fact that the undertaking of original research is novel for them.

As PhD students, respondents defined the PhD as 'hard work' and a preparation of for an academic career. Interestingly, students did not usually go into the specifics of their research or subject area. It was as if that was secondary to the credential itself. The PhD was about going to the next step, a hurdle one had to cross, rather than a process of personal and intellectual development.

In terms of students' expectations of their supervisor their answers were quite straightforward and clear: students want supervisors who question them, who give them support and who edits their work. Ideally, too, someone who can give them a 'pat on the back' once in a while.

Students did not express very positive views on the structure of their doctoral programmes. They found that the hurdles they imposed, namely the upgrade paper, did not really help them with the research itself, and at times was just done to comply with external pressures i.e. research councils. However, they were seen as allowing the PhD process to become more expedient. In terms of research training

the overall view was that it was not very useful or not very good. They argued that if they had gotten to the stage of being accepted to do PhD they should be seen as being able to find their own methodological answers and, failing that, the supervisor was there to help them with these. However, some students at the end of their degree lamented the fact that they had not taken the opportunity to take more training throughout their PhD.

Chapter 5 concludes with the advice my interviewees would give to prospective PhD students. Importantly it appears students would highly recommend prospective students to try and really understand what a PhD entails before they start it, especially the intensity and sophistication of work one has to do in a PhD. But they would also advise prospective students to realise that the PhD is a very lonely endeavour, that it requires very strong commitment to it and that one really could do what a strong support base of people who really care about one's project. Finally, the issues of self-doubt, the ups and downs of research life, and the lack of confidence in oneself were also important to be prepared for.

10.7. Reflections on Supervisors' and Students' Views

This chapter aimed to reflect and structure some of the main issues and topics arising from the interviews with supervisors and with students. The previous two chapters were meant to give voice to the interviewees and therefore my aim remained one of interpreting the data. However in this chapter my objective was to structure some of the most relevant issues arising from the previous two. Concomitantly, I intended to introduce here my own voice and my own experience. It was a way to structure my own views and ideas. It was mainly based on the data

collected but also on my own doctoral experience. I see this as a process of academic honesty. Since I am studying the PhD experience in the Social Sciences, it is important that I reflect on my own experience and see how it matches or otherwise that of the interviewees.

Both supervisors and students showed an awareness of the change doctoral programmes are undergoing. This awareness was higher for supervisors than for students for the obvious reasons that the former are familiar with the changes and have worked as supervisors for years. The students have a rather limited view of the PhD. Those who started the PhD before the changes started being introduced in their department are just aware of the changes imposed to students who started after them because of what they hear from them.

My own perception of change has not come as a direct consequence of my own doctoral experience but rather through my previous work as a research officer at Blueskies University, and as a consequence of my doctoral research. My UCL department is unusual when compared to other academic departments in the UK. On top of that my funding is external to the UK therefore many of the pressures made to UK PhD students have not applied to me. So, even if I am aware of the changes that are happening and are affecting supervisors and PhD students, I cannot say I have felt them throughout my PhD. No obligatory training requirements and academically very little, if any, exchanges in my department. This is how I would envisage the old PhDs to have been.

The idea that the PhD is the main key to an academic career appears to have been unanimous. Therefore supervisors stated they prepare students to become academics and students started their PhD to pursue an academic career. There were a couple of other reasons given by students as seen in section 5 above namely that it was a natural step for them. And for me this was the original reason to do a PhD. A student said "I always knew I was going to do a PhD" and I view my choice in the same way. As my career in another HEI has developed the need to have a PhD in order to progress through the academic ladder has become more obvious. But I am also very interested in sociology of academia. For me therefore three reasons brought me to start my PhD: interest for the topic, natural choice and need for a credential.

I was also interested in exploring whether there was a particular type of student that chose to do a PhD at Blueskies University. They had all obviously had very good grades in their undergraduate and their masters degrees and so could be said to be very successful students. Some, if not all, had come from very prestigious universities, whether in the UK or abroad. They are what I would call well-versed in university-speak: being successful in university can be about intelligence and/or hard work, but there is a strong element of familiarity and success in writing essays and doing exams, in doing well what you are supposed to do. They know how to move in the university world and therefore it is unsurprising that this is the type of students that chooses to do a PhD at Blueskies University.

This begs the question of whether only a certain type of students applies to do a PhD at this university or whether the university only accepts this kind of student.

