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**Understanding policy success and failure in contemporary English  
higher education: a study of three policy episodes**

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## Abstract

Higher education (HE) policy-making in England has features which make it distinctive. An intermediary body between government and institutions, under a number of guises, has endured since the first half of the twentieth century, informed by new liberalism reforms: the changing role of the state, marketisation and new public management, and is perhaps inimitable in having played a central role in policy-making. This thesis is a study of HE policy-making through analysis of the work of one intermediary body, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The thesis contextualises the policy work of HEFCE and its place in making and influencing policy.

Three HEFCE policy episodes (e-University, CETLs and LLNs) are used to examine notions of policy success and failure. There is a tendency for policy to be seen as success *or* failure; this thesis aims to provide a more nuanced, less binary, approach, which captures more dimensions of success and failure. The thesis uses a framework, '*three dimensions of policy success*' (McConnell 2010), to illuminate how policy success and failure can be understood on a spectrum. The thesis utilises the case studies to examine distinctions and commonalities of success and failure to yield insight and understanding in relation to policy learning. Five key themes arise from the analysis: enabling a strong coalition, trajectory of policy-making between policy-makers and implementers, approaches to policy sustainability, the role of monitoring and evaluation in ensuring value for money and the role of policy-makers in preserving policy goals.

The contribution of the research is the application of a theoretical framework to articulate policy success and failure to the field of English HE, which has not hitherto been examined with this framework, and to articulate policy learning as a result.



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## Acronyms

ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
ASN	Additional Student Numbers
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CASTL	Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
CATs	Credit Accumulation Transfer Agreements
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CETL	Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
CAT	College of Advanced Technology
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information
CIPeL	Centre for Interprofessional e-Learning
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CoVEs	Centres of Vocational Excellence
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSET	Centre for the Study for Education and Training
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom
DFE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Science
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey
ELQ	Equivalent Level Qualifications
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FD	Foundation Degree
Fdf	Foundation Forward

FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FeC	Full Economic Cost
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIF	Higher Education Innovation Fund
HELP CETL	Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
HEROBC	Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HoldCo	e-University Holding Company
HR	Human Resources
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information Technology and Communication
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
KIS	Key information Set
LNN	Lifelong Learning Network
LSE	London School of Economics
LSC	Learning Skills Council
LTSN	Learning and Teaching Support Network
MASN	Maximum Aggregate Student Number
NAB	National Advisory Board
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NCOP	Network for Collaborative Outreach Programme
NCTA	National Council for Technological Awards

NSS	National Student Survey
NTFS	National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
NUS	National Union of Students
OCF	Open Courseware Factory
OCPA	Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
OST	Office for Science and Technology
PA	Progression Agreement
PCFC	Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
PfP	Partnerships for Progression
PGT	Taught-postgraduate
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas
PwC	Price Waterhouse Coopers
QAA	Quality Assessment Agency
QR	Research Quality recurrent funding
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REF	Research Excellence Framework
RLO-CETL	Reusable Learning Objects Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
SCEPTrE	Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principles
SDF	Strategic Development Fund
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SNC	Student Number Control
SNU	Swedish Net University

SRIF	Science Research Investment Fund
SSC	Sector Skills Council
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SQW	SQW Consulting Ltd
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
THES	Times Higher Educational Supplement
TQEF	Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund
TRAC	Transparent Approach to Costing
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
UFC	Universities Funding Council
UGC	Universities Grant Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UKeU	UK e-university
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
USA	United States of America
UUK	Universities UK
WW2	World War 2

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *1.1 Context of higher education*

The locus of policy-making in English higher education (HE) has been transformed over the last century, from one state of affairs, where universities' autonomy allowed policy-making at institutional level, to facilitate their role in enhancing social good - defined as good which does not depend upon public policy or funding (Mor Barrak 2018) - to present day policy-making where government is the focus of policy formation and the role of universities is perceived to be in aiding economic good - as defined by a good that is marketable and for which there is an opportunity cost. This evolution is set against a backdrop of wider new liberalism policy reforms (Shattock 2012) in the role of the state, globalisation, marketisation and new public management (Clark 2004).

HE is perhaps distinctive in English policy-making, in having had an intermediary body between government and institutions, with space for government's vision for HE policy to be interpreted, established and accomplished. In England this intermediary body has had a number of forms, firstly as the Universities Grant Committee (UGC), then the Universities Funding Council (UFC), and more recently (1992 - 2018), the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The role of the intermediary body has undergone significant change in the light of evolving ideologies of successive governments from a 'buffer' representing the universities in the face of government, to mediator, agent, broker, and more recently, regulator. The Office for Students, HEFCE's replacement from 2018, has terms of reference that class it as a regulatory body, and there is currently hot debate about the organisation's apparent lack of role in policy-making (Kernohan 2018).

This thesis outlines the policy work of HEFCE in detail, bringing together a timeline of policy initiatives, and illuminates understanding of these against the background of wider new liberalism policy reforms, the changing role of the state, globalisation, marketisation and new public management in HE policy-making. This work is a contribution to knowledge in itself, as I am not aware of any such thorough analysis of the breadth and depth of HEFCE policies.

## 1.2 Context of policy analysis (meanings of policy)

The meanings attributed to 'policy' have evolved over time, from simple, linear definitions, where policy is simply *formed* by the state and followed by implementation, to much more cyclical meanings, where policy is understood as a much more social, cultural and dynamic process, '*deeply imbued with values and ideology*' (Phillips 2007 p.37). In these more complex understandings of policy, the roles of different actors have agency to interpret, re-interpret and mis-interpret policy, and the spaces between formation and implementation become as important as the policy itself, as do 'policy texts' in informing an interpretation of policy (Ball 1993, 2006, 2015). In more contemporary comprehensions of policy, the *local*, as the place of implementation gains more credence (Ayres and Marsh 2013, Newman 2013, Lowndes and McCaughie 2013, Van der Steen et al 2013) and the *context of practice* (Ball 2006) is central to how policy is understood.