The issue of whether by admitting a very specific type of student the university is excluding otherness. The chapter goes on to question the issue of the university as an institution promoting social reproduction. But another issue is that of by narrowing diversity at entrance point, the university may also be excluding topics and approaches to research that are diverse. It was clear from the data that supervisors are not looking for creativity and originality in their students.

When reflecting about whether I would fit this type of student it remained clear that there are some characteristics that I share with this cohort: good university and educational background, and studying at a prestigious university. But other characteristics make me less similar to this type of student: I have worked prior to starting my PhD, I am sponsored by a foreign research council and these are differences that make the doctoral experience different.

The chapter finally goes on to explore the question of how a tight completion deadline affects the intellectual journey of the PhD and also reflects on the structured element of the PhD, of which the deadline and research training are important elements. Research training overall seemed to be dismissed as a priority by both cohorts of respondents. Whether seen as a 'waste of time' or unimportant, it appears that the drive to include a strong element of transferable skills training as a consequence of the recommendations of the Roberts Report has been successful only insofar as it was made compulsory. Otherwise uptake of training would be very low. Supervisors appeared to have at the forefront of their concerns when recruiting new students whether their research proposal was feasible in three to four years. This meant that practical concerns are taking priority over

intellectual concerns in student selection. The priority now seems to be that the PhD should be a training of researchers. This seems to have shifted the perspective of the PhD as having an intrinsic value in itself to one that sees the PhD as mainly having an extrinsic value. The following chapter went on the reflect on the value of the PhD.

10.8. PhD: what value?

This question about what value the PhD has cannot be discussed without contextualising the main elements that affect what the PhD has become. It was unanimous from the interviews that the PhD is indeed changing. The priority to complete on time and the concern over completion rates are now at the forefront of departmental concerns over PhD programmes and doctoral students. In this chapter I posit that by prioritising the deadline over the process of research universities may be inverting the process of research itself. By prioritising the timeline "we are asking people to actually have the end of the narrative and then they fill it in with case studies" was how one supervisor put it. Inverting the research process will therefore have an impact on the production of knowledge, at least at doctoral level.

This has impacted on the experience of the PhD especially for the supervisors interviewed. Supervisors felt a sense of loss in terms of intellectual space and freedom. The PhD is now a more structured programme with a series of hurdles students need to overcome such as end-of-year reports and the upgrade paper. The changes which have been introduced could be seen as external to the PhD itself in the sense that they are not about the doctoral research itself but about issues

relating to the education of PhD students such as preparing graduates for the improvement of the economy.

The chapter goes on to reflect that there is no doubt that for my interviewees the PhD is a preparation for a career in academia. This contradicts the aims the Roberts Report which argues for a degree that is more turned towards the market economy outside of academia, be it in industry or even civil service. However much supervisors expressed a sense of loss they have shown a commitment to the new demands imposed on them by the institution and by wider social influences such as national funding bodies. Simultaneously, it is increasingly the case that without a PhD it is nearly impossible to get into an academic career. The PhD therefore needs to fulfil two very different functions. One, as perceived by faculty, that is of preparing future academics and another that is preparing students for a world outside academia. These two functions appear to be at odds with each other as one requires an extensive intellectual journey whereas the other puts the onus of the gaining of transferable skills and structure that are relatively new to doctoral programmes. There appears to be a general view that the PhD is now a *lesser* endeavour with more limited aims than it used to, so supervisors have argued.

This common perception among the supervisors interviewed is justified by the external pressures they and their students face to complete on time and to take on a variety of training which sometimes is at odds with the individual research of the student. The taking up of training appears to be formed around the tick-the-box mentality rather than on a more long term perspective. There is a shift therefore

that is impacting on what kind of theses and doctoral work students are embarking on.

The chapter thus suggests that from valuing the intrinsic of the PhD supervisors, students and academia are now valuing the extrinsic value of the PhD. This reflects a wider political view of the university and society that favours practical interests over knowledge for its own sake. The value of the PhD nowadays can be found outside of the doctoral thesis rather than on the PhD itself. The PhD's main value is extrinsic: it is about the credential one gets at the end of it, and about the skills one gains in the road to the labour market. Deliverables took over and originality was left behind. No longer is the PhD a place of contestation which creativity always entails but has rather become the place of compliance.

For this chapter I have selected a few definitions of the PhD given by research-intensive institutions. They seem to define it as an 'original contribution to knowledge'. The data I collected appears to contradict this view. By valuing what the PhD is seen to represent rather then the PhD itself it is unlikely that the PhD is still a *locale* for the creation of new knowledge for new requires creativity, time and originality. What are the implications of this in terms of what kind of academics of the future the university is preparing and what type of knowledge is it looking to foment? That is the question that chapter 8 addresses.

10.9. PhD: an original contribution to knowledge?

There is a strong body of literature that posits that the university is changing its remit from a place where "the historical project of culture" is no longer its main aim. The dependence on government funding and the perceived increased on research councils influence the running of research, in particular the view that there is an economic and political need for applied science whose contribution to society must be quantifiable, are all diverting the university from that historical project. There is a strong feeling amongst authors that putting the university at the core of the market economy, which it should serve, is giving the university a more pragmatic and utilitarian ethos. For the Social Sciences (as well as the Arts and the Humanities) there is an increased pressure to *perform* since funding is being squeezed out of these disciplines in favour of STEM subjects which HEFCE has publicly prioritised. Plus, and this is one of the main arguments in this chapter, it is being asked of the social sciences to change.

Knowledge creation is increasingly being constrained by practices in the hard sciences. This is mainly due to the fact the funding policies are privileging the practices of the latter in detriment of disciplinary practices of the former. The chapter goes on the suggest therefore that disciplinary traditions in the Social Sciences are being shunned and new ways of doing social science are being introduced. The focus on deliverables and the need to demonstrate the economic and social value of research finding are also contributing to this shift (this too may also be altering the way hard sciences are working).

All these changes in practices demonstrate above all that the role of intellectual creation *per se* has been demoted and therefore the University as a pillar of knowledge creation is foregoing its historical role. And knowledge production in academia is changing. If the contribution to the economy is at the core of knowledge production then science needs to change. The disciplines that are seen as contributing less (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts) are being asked to change quite considerably. Apparently they need to adapt to new ways of creating knowledge, prove they are economically contributing to society and therefore the notion of knowledge for its own sake needs to be changed.

All this is happening in Social Sciences in the UK and this means that both academics, and future academics (current PhD students), who are the creators of new knowledge *par excellence* (even if not the unique creators of knowledge), are at the centre of these changes. Academics need to change their ways of work and therefore I suggest that they feel the need to censor themselves in their disciplinary practices. Moreover, they are extending their self-censorship to their apprentices, the doctoral students. I argued in this chapter that this censorship is one that encompasses not only a censorship of 'subjects' but also a censorship of 'range' within each discipline. This is not new however. What is perhaps new is that the exclusionary practices of the university, the Ivory Tower for the few, has now gained a new dimension. Supervisors stated very clearly that they are rejecting prospective students who submit research proposals that are deemed to be too original or creative. This suggests that the new level of censorship, and exclusion being introduced, is now at the very high level. It seems that no longer does the university want to welcome those with revolutionary or 'out-of-the-box' ideas.

Less ambition is now welcome, and favoured. Specialisation and narrowing of scope are taking over. Creation has been substituted by compliance to rules. The chapter ends with the question of whether all these changes are affecting the academics of the future and thus the future of academia. It is too early to answer this question. However it is unlikely that the university will be able to keep at its core its "historical project of culture".

10.10. Final reflections on the thesis and its theoretical contributions

10.10.1. Main findings

The University has retained some of its historical characteristics such as internationally recognised degrees, relative easy movement of academics between universities, division between research and teaching and, more recently, the creation of the research-led university in Germany in the nineteenth century. The Bologna process has been created to facilitate the *translation* of different degrees between countries of the European area. Even if different countries boast different higher education systems they nonetheless are tending towards creating increasingly similar structures.

Literature available on the PhD is mainly centred around two areas: one focusing on guides and advice for doing the PhD, the other looking at time to completion, often involving statistical analyses of various kinds. My PhD aims to address a different area: that of the PhD experience in the *voice* of its two main actors – the students and the supervisors. The literature has yet to explore the impact the

experience of the PhD after the introduction of the skills agenda which has had a considerable impact on the PhD in the social sciences.

Supervisors interviewed expressed a sense of loss but showed a very pragmatic attitude changing the way they select and supervise their students in order for completion to be improved. The PhD is seen as a credential so the quicker it is done the better. They agreed that the scope of the PhD is much narrower nowadays but there is not the possibility of doing things differently. No longer do supervisors look for creative and original students and research proposals. There is thus the proliferation of the *professional student* who is good at university speak but may lack some spark.