Approaches to analysing how governments and organisations make policy decisions and how policies are developed, implemented and evaluated have also evolved over time. The 1960s and 1970s were dominated by *rationalist* theoretical perspectives and *positivist* methodologies, which aligned well with linear understandings of policy, and drew on quantitative approaches to examine policy-making (Howlett et al 2009). More contemporary policy analysts, such as Fischer and Forester (1993) and Ball (2006) take a more '*post positive*' methodological approach, taking account of the dynamics of policy-making and the value judgements of actors in the policy process. Discourse based approaches to policy analysis (Ball 1993, Fairclough 2014, Taylor 2004), in which the policy text itself becomes central to a semiotic analysis, have also played a part. The theoretical work of Michel Foucault, who extended discourse analysis beyond linguistic approaches to those of notions of knowledge and power, has also played a significant role in how policy analysis is accomplished.

Many different frameworks for guiding policy analysts have been developed, and some of these can be categorised as either 'rational stages' or 'systems' methodologies. The work of Laswell (1971) was pioneering in this respect, as he breaks down the policy cycle into seven rational stages in which to analyse knowledge *of* and *in* the policy process, in order to ascertain how governments make policy decisions. Others, such as Hill and Hupe (2006) and Howlett et al (2009), have drawn on Laswell's early work to further develop policy cycle analysis to take account of more complex understandings of how external factors influence government policy decisions. However, such policy cycle approaches take both positivist

and linear approaches to policy analysis, and do not adequately address a post-positivist approach to take account of the dynamics of policy-making. Lindblom's (1959) and Herbert Simon's (1991) influential works question the positivist approach, and seek to embrace the influences of other actors in the policy process, accepting that they will have non-rationalist interventions bounded by their own social and political narrations. For Lindblom, like Foucault, power also becomes an important influence in the policy-making process. More recently, analysts have begun to move away from observing policy *making* to policy *implementation*, since it is in the spaces of implementation that policies are interpreted and evolve. Lewis and Flynn (1978) pioneered a '*policy-action*' framework approach, which views the behaviour of actors and their actions as influenced by their world outside their organisations (Parsons 1995) and deLeon and deLeon suggest a framework which examines '*different types of accountability under varying conditions of ambiguity and conflict*' (deLeon and deLeon 2002) in policy implementation.

Whilst all of these approaches are worthwhile in terms of seeking to reach an understanding of the policy process, its implementation and its evolutionary progress influenced by many discourses, interactions and interpretations, what is omitted is any sense of policy evaluation. Policy evaluation is an important step in the policy cycle, if policy makers and implementers are going to be able to make sense of policy. David Nachmias (1979) is considered to be the pioneer in articulating evaluation as an important part of the policy cycle. Although critiques of this early work suggest that it draws too heavily on a rationalist theoretical position and positivist approaches, more recent debate around policy evaluation, such as Dryzek (1993), has sought to address this by observing that evaluation cannot be value free. There is a choice of contemporary analytical approaches, but many current policy analysts take a post-positivist '*design approach*', (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987, Howlett et al 2009) which is interpretative in nature and more holistic, where the policy is considered not just as a process but as being influenced by ideological and social constructs, and power relations, as part of the evaluation. A more recent development in the design approach to evaluation has been the theorised work on examining policy success and failure. 'Success' and, more particularly, 'failure' are emotive terms, but are served well by an interpretative approach to policy analysis. Taking an interpretative view of success and failure is a constructive step in engaging with *policy learning*, in order to learn lessons from process, programmatic and political learning, which itself has become a theorised notion in recent years (Bennett and Howlett 1992, May 1992). Policy success and failure are

central concepts in this study, since it is through an analysis of a nuanced approach to these that the thesis seeks to illuminate understandings of policy success and failure in English HE.

### *1.3 Understandings of policy success and failure*

Bovens, 't Hart (1998) and Bovens, 't Hart & Peters (2001) are considered to be the key contributors to theorisations of policy success and failure, advocating an anti-positivist and interpretative approach to developing criteria for success and failure, whilst acknowledging that such concepts are contested social constructs with inherent value judgements. Much has been written on policy failure in recent years, Bovens, 't Hart (1998) and Bovens, 't Hart & Peters (2001), King and Crewe (2013), March and McConnell (2010), McConnell (2015, 2016), Bovens and 't Hart (2016), and the use of empirical studies to attempt to define policy failure is a common theme in the literature. There is less literature on policy success, perhaps because it does not provoke such an emotive response, and perhaps there is a perception that there are fewer lessons to be learned. Kerr (1976) sought to identify what made a policy successful, and she suggests a set of formulaic conditions to define success. Bovens, 't Hart and Peters (2001) developed a framework for locating success and failure in terms of the *programmatic* (a technographic approach) and *political* (an interpretative approach) dimensions of policy. Marsh and McConnell (2010) more recently determined that the work of Bovens, 't Hart (1998) and Bovens, 't Hart & Peters (2001) had missed a key dimension, that of policy *process*, and so devised a theoretical framework to address these, '*three dimensions of policy success*'.

However, these earlier works polarise the notions of success and failure, such that what does not succeed logically fails, and they do not take account of the fact that success is not an '*all or nothing phenomenon*' (McConnell 2010 p.55). McConnell sought to articulate meanings of policy success and crucially for this study, McConnell formulates a framework for policy analysis that examines policy success and failure in a more nuanced way, and articulates the '*grey areas in between*' on a spectrum of success and failure. His work, drawing on case studies as empirical examples, seeks to address the '*three dimensions of policy*' as '*process*', '*programme*' and '*politics*' and to position them on a continuum from success through '*durable success, conflicted success, precarious success*' to '*failure*' (McConnell 2010). McConnell also takes a post-positivist approach in recognising the context of policy-making and the influence of other actors, interventions and in particular, the role of policy in preserving the political values and direction of government. The



framework draws on more recent policy analysis approaches in evaluating policy success and failure, and has been a major contributor in recognising that success and failure are not binary positions. I consider that the McConnell framework is a useful theoretical and methodological tool to examine policy episodes, since it allows for an approach, which recognises that '*success and failure are not mutually exclusive*' (McConnell 2010) and where a policy might '*fail in one dimension*', it might '*succeed in another*' (Bovens and t'Hart 1998 p.35). As such, examining success and failure in this nuanced way could illuminate clearer understandings of how and why certain policy episodes have been perceived to succeed or fail.