For the students the PhD too is a credential, a passport into academia. Their choice of Blueskies University also demonstrates the focus on career because they chose Blueskies because it is a famous and prestigious brand they wanted stamped in their passport. For many students too the PhD is a natural step after their undergraduate and masters degrees.

In terms of skills training both supervisors and students were very critical and expressed negative opinions. However, the various hurdles introduced in the PhD programmes appear to be seen more positively by some supervisors.

This thesis suggests, based on the interview data and available literature, that there has been a shift in the value attributed to the PhD. From an intrinsic value, historically attributed to the PhD, the doctorate is now valued for its extrinsic

value. It is as a credential that it appears to be valued with the consequent loss of the value of knowledge for its own sake. The notion of original contribution to knowledge, at the heart of PhD in the UK is changing. Supervisors are looking for efficient researchers and no longer for intellectuals. And are therefore preparing efficient researchers rather than academics as intellectuals. The nature of the PhD is therefore changing. No longer do creativity and originality seem to be a priority. And a new level of censorship appears to have been introduced: very creative and original research proposals are being refused.

Changes introduced in PhD programmes may also affect the nature of the disciplines in the social sciences. By adopting research models from the sciences funding bodies are changing the way research is done in the social sciences and may be irreversibly changing social sciences.

The main contributions of this thesis have been: giving *voice* to those who have not been heard in the process of changing PhD programmes. It has concluded that funding changes have affected the PhD experience for students and supervisors at Blueskies University. It has also concluded that the PhD may no longer be the great intellectual journey but rather a training to prepare efficient researchers. It has thus posited that the PhD is mainly seen as a credential. It is no longer its intrinsic value that is most important. It has questioned the concept of original contribution to knowledge applied to the new PhD programmes. It has finally suggested that the nature of the social sciences may be irreversibly changing.

10.10.2. Theoretical location and theoretical contributions

This thesis makes reference throughout to some very important contributions to the understanding of the PhD, its meaning and its social and knowledge functions. From Eaton, Nelson and Dale in the first part of the twentieth century through to Bourdieu, Derrida, and finally Delanty, Fuller and Barnett. All these remain the most prominent theoretical pillars of the thesis. Usually students are asked during their doctoral research what is the theoretical framework they are using for their research. In my view, this question does not address the fact that I have used various theoretical building blocks that have helped me structure this thesis and the main findings in it.

The contributions of Eaton, Nelson and Dale were particularly useful for setting the main questions that have been present in much of the literature on the PhD. Eaton introduced an analysis of the PhD focussing on the role of the student vis-à-vis the research and the supervisor, and questions what levels of originality and creativity are allowed at doctoral level. These have implications in terms of the level of involvement of the student in a "complete act of research". Dale questions whether the PhD programme prepares students adequately for a teaching position at the university which for him should be one of the main objectives of getting a doctorate and this is an important contribution for it situates a possible focus of discussion about the function of the PhD. Finally, Nelson ponders over the issue of the PhD as a "union card" for an academic career. In order to get this 'card' students need demonstrate servility and humility towards rules and the faculty and this entails a lesser level of independence and creativity that many would think is crucial at PhD level. Nelson's contribution is relevant in appreciating the degree of compliance and independence allowed to students at doctoral level.

The contributions from Barnett, Delanty and Fuller, explored elsewhere in the thesis, were very important and relevant for an understanding of the contemporary PhD experience and of the role of the university and of knowledge as an integral part, or not, of the current role of the university in the UK. Barnett crucially discusses the competences the university is expected to help students develop, namely an academic competence and an operational one. He posits that the 'competence' discourse is prevalent in a university system that needs to demonstrate its short-term contribution to society. Fuller's view that knowledge is being devalued in, and by, the university complements Barnett's assertions. For Fuller the credential is becoming the currency of university practice to the detriment of knowledge creation and dissemination which have both been part of the history of the university. Finally, Delanty posits that University departments have become administrative units rather than sites of research and thus the notion of the university as a site of excellence and creativity is now being undermined.

In these concluding notes however I would like to make a further exploration of Bourdieu's and Derrida's contributions to this thesis. Moreover, I will use and further develop Bourdieu's concept of 'reproduction' and Derrida's concept of censorship to suggest a new framework which can help us understand many of the dynamics which are currently in place in universities and, especially, at PhD level. Both concepts can be used together in order to help us grasp some of the idiosyncrasies present in the reflection of what the role of PhD is and the role it may be taking.

Bourdieu has looked at length at how processes of reproduction happen in universities, especially in what are the Grandes Écoles in France: very prestigious universities with very demanding entry requirements. They share some characteristics with prestigious UK universities such as Cambridge, Oxford, UCL, LSE and Imperial – which have been called the G5 universities – and other Russell Group Universities, of which Blueskies University is part. These, as well as the Grandes Écoles, are relatively old universities in their respective countries and both set of HEIs are commonly perceived as elitist universities. They also share the commonly held perception that they are universities for the 'very few', with stringent admission procedures and out of reach for those who are not from privileged backgrounds. And in this sense Bourdieu's theory is applicable to the UK context. In the UK the question of how well-prepared students from state schools may be, compared to their public schools counterparts, for admissions interviews at Oxbridge is often discussed. These interviews assess more than students' knowledge since they require a certain savoir-faire from the students – they require high levels of social capital and are therefore extremely exclusionary in unquantifiable ways.

Bourdieu and also Passeron demonstrated, both empirically and theoretically, that the Grandes Écoles managed, through a set of immaterial dispositions as well as material obstacles, to engage in very strong processes of reproduction and, simultaneously, or as consequence of these, to impose very strong obstacles to those outside the in-group to gain access to the institution. As such, they demonstrated through very elaborate empirical research how the 'intelligentsia' – to use Weber's term – reinforced its dominance over prestigious higher education

institutions and managed to maintain them as unreachable to the outer group. They demonstrated that those from privileged economic backgrounds and mainly with high social and cultural capital were most likely to pursue their studies in the Grandes Écoles, especially those students whose parents were professionals such as teachers, lecturers and professionals, and lawyers. Those wanting to pursue a career in the French civil service, for example, including politics, would have to embark on a degree in the École National d'Administration (ENA) from which the term 'enarque' – meaning students and alumni from the ENA – comes from. Access to the ENA is very strict and, as a Grande École, limited almost uniquely to those whose families have high social capital.

The notion of reproduction in a Bourdieusian sense has, therefore, two potential and simultaneous usages for our understanding of current PhD processes. First, reproduction in the sense that the PhD at Blueskies appears to be mainly open to students who belong to the same high social capital groups. This elitism came clearly through the interviews with academics and also with the students. This sense of elitism was both made explicit in the interviews and was also sensed from a critical analysis of them. Secondly, reproduction in the sense of academic practices, dispositions and disciplinary language learned through the PhD experience, which appears to constitute the most important element of entry to an academic career. Bourdieu and Passeron suggest the notion of *esprit de corps* to define this shared set of dispositions and knowledge. The latter sense is the one which was the most prevalent in the interviews conducted for this PhD. These two usages are relevant and present in the dynamics analysed in this thesis. I would, however, like to suggest a new layer in this process of reproduction.

As was explained in chapter 9, Derrida, in his analysis of the university, suggests the existence of a veiled censorship of topics and subjects. I then extended this usage of institutional censorship to the existence of a practice of censorship at an individual level. On the one hand this censorship excludes the highly original and creative prospective students, who appear no longer to have space in academia and, on the other, extends self-censorship. With the quantification of academic value (by focusing on outputs of research) supervisors interviewed demonstrated an awareness that some topics and research paths are more publishable, therefore seen as more desirable, than others. Therefore they have to censor themselves in order to survive. They however appear to have extended this censorship to prospective students. Students need to have projects which are feasible within a limited time frame and which are publishable.

The new level of reproduction that I therefore suggest – when integrating Derrida's concept of censorship into Bourdieu's concept of reproduction - is that of subverted reproduction – one that can be intermittent and, more importantly, a move against the reproduction process itself. This thesis argues that the PhD is still the time and place for the preparation of the next generation of academics, however differently prepared they may be for the academic career. However, since the PhD appears to have changed so much according to my interviewees there is a level of discontinuity – lack of reproduction or, more precisely, subversion of reproduction – that needs to be acknowledged. How does this subverted reproduction operate?

As explained above, according to Bourdieu, universities are sites of reproduction of social systems and social capital. Access to prestigious universities is usually granted to students who belong to the social and/or cultural intelligentsia. The analysis of the data collected for this thesis appears to substantiate that. Thus the university remains the place for those who belong to a certain cultural strata, and even more so at doctoral level. This element does not appear to have changed according to the interviews I conducted. What appears to have changed is of another order. Some supervisors were quite open about their highly successful doctorates and academic careers. Some also have been vocal about their intellectual achievements as a consequence of hard work but also their own capacities. To sum it up, supervisors as a *corps* appear to perceive themselves very highly. This was verbalised often in the context of the doctoral students they are looking for now and the expectations they have of doctoral research. There was a clear demarcation between *old* theses and *new* theses, the latter subjected to different sets of expectations and rules than those which were done by the supervisors themselves. In addition, when denying access to very creative and original students, there appears to be a new element being introduced in the doctoral process: that of censorship at the higher echelons. This is where discontinuity appears to operate.