### *1.4 Contribution to knowledge*

This thesis seeks to apply a chosen theoretical framework to the field of higher education policy studies in order to undertake a systematic assessment of three policy episodes and to illuminate how policy success and failure can be understood on a spectrum. The policy episodes seek to examine distinctions and commonalities of success and failure to yield insight and understanding in relation to policy learning.

Tight, in his most recent reviews of research in the field of HE (2012, 2018) argues that whilst there is a plethora of studies into various aspects of HE policy, and in particular in system policy (p.7 2012), many HE researchers '*showed little or no engagement with theory*' (p.7 2018), although the inter-disciplinary nature of HE studies lends itself well to importing theories from other disciplines - for example, sociological, psychological and management studies. Tight suggests that the situation is improving and indeed, there are examples of education theorists employing theoretical approaches, such as Ball (1990) taking a sociological approach to examining policy texts, and Taylor (2004) and Cochran-Smith and Fries' (2001) work on warrant is contextualised through language and semiotics. There has also been more recent work in using theoretical frameworks from other disciplines in examining HE policy, such as Kogan and Hanney (2000), Taylor (2004), Bacchi (2009), Hyatt (2013) and Jungblut (2015). Whilst these frameworks examine different aspects of policy, particularly in relation to texts, policy problems and systems, what is currently less well articulated in HE studies is a framework for observing policy success and failure, and in particular a nuanced approach to the success/failure spectrum.

This study addresses that space by utilising the theoretical framework described above (McConnell 2010). McConnell uses case studies of policy-making from all over the world in

his own work to illustrate the framework, for example in tax reform and environmental policies, and there are examples of others using the framework to illustrate understandings of policy success in other areas, such as Kay and Boxwell's (2015) review of health care reform in Australia. As far as I am aware, and having conducted a keyword search review of the British Library e-thesis online service, as well as a Google Scholar search, there are no other examples of studies using McConnell's framework for an analysis of policy case studies in English HE.

The context of English HE policy lends itself well to the application of a framework which recognises that success and failure is not a binary distinction, since HE policy in England has some distinctive features, particularly the presence of an intermediary body, which is unlike government policy-making in most other sectors. As such, the site of policy-making, its implementation and the actors involved adds new aspects to the process, programme and political dimensions described in Section 1.3 (p.4) above, where success in one dimension may be a failure in another. This distinctiveness provides a helpful test of the framework's usefulness. Through a systematic and interpretative thematic analysis of policy and other related texts, this thesis seeks to produce thick descriptions of three specific HEFCE policy episodes. Using these descriptions to contextualise the theoretical approach, the thesis draws upon the analytical framework to illuminate and articulate a position of success or failure in relation to each episode. As far as I am aware, analysis of these particular episodes has not been conducted with such a nuanced approach to success and failure in HE.

Tight (2017) argues that small-scale case studies are useful for making generalisations and representativeness but he also asserts that one of the difficulties with a case study approach to policy analysis is that they are often time bound and '*as such offer little to policy learning*' (p.120 2012). However, I suggest that by adopting insights into the particular policy episodes, and drawing together the distinctions and commonalities, it is possible to yield insight into future HE policy-making. Yin (2014) attests that case studies are advantageous in research requiring comparisons to explain causal links, and the evaluation criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for demonstrating credibility in qualitative, interpretative studies suggests that the ability to transfer understandings between different domains is an effective technique for establishing trustworthiness of the study. The thesis draws on the analysis of the case studies to illuminate distinctions and

commonalities, to gain insight into future policy-making, drawing on some of the theories of '*policy learning*' (Bennett and Howlett 1992 and May 1992).

Finally, this thesis offers a critique of the McConnell (2010) framework, its appropriateness and limitations, in the context of HE and contemporary models of policy analysis, as outlined in 1.2 and 1.3 above.

## 1.5 Research questions

The main research question is:

How can policy success and failure be understood, from the study of three policy episodes in the context of contemporary HE in England, by applying criteria from an existing framework for success and failure?

### 1.5.1 Supplementary research questions

- a) Does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in HE?
- b) What can an analysis of HEFCE policy-making reveal about the locus of power in policy-making in HE?
- c) To what extent is the chosen theoretical framework sufficient or inadequate in analysing policy success and failure in the context of contemporary theoretical approaches to policy analysis?

## 1.6 Theoretical approach and research methods

The theoretical framework for the study is adopted from the fields of political science and policy studies, McConnell's '*three dimensions of policy success*' (2010) as described above. This framework has been chosen over and above other theorisations because of its nuanced approach to examining aspects of success and failure, and for applying an interpretative approach to observe how policies might both succeed and fail in the different dimensions. As the researcher, I take the view that this is a useful approach to take when analysing policy episodes in the arena of HE in England, where there are distinctive features

in the policy relationship between government, HEFCE as an intermediary body and institutions as policy receivers. As such, this *context of practice* (Ball 2006) is distinctive in policy-making. It is my view that this distinctive arena for policy setting opens up possibilities for policy episodes to succeed or fail to varying degrees in the three dimensions of process, programme and politics.

A case study approach is used to inform and explain the specific policy episodes, as empirical enquiries into complex social phenomena in a real world context (Merriam 1988), to assist with explanation, description and illustration of particular incidents. Case studies are also suitable for historical research, where the researcher is reliant upon methods such as documentary analysis, rather than direct observation. Research that requires comparisons to explain causal links also benefits from the use of case studies as a method (Yin 2014), and thus this approach is used in seeking to identify commonalities and differences in each episode.

The justification for the selection of the case studies is further explored in Chapter 3, but in brief they were selected from a period in HEFCE's history in which New Labour (1997-2010), and its 'Third Way' centrist approach to policy was the adopted ideological position of the time. As such, all three policy episodes were in place between 2000 and 2010. During this time, HEFCE was rich with policy initiatives, some driven by government and some by HEFCE itself. The chosen case studies also had to meet set criteria that I have identified in order to ensure that the descriptions were sufficiently robust. Briefly (but described in greater depth in Chapter 3) the criteria are as follows:

- a) They were sufficiently time bound;
- b) The policy episode had identifiable objectives, proposed outcomes and benefits to the target group;
- c) The policy episode followed a typical policy approach by HEFCE;
- d) There were sufficient sources of data to allow for a '*thick description*' (Geertz 1973);
- e) There were sufficient secondary sources of data to allow for a richer and more textured analysis;
- f) The choice of case studies allowed for '*replication*', not '*sampling*' (Yin 2014) such that phenomena in relation to policy process, programme and politics are likely to produce results that are either similar or contrasting, but for predictable reasons;

- g) There was sufficient documentary material available to test for trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

These criteria were chosen because the first three yielded sufficient insight to meet the requirements of the McConnell (2010) framework in enabling an interpretation of success and failure in relation to the three dimensions of success, there were sufficient data sources, and the available data allowed for tests of robustness and trustworthiness, as described in Chapter 3.

The research approach is qualitative and takes an interpretive approach in seeking illumination and understanding in relation to the specific policy episodes. An interpretive approach lends itself well to the *anti-foundationalist* approach advocated by Bovens and t'Hart (1998) in articulating policy success and failure through the ideologies, social and politics value judgements and the contested observations of the many policy actors involved in English HE policy. Such an interpretive approach also lends itself well to the *realism* position advocated by McConnell (2010b) in articulating success and failure, in an '*arts and crafts*' (McConnell 2015) interpretation of the '*messy realpolitik of types and degrees of [success and] failure, as well as the ambiguities and tensions between them*' (McConnell 2015 p.221).

A historical research design approach is used as a descriptive and analytical device for the interrogation of text based documents. Thematic analysis, which is particularly applicable to qualitative case study research which utilises documents as the sources for research data (Bowen 2009) is used as a method which lends itself well to the theoretical framework for this study, in being interpretive, and understanding texts as social constructs within the social and historical context in which they are produced (McCulloch 2004). It is my opinion that a thematic analysis approach is best suited to this type of research, since it allows for a thick description of policy episodes which have now concluded (and thus are not open to direct observation) whilst giving voices to a range of actors, through both primary and secondary document sources. Whilst interviews with some of the actors might have offered other valuable insights, it would not be feasible to interview all actors given the length of time that has passed since the policy episodes were operational. Thus, with a limited number of interviewees, there might be a tendency to allow the views of one or two actors to influence the interpretation, rather than the critical and reflexive analysis of the data by me, as the researcher.

A thematic analysis approach allows reading of the texts (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) in order that emerging themes in the descriptions become the premises for analysis. Whilst the approach is interpretative, a thematic approach allows themes to emerge from the analysis, rather than these being pre-judged (Bowen 2009). In each case, the dominant themes identified were used to give an account of how the policy episode was viewed, evaluated and judged by different actors at different times. Within the context of the thematic analysis, I have chosen to take a *content analysis* approach (Scott 1990), which assesses the significance of particular details within the texts to measure the importance of particular concepts, rather than other document analysis approaches, such as linguistic (Ball 1990) or metanarratives (Roe 1994).

This study uses both primary and secondary source materials. Data is collected through close and multiple readings of a range of primary texts which include: HEFCE Board papers, circulars and annual reports, policy announcements, consultations and evaluations, to illuminate an understanding of the background, process and outcomes in relation to each case study. Further reading of secondary texts, such as academic commentaries, independent evaluations, parliamentary questions and discussions, and media reports, is then undertaken in order to identify, cross reference and codify common themes in relation to each case study.

The scope of the research is deliberately limited to policy episodes within the learning and teaching strand of HEFCE's activity. Selecting from one category allows for a greater richness in identifying common themes or contradictions arising from the policy episode, rather than selecting from more than one category, where common themes may be more difficult to identify. As such, this limits the study to identifying commonalities and differences in learning and teaching policy, but there is scope for *transferability* (Lincoln and Guba 1995) to other contexts and other HE policy areas, such as widening participation or research.

### *1.7 Organisation of thesis*

The thesis is organised into three parts. The first provides an overview of the fields of enquiry in the context of HE studies, policy studies and policy analysis, describes the chosen theoretical framework and provides a justification for the chosen research methods. The second contextualises the study, setting out a historical review of HE policy-making in the early twentieth century and the policy work of HEFCE. This part also provides a thick

description of each of the three chosen policy episodes. The final part brings together the theoretical framework and the case studies, with an analysis of the main findings in each of the episodes, to establish commonalities and differences and identify areas of policy learning for future policy setting. This section also reviews the appropriateness of the theoretical framework in the context of HE and contemporary approaches to policy analysis.

## *1.8 Description of chapters*

**Chapter 1 - Introduction:** introduction to the fields of enquiry and focus of the research questions.

**Chapter 2 – Situating the research:** situates the research within the fields of enquiry: HE studies and policy studies. The chapter includes a discussion on the meaning of policy (past and contemporary), the evolution of policy analysis studies and theoretical understandings, applied policy analysis, policy success and failure and an introduction to the methodological framework, *'dimensions of policy success'* (McConnell 2010).

**Chapter 3 – Approach, theoretical framework, research methods:** outlines the approach and theoretical framework chosen for the study and provides both a description of, and justification for, the chosen research methods.

**Chapter 4 – Contextualising the research:** describes a brief history of policy-making since the early twentieth century, documents and situates the policy work of HEFCE from 1992 – 2018, and in particular the changing ideologies for policy-making during the life of HEFCE, and justifies the choice of policy episodes as case studies.