Recruitment is still made from students from good universities and good schools, which for Bourdieu demonstrates a high level of social and cultural capital. But this no longer appears to be geared towards the creative and original and independent students, as the supervisors appeared to have described themselves when they were doing their own PhD research. It is a process of discontinuity

which is demonstrably intentional. Supervisors were clear in stating their avoidance of 'risky' topics. Nelson talks of academics as "the ranks of that self-perpetuated group whose members comprise the supposed aristocracy of our educational system" (Nelson 1933:234). When supervisors are "culturally discouraging" the "young people who really love doing research (…) and see that as a good life" then it appears that the constituency of the aristocracy of the university system is changing. Thus has reproduction been subverted.

There is an intentional and conscious process of censoring entrance to what Mroz calls the "intelligent semi-crazies" in benefit of the "safe and compliant" (Mroz 2009:5). This aspect not only confirms the sense of change which has been argued throughout the thesis but it reinforces it. A new element appears to have been introduced in the renewal of the academic body, the faculty. The consequences of this cannot be predicted. But in an atmosphere of change - the change of doctoral programmes, changing academic market, of funding policies - subverted reproduction has a fertile ground to gain momentum.

10.10.3. Professionalism
This thesis posits that the changes being made at PhD level appear to have had a negative impact on the depth of the doctoral research. The timeline, the skills and training, the avoidance of topics deemed too original, all appear to have led the PhD to become a credential above anything else. The streamlining of the PhD programme with a strong focus on transferable skills training has been one of the most significant changes in the PhD in recent years. The research councils appear to have directed the PhD into a more professionalised, and regulated, degree.

Simultaneously there has been a move to professionalise the supervisory element of the PhD. Academics are increasingly required to undergo training in order to improve their practice as PhD supervisors.

This move towards training academics suggests a notion that previous practices could sometimes have not been appropriate in supporting PhD students. The training of academics has been accompanied by a more stringent structure of the PhD programme. This has implied that students need a series of checkpoints throughout the thesis, and that supervisors have to demonstrate a more professionalised approach to their supervision. This has been done by the establishment of a series of rules for the supervisors. Departments now stipulate how many meetings there should be per term/year between the student and their supervisor. This has an obvious advantage. Students will feel more supported if they meet their supervisor regularly. Supervisors will be closer to the students' work and their progress and can potentially save a lot of time by preventing students going in an unproductive direction.

Many institutions have introduced a student record where meetings with supervisors are registered as well as the contents of the discussion in the meetings. This has an advantage for the institution itself since it helps it monitor individual practice. It may also have benefits for the supervisor since it can provide a shared platform with their students. This can also have advantages for the student: it may indicate that the student is being taken care of by both the institution and the supervisor. This latter point is relevant when considering the background of supervisory practice in the social sciences. As has been explored in the thesis, the

doctoral model metaphor of the supervisor who asks the student to "go to the library and come back in 6 months" reflected a view of a less supportive supervisor-student relationship.

The argument remains that changes in doctoral programmes appear to strongly indicate a move towards PhD research which is less free, less creative and less original. However, a certain professionalization of supervisory practice can have benefits for the PhD student experience if it implies a closer support on the part of the supervisor.

10.10.4. Clarifying the process/product dichotomy

This thesis has concluded that there appears to have been a shift from a focus on the research process itself to a focus on the product. Research process understood as the devising of a research project that addresses a question that can be seen as an 'original contribution to knowledge'. There has also been a shift away from the independence and intellectual serendipity that have been historically present in the PhD in the social sciences. This was illustrated by the nostalgic feeling that supervisors conveyed in their interviews when stating their sense of loss about the *old* PhDs. The focus on the product was meant as a focus on the credential itself. The thesis has therefore argued that the PhD has lost some of its intrinsic value, which has been replaced by its extrinsic value.