**Chapter 5 – Case study 1:** The E-University.

**Chapter 6 – Case study 2:** Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

**Chapter 7 – Case study 3:** Lifelong Learning Networks.

**Chapter 8 – Analysis and discussion of the case studies against the theoretical framework:** draws together the evidence for policy success and failure from the case studies and using the theoretical framework, applies an interpretative approach to suggest where they might lie on the success/failure spectrum. This chapter also uses this work to identify commonalities and distinctions to yield insight into future HE policy-making. Finally, this

chapter analyses the appropriateness and limitations of the theoretical framework and, relating back to the discussion in Chapter 2 on approaches to policy analysis, discusses the framework's relevance to contemporary understandings of policy.

**Chapter 9 – Conclusions:** this chapter provides a summary of the key findings and relates the work back to Chapter 2 in situating the research within contemporary understandings of policy. This chapter outlines the contribution of the thesis to policy analysis in HE and sets out the limitations and constraints of the work. Finally, this chapter outlines some directions for future work that could add richness to the research.



## Chapter 2: Situating the research: in the fields of higher education and policy studies

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the research within the relevant fields of enquiry and literature. This thesis sits within two fields of enquiry: higher education (HE) studies and policy studies. This chapter firstly examines the study of HE as a field of research, since this is where the work of this thesis is contextualised, in order to establish how this study enhances an understanding of policy in English HE. The remainder of the chapter situates the research within policy studies, and introduces the theoretical framework used to theorise the research. This is done through a historical review of the comprehensions and concepts of policy, the historical and contemporary approaches to policy analysis, and an exploration of the notions of policy success and failure. This chapter introduces McConnell's (2010) framework for examining policy success and failure, which is central to the thesis. Finally, this chapter examines notions of '*policy learning*' (May 1992), which is also significant to the part of the thesis which explores whether lessons for future policy setting in HE can be learned from an examination of the chosen case studies.

### 2.2 Higher education studies

This thesis sits right at the heart of HE studies, in terms of both researching policy and as the space where the fieldwork has been conducted. The study of HE has become an international discipline in its own right recently, particularly in the light of increasing globalisation and the knowledge economy. As such, HE has become '*big business*' (Tight 2012) and consequently there has been a greater interest in research. Ozga (2000) asserts that new ways of researching education have been necessitated by the new order of thinking about contemporary education's place in society, and changes in the social and economic contexts which shape policy have become an important part of that research. As such, policy analysis has become a critical form of research into education (Ozga 2000).

Tight's recent insights (2012, 2018) contextualise current HE research. He divides the current debates and research into eight schema, or categories, one of which he calls '*system policy*' (Tight 2012 p.7, 2018 p.95). Within that broad category, Tight identifies a number of sub-categories: '*the policy context, national policies, comparative policy studies,*

*historical policy studies and funding relationships'* (Tight 2012 p.117). He contends, like Ozga, that policy has become a dominant field in HE studies due to the changing nature of the state's role, and he notes that,

*'With government remaining the major funder of higher education in most countries, system policy remains the crucial determinant of higher education practice. It naturally, therefore, forms a key focus for comment and research, with any changes in policy being subject to review and evaluation'* (2012 p.117).

Of those sub-categories, this study fits well within policy context, national policies and historical policy studies. The policy context, and in particular the role of HEFCE in that context, is central to the study. This study examines episodes of national policy and, like the vast majority of those that focus on national policy (Tight 2012 p.120), takes a historical case study approach. Tight argues that one of the difficulties with case studies is that they are often time bound and as such offer little to policy learning:

*'While these studies are of considerable interest and topicality about the time they are published – and of some continuing historical interest – their concerns and emphasis often soon date'* (Tight 2012 p.120).

This study seeks to address that criticism by using the case studies to illuminate particular characteristics, similarities and differences in relation to policy episodes. Although a historical approach, the thesis then seeks to apply those understandings to enlighten future policy positioning by government and the Office for Students (OfS) under a new policy setting and regulatory regime.

Tight contends that many HE researchers do not engage explicitly with theory (2018 p.7), although the inter-disciplinary nature of HE studies lends itself well to importing theories from other academic disciplines. However, there are examples of inter-disciplinary theorisation: for example, Ball (1990) takes a sociological approach in theorising how policy texts have been shaped by notions of power and discourse, as does Taylor (2004), and Cochran-Smith and Fries' (2001) work on warrant and the justification for policy is contextualised through language and semiotics. Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) contend that there is increasing interest in the use of political science in the study of education, and they provide a comprehensive review of available literature in this respect. However, like Tight (2012), they conclude that the study of education within political sciences is under-theorised:

*'Theoretical frameworks tend to be borrowed from education sociology, organisation theory or management studies rather than political science'* (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011 p.418).

There have been few examples of theoretical frameworks adopted in HE studies, although some have begun to emerge in recent years. Kogan and Hanney in their (2000) book on *'Reforming Higher Education'* adopt a political science framework for their theoretical basis. Carol Bacchi (2009) takes a discourse analysis approach in which she problematises policy through a *'framing mechanism'* (p.263) in developing her *'WPR (What's the Problem Represented)'* framework to address policy problems through the application of six questions. Although not specifically aimed at HE studies, its broad policy framework approach is easily adaptable to education. Taylor (2004) also takes similar discourse analysis approaches to policy texts, using a framework adapted from the work of Fairclough (2001) to examine education policy. Hyatt's (2013) framework for critical analysis of HE policy texts (p.43) is a more recent example, consisting of two elements, one for contextualising texts and another for deconstruction. Jungblut (2015) uses a two-dimensional analytical framework to hypothesise whether different political parties favour different HE systems, and consequently policy outputs, and how these differences can be conceptualised.

Section 2.2 (p.13) has established that interest in the study of policy in HE has grown in recent years, and that there are examples of education researchers beginning to use theorisations from other disciplines to inform studies of HE policy. There is growing interest in using theorisations from political sciences, although, as Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) attest, it is an area of research that is currently under-theorised. From an analysis of the work of Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011), and Tight (2012, 2018), in summarising current research, I have concluded that the use of a theoretical framework from political science to examine policy in HE and, more specifically, policy success and failure, is an area which is currently under-researched. Policy success and failure is explored fully in Section 2.5 (p.38) and my justification for adopting the McConnell framework for this study will be explored in greater detail there.

### *2.3 Comprehensions and concepts of policy*

This section takes a historical look at the changing understandings of policy over time and examines the work of sociologists who have added to the body of literature in defining what is meant by policy. An insight into how conceptions of policy have changed over time will assist the reader in appreciating how contemporary theorists understand the complex and multidimensional nature of policy and policy actors. This understanding is important to

the thesis, in critiquing the usefulness of the chosen theoretical framework against contemporary conceptions of policy (Chapter 8).

800 years ago, a late 1300s OED definition defined policy as '*an organised or established system of government, such as a constitution or a state*'. From the mid-1400s, the OED had developed that definition further, such that policy was for the public good,

*'a particular course of action that is adopted by government, party, ruler, politician or their representative; more generally, any particular course of action that is adopted as advantageous or expedient'* (taken from Jenkins 2007 p.30).

A contemporary dictionary (The Cambridge Dictionary 2015) defines policy as

*'a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed officially by a group of people, a business organisation, a government, or a political party'*.

Whilst there have been subtle changes to the definition over the last 800 years, what is clear is that notions of *organisation*, *government* and *action* have remained a constant feature in defining 'policy'. In the field of policy studies, however, the academic literature on the meaning of policy is rich with evolution, taking this broad definition to greater depths. Early iterations of the meaning of policy were very linear in their approach: policy was formed and 'done to' those on the receiving end. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, greater emphasis was placed on ideas of rationality, legitimacy, power and knowledge, and, more recently, more complex comprehensions have moved away from linear definitions of policy to more dynamic, cyclical definitions, where the actors involved, together with their social and cultural values, play a greater part in how policy is formed, implemented, re-formed and re-addressed. As such, there has been a shift in understanding policy from being a product, to that of a process, and finally, to policy as practice.

### **2.3.1 Linear understandings of policy**

Most of the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century explorations of the meaning of policy were linear in their description. They define policy very much in terms of *a course of action*, where an entity such as government has a legitimate and moral right to alter a course of action for the benefit of the people; examples of these understandings are given in 2.2.4.3 below. More importantly, government has the power and expert knowledge, in the Foucauldian sense of exercising power and knowledge, to take action in the form of intervention. This action is a way of organising life for a country's citizens and as a means of imposing order and coherence. Marshall, in his consideration of social policy in 1965, defined it as the

*'policy of governments with regards to action having a direct impact on the welfare of citizens'* (Marshall 1965 p.7).

These comprehensions of policy were what Colebatch (2002) refers to as *'vertical approaches'*, top down, with *'authorised decision making'* (p.39). These *'state control'* (Dale 1989) explanations assumed that the process of generating policy was undertaken by those with expert knowledge (civil servants, agents of government) and that was followed by the process of implementation as a *'separate moment'* (Alford and Friedland 1988).

The imposition of order, of taking action for the benefit of citizens, is a central idea in these 1950s and 1960s linear attempts at making meaning out of policy. Ginsberg, (1953, p24) took the position that policy was about *moral order and progress* and in 1957, Macbeath continues the theme of order, observing that

*'social policies are concerned with the right ordering of the network of relationships between men and women who live together in societies, or with the principles which should govern the activities of individuals and groups so far as they affect the lives and interests of other people'* (Macbeath 1957 p.1).

Lafitte, in 1962, continued this line of thought in relation to order, defining policy as an

*'attempt to steer life of society along channels it would not follow if left to itself'* (Lafitte 1962 p.9).

Hagenbuch (1958) continues on the same theme but, like Ginsberg, seeks to define policy in terms of progressing the lives of citizens:

*'The mainspring of social policy may be said to be the desire to ensure every member of the community has certain minimum standards and certain opportunities'* (Hagenbuch 1958 p.205).

In all of these attempts to explain policy, there is strong emphasis on the aim for policy to be beneficial, but the key observation is that there is a definite *imposing* of policy by government, by an elite power, and that policy must be *good* policy, *rational*, *ordered*, to the benefit of citizens.

The concept of policy as *action* is fundamental to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century policy meanings. In 1968, Bauer defined policy as *'parameter shaping acts'*, where governments are continuously accepting or rejecting a course of action in order to optimise decision making. He argues that

*'various labels are applied to decisions and actions we take, depending in general on the breadth of their implications. If they are trivial and repetitive and demand little cogitation, they may be called routine actions. If they are more complex, have wider*

*ramifications, and demand more thought, we may refer to them as tactical decisions. For those which have the widest ramifications and the longest time perspective, and which generally require more information and contemplation, we tend to reserve the word policy'* (Bauer 1968 p.1-2).

Titmuss, considered to be one of founding fathers of social policy analysis, defined policy as

*'the principles that govern action directed towards given ends'* (Titmuss 1974 p.23).

In this definition, as with all the earlier meanings, there is the implication of *change* from one state to another in a one-way linear process, with policy-makers having the power to effect change. The *right* of policy-makers to effect change is not questioned, since they have legitimate agency, as the knowledge experts, to do so.

Dearlove (1973 p.2) defined public policy as *'the substance of what government does'*, but he argues this from a point of view that sees policy as being defined not by what is intended, but by what can be committed in terms of resources to address a public problem. Here there has been a slight shift of emphasis from government simply taking action to achieve a predetermined result. There is now the implication that other factors, such as resources (or lack of them), can effect a change of course which might result in delivery of something different to that originally intended or desired.

In summary, there are some key themes which can be seen in these early linear characterisations of meaning of policy, particularly, that government has the *power* and the *expert knowledge* which gives it the *legitimacy* in taking a *course of action* to impose order on its citizens for their own benefit. These definitions do, however, make an assumption that governments are *rational* in their policy-making, and that courses of action are taken to the benefit of citizens, not that of policy-makers or government. This review of early comprehensions of policy contributes to the thesis in situating policy-making in HE in the twentieth century, and provides the groundwork for exploring how the locus of power has shifted with changing ideologies of different governments - on the one hand, neoliberalism approaches and greater marketisation of HE, and on the other hand, the role of the state and new public management.