This argument was based on the evidence collected from the interview data, and evidence from policy and funding priorities as well as on Blueskies University's drive to streamline their doctoral degrees. A lot of the changes explored in the

thesis though refer to the process itself. However they do not refer to the process as is meant by the intellectual journey. Instead, the focus on the credentialist approach changes the process itself. By avoiding the *flâneur* researcher it aims to implement a more effective and pragmatic one. So when the thesis states that the focus of the PhD appears to be the product it does not deny that the process has been considerably changed. In fact, the product has gained prominence in detriment of the process. It is the change in the process itself that demonstrates said prominence. In going against the historical process of the disciplinary practice at doctoral level it reinforces the prevalence of a credentialist approach.

This is put in place namely by a string of monitoring procedures, such as upgrades and end-of-year reviews, that some supervisors believe detract students from a certain academic independence and originality. So, even if this thesis often refers to changes occurring in the process, this does not detract from the acknowledgement that the credential, the product, is increasingly perceived as the most important element of the doctoral experience. And that the changes on the process are a consequence of the focus on the product.

10.10.5. Time-constrained intellectual production: From an intellectual journey to …. a tram ride

In the process of reflecting upon the PhD and of writing this thesis the issue of what may have substituted the intellectual journey, the intellectual *flânerie*, has often been asked. The view that I have conveyed in the thesis is that of an intellectual journey that allows the student freedom of choice and space to wander. It may appear to convey an over-romanticised view of intellectual exercise but that is not what I want to convey. My argument is that the creative process as such, as

the search of knowledge should be – even if bounded by disciplinary rules and institutional practices – requires a degree of independence, solitude, exploration and unexpectedness that the metaphor of 'journey' can aptly convey. So the question remains of what has been substituted for the intellectual journey. I think the notion of tram ride captures the imagery that has been conveyed by my interviews.

A tram ride still has a certain poetic element to it. One can often think of trams when visiting certain cities in a time away from the *profane* time – the time Durkheim considers to be related to the everyday life. The ride that may possibly take us to unknown places. However, the tram ride is one with clearly defined starting and ending points. The tram goes from A to B, and we embark on it to go to specific places through clearly defined and publicised stops. And so, when acquiring a ticket and getting on the tram, one is aware of where one is and where the ride will take us. In the same way that the PhD appears to be. From acquiring our ticket to the ride, when we pay our fees, throughout the ride, we will have to stop at certain pre-determined stops – upgrades, meetings with supervisor, end-of-year reviews, viva – to get to the credential.

This is a change of focus. McLuhan famously stated that the "medium is the message". A parallel can be established with the PhD programme. If the message is the consequence of the medium available, and if we have in fact substituted the journey for the ride, the end message, the end result, would undoubtedly change.

10.11. Future steps

This section aims to explore a set of questions that could give some substantive continuity to the research questions and findings in this thesis and which further research might address.

There are two sets of further research that I will be looking at developing when I conclude my PhD. One will be developed from data used for this research. I would like to gather more data in the same institution in order to look at whether the views of supervisors are the same or not as those interviewed here, have changed, or whether practices have shifted again. I would also like to interview some of the students I interviewed, majority of whom would have already completed their PhD, and asked them to reflect on their PhD experience as well as how it prepared them for their current career (whether or not in academia).

Another set of research I would like to develop would be related to the changes that social sciences are undergoing in the university, and include not only a UK perspective but also European and US practices. Furthermore, I would like to explore whether new ways of doing PhDs are emerging and how different countries are adapting to budget constraints and other external pressures.

The following are also research programmes that could also arise from this thesis: whether the results of this thesis are peculiar to the social sciences or whether we would see similar 'experiences' in other disciplines, and whether this experience is typical of a elite university. It would be interesting therefore to do a similar study in a different type of university.

It would be also interesting to explore the intellectual versus non-intellectual agendas and see how these progress in the UK university system. Also to see what the implications will be students start paying much higher fees from 2012 will the impact will be for the doctoral experience and the predictable increase in the 'student-as-customer' mentality. The issue of privatisation of the university and the influence of the market in the running and university agendas will be also interesting to explore and analyse.

In the context of the present research interviewees were not selected on the basis of whether they were international or home students, their gender or whether they were studying full-time or part-time, for this was not the object of my study. It would however be interesting to explore some issues relating to how male and female students respond to changes to the PhD programme especially in a context that Bourdieu considers to be dominated by male practices and discourses. Would there, perhaps, be a gendered response to the increasing credentialist approach to the doctoral degree?