### 2.3.2 Theories of rationality – a brief digression

In order to aid understanding of how policy has more recently been understood in terms of policy in practice, It is important to the thesis at this point to digress slightly from considering meanings of policy to briefly explore theories of rationality, and rational-legal authority, before adding more complexity to the evolution of understandings of policy. This is important since the majority of modern states have been considered to be rational-legal authorities, and hence all policy-making needs to be considered within that context. Those meanings considered so far, not only have linearity in common, but they all have an implicit assumption that the courses of action undertaken by governments in their policy-making are rational. Weber (1978) proposed that social action was determined by four types of rationality, the two most important for this study being *Zweckrational*, where action is purposeful and related to the expectations of others beyond the author, in a particular contextual environment, and *Wertrational*, where action is taken dependent upon an actor's, or author's, values and beliefs. In either case, action is considered to be driven by being rational, based on facts, knowledge and reason, and is therefore legitimate in its making. Weber's assumptions that all humans, and hence governments, will behave in ways that are rational has been criticised by other sociologists, for not taking into account emotions or other factors that limit people's ability to act in an entirely rational manner.

Weber, in his essay '*The Three Types of Legitimate Rule*' (1958), goes on to distinguish between '*types of legitimate political leaderships and authority: charismatic authority, traditional authority and legal authority*'. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall concentrate here on legal authority, since Weber argues that it is a key characteristic of the majority of modern states and governance. Weber argued that rational-legal authorities are able to exercise their authority and take action because they legitimise that action through the organisation of the officialdom, monopolisation of central administration and legislation, and control of citizens through taxation and physical force. These actions are seen by citizens as being both rational and legitimate, since the legal order that sets the rules is in line with other rules that govern action. Weber suggests that '*rational pursuit of efficiency*' and the '*iron caged bureaucratisation*' (Weber 1958) were at the heart of modern society. Like the linear definitions of policy already considered, this view of rational governance is a very top down, power elite model.

This brief divergence into rationality is important here since it is clear from the meanings of policy examined thus far, that in linear explanations (decisions – action), rationality is a

central undisputed notion. In more contemporary concepts of policy, which move away from these linear, rational models, the notion of an elite power becomes very much a contested notion.

### 2.3.3 Adding dimensions of complexity to comprehensions of policy

Colebatch begins to re-define policy in a more complex way. He concurs with earlier writers that policy *'is about the maintenance of order through the exercise of legitimate authority'* (in Jenkins 2007 p.24) but he argues that our previous ideas of policy rest *'on three assumptions about social order, instrumentality, hierarchy and coherence'* (Colebatch 2002 p.8), where public organisations exist to achieve particular objectives (instrumentality), that the flow of power is from governments to the people (hierarchy) and that all the actions fit together into a single system that steers and co-ordinates progress (coherence). However, it is, he asserts, more complex than this notion of social order, since action does not simply follow legitimised decision making. Colebatch introduces a new hypothesis in contrast to the top down rational view constrained by more linear definitions of policy. He proposes the concept of *tension*, where the very attributes of policy, *'order, authority and expertise'* (p.9) are likely to embody continuing tensions in policy outcomes and thus questions the legitimisation of those concepts as rational entities. This notion of tension begins to be articulated as a central theme in more contemporary meanings of policy. This is a particularly important concept for the purposes of this thesis, since HEFCE has often been described as a 'buffer' body between government and HEIs, as will be explored later in Chapter 4, in contextualising policy in terms of HE. HEFCE is perhaps unique in acting as a buffer body in public policy, and as such the locus of power in this hierarchy is less obvious. Colebatch's notion of tension then becomes an important consideration in this respect.

Colebatch also argues that there are a variety of *actors* in the policy process, suggesting that policy is *'socially constructed'* in a continual process of *'social action and interaction'* (p.13) and so begins to question notions of rational elitist power. As such, the failings of Weber's constructions of rationalist, identified in 2.3.2, begin to be addressed. Policy begins to be defined in terms of a more social and cultural process, where actors may not share the same objectives and there can be divergence between the *process* and the *experience* of the policy by the actors involved. He argues that

*'in the end, it is what policy participants do with the idea that determines what policy means'* (Colebatch 2002 p.136).



So to take these additional dimensions into consideration, other actors, and their social and cultural histories and experiences, can influence the formation of policy, negating notions of policy as equating with rationality. This work also draws on the early ideas from Lipsky, who in 1976 argued that policy also needed to take into account the interaction between policy-makers and those at *'street level'*.

A third element to Colebatch's (2002) definition is that of *choice*, where he asserts that policy meanings tend to assume articulate conscious choice, with policy being the natural action taken as a result of a decision. However, he argues, there is a tension between choice and structure, and both previous actions and the required commitment of resources in the existing system, can limit choice or equally open up opportunities for making other choices leading to different actions:

*'The experience of the policy process is often that it is the flow of action which throws up the opportunities for choice' (p.17).... 'making choices challenges the existing structure and having this structure limits the opportunity for choice' (p.18).*

Colebatch accepts that the meaning of policy reflects particular values, *'instrumental rationality'* and *'legitimate authority'*, but he describes policy as a *'concept in use'* (2002 p.20) whereby the meaning of policy is socially constructed, shaped by both historical and current actions and choices within the system, and the variety of actors and their interaction and tensions, which result in the pursuit of maintaining order.