In terms of international students, it would be important to explore whether firstly there is a perceived difference in the focus of the PhD and whether it actually matters to them. Exploring the reasons why home students and international students do a PhD could help identify whether the changing policies may affect future recruitment of PhD candidates. Equally of interest would be to explore whether international and home students have different motives that lead them to do a PhD in order to assess whether there is an uniformization of the international student body.

Exploring the responses of part-time and full-time students in relation to their reasons for doing a PhD could be of particular interest since this could eventually be the biggest polarization in terms of responses. Part-time students' experience of the PhD is very different: less contact with the department and their peers, pressure in juggling job and study, eventual more difficulty in financing their degree. Also the perceived extra effort required from part-time students could actually illuminate what motivates them to do a PhD. One supervisor suggested he would have liked to allow more part-time students [he had none at the time of the interview] because he perceived them as the ones who usually demonstrated more commitment to originality and difference. It would be interesting to explore this issue in-depth.

Another issue which appears to me to be of particular relevance in our understanding of the PhD experience would be that of whether and how funding may affect students' perceptions of their PhD, which would be important to investigate in a further study. There were hints in some interviews that students who are funded (by the research councils or from other sources, e.g. national governments scholarships for international students) were perceived by their peers as enjoying a different status from those students who are not funded. In trying to understand the PhD experience, understanding the dynamics the students establish between themselves is very relevant. As was stated in the thesis, and following from Nelson's original contribution, there appears to be evidence that there is an established hierarchy between the students and faculty. This has implications in terms of the 'humility and servility' which, according to Nelson, students need to demonstrate in relation to the academics in their department. If a new level of

hierarchy is established between the students, with some students enjoying a higher status than others due to their being funded, then it is important to investigate this and how it impacts on the PhD experience. The basis of this difference in status may arise from the perception that students who are funded have a better research proposal than those who are not funded. More, this appears to suggest they may be better researchers and this is what seems to credit them with a higher position in the hierarchy. These are however speculations arising from the analysis of the interviews. It would be useful to do further research on this topic.

Another issue that could be further researched is that of disciplinary variation within the Social Sciences. Even though there are considerable common aspects of the experience of the PhD in different social sciences disciplines it could be the case that there may be some variations in the demands placed on students and supervisors in different social sciences. It is relevant to understand how different disciplinary practices are put in place in doctoral programmes. There appears to be a strong push to apply the sciences PhD model to the social sciences. In understanding how different social sciences PhDs operate one could have a better understanding of the implications of this move towards a sciences model of the PhD on the difference social sciences disciplines. It would be interesting to analyse the implications of this in detail in more theoretically oriented theses.

One other avenue that would be interesting to investigate is how the expansion of mass education impacts on the PhD. There is a considerable amount of research on the pedagogic impacts on mass higher education at undergraduate level. However

there does not appear to be a body of literature looking at how it affects doctoral programmes. There are a few questions worth pursuing in this context. Firstly to analyse the growth of the PhD student population (both in research-intensive and teaching-focussed universities) and how the increased number of students affect the deployment of resources (intellectual and physical) in different departments. Then it would be interesting to enquire why are student numbers rising and whether this increase is just reflects the expansion of student numbers at masters and undergraduate levels.

Of importance too is to develop an understanding of government funding policies of research degrees and whether there is an intention to keep increasing PhD student numbers. There may be an interest in the part of universities to have a higher number of international PhD students since they pay considerably higher fees than their home counterparts and it is important to enquire whether the only increase expected is of these foreign students or whether in fact universities are looking to increase home student numbers too. More, it could be relevant to investigate whether different types of universities have different policies in relation to student numbers.

One more research avenue that would be relevant to pursue is that of the PhD as textual form namely how certain writing forms can be productive. Musically there is the example of the symphony or the sonata, which allow composers to develop specific musical ideas and translate them musically. In poetry there are the examples of Haiku, the Japanese poetry form, the Limerick and the Tercet. All have very strict rules but these do not mean *per se* the denial of creativity, quite the

opposite. In a similar way, it would be interesting to explore how the PhD as a particular form can have an impact on the research process itself. And this for two main reasons: firstly because the PhD is the first considerable piece of writing that the students will have ever done and, likely for the majority, will ever do. Secondly, because the structure of the PhD as a *genre*, as a supervisor put it, can impact of the development of ideas and be a *locale* of both compliance – respecting the *genre* but also the rules and expectations of the research degree - and contestation – freedom within the text.

A study of these questions would allow for a further understanding of the manifold dimensions of change in doctoral programmes as well as of the perceptions of change in PhD programmes.

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