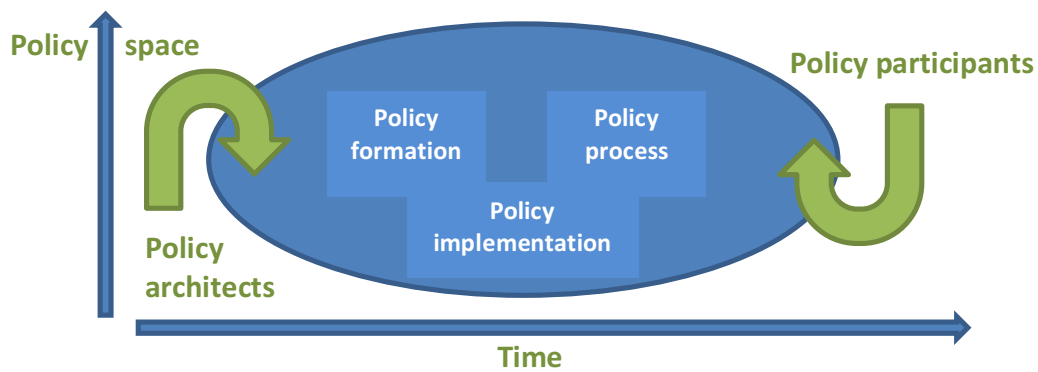
This progression from early linear meaning demonstrates that social science disciplines begin to articulate a concept of policy that is a much more interactive process, with tensions both in terms of process and action, moving away from ideas which focus on the centrality of change and *deliberate* policy process. Jenkins (2007) goes even further than Colebatch, arguing that the

*'policy process is uncertain in its outcomes, limited in its vision, partial in its scope, as inefficient as one might expect of any organisation process, and to some extent self-defeating: it is neither iron cage nor panopticon' (p.32).*

This harks back to the work of Dearlove (1973) above, for whom policy outcomes are not necessarily those intended by policy-makers, and that of Margetts, 6 and Hood (2010) on the unintended effects and paradoxes of public policy reform in modern societies, where, for example, the application of evidence based scientific knowledge or New Public Management reforms, which sought to modernise and standardise public services like universities, resulted in effects that were not originally planned.

Hill (2009) takes this a stage further, arguing that policy is an on-going and multi stranded process, where the separate moments between policy formation and implementation are interlinked. He argues that policy is not something that is defined only by its process from the point of formation by one entity, making one decision at one moment in time, but that *'policy-making process is a web of decisions'* (2009 p.16) and, like Colebatch, involves different actors at different levels of the process. Hill introduces a new element, that of time, suggesting that the web of decisions, and hence the policy direction, can continue to evolve over the course of time, beyond the initial policy process. So the meaning of policy becomes a much more holistic process, where policy formation is not 'done' in a vacuum. Hill also considers the impact of other policy decisions, such that they influence each other, in a *'crowded policy space'* (Hill 2009 p.16). Hill continues to expand this holistic notion, adding a further dimension to the matrix, that of *incrementalisation*, where policy may not always be new, but may be an incremental change to an existing policy. In this understanding of policy, implementation may also influence new increments in the policy process, or indeed the formation of new policies. As such, policy informs new policy, in what Dery (1999) refers to as *'policy by the way'* (1999 p.165-6), suggesting that policy can also be incidental. A further facet to add to this already complex understanding of policy is that of *'non policy'* (Hecló 1972 p.85), where a *'non decision'* or *'inaction'* is a deliberate act, in order to maintain the status quo or to give the appearance of coherence and order.

These comprehensions move away from the early linear understandings, to one which is much more holistic, taking account of different actors in the policy space, both policy-makers and policy participants, and accepting that policy is dynamic, with formation, process and implementation as part of a cyclical dimension that evolves over time. Taking these understandings together, this more complex meaning of policy could be pictorially represented in the following diagram, whereby policy formation, process and implementation are not linear, but conceptually interlinked and influenced at all points by policy architects and participants, within the contexts of the policy space (society) and over time:

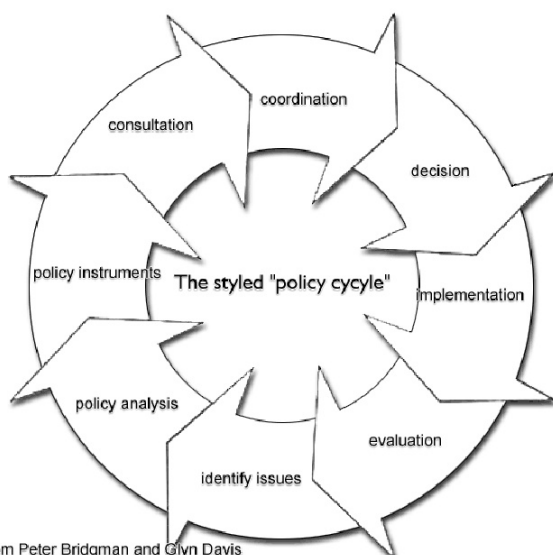


**Figure 1 – PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION OF UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLICY**

These more complex understandings begin to conceive policy as more cyclical, which suggests that policy is not a linear process with a beginning and an end, and as such it has agency. Bridgman and Davis' (2003) *'Australian Policy Cycle'* (p.100), offers a diagrammatic description of the policy cycle, although it has to be noted that their intention was to offer a practical guide to policy-makers, not a theoretical framework to articulate meaning of policy. Their work draws on that of Harold Lasswell (1951) who characterised *'policy-making as a sequence of intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal and termination'*, and there are also reflections of the work of Howlett and Ramesh, who drew up a model of a policy cycle for use as an analytical tool, by breaking the process up into a number of stages:

- *'Agenda setting;*
- *Policy formulation;*
- *Decision making;*
- *Policy implementation;*
- *Policy evaluation'* (Howlett and Ramesh 1995).

Bridgman and Davis (2004) draw on these works to develop a policy cycle consisting of eight stages, and the key purpose for including it here is to articulate how more contemporary notions of policy have begun to understand it as a dynamic course of action. Their policy cycle comprises a 'stages' approach, that has informed much of the work in policy analysis considered later in this chapter. It is also worthwhile noting at this point that there are reflections of this policy cycle approach in McConnell's framework for analysing policy success (Section 2.5, p.38), which relies heavily on the notions of policy process and implementation, which will be explored in greater detail at the end of this chapter.



From Peter Bridgman and Glyn Davis  
The Australian Policy Handbook, 3rd ed. Allen and Unwin 2004, p26

**Figure 2 – BRIDGMAN AND DAVIS 'POLICY CYCLE' (2004 p.26)**

More contemporary conceptualisations take a post-structuralism approach to understanding policy and have sought to both problematise it in terms that emphasise the dynamic nature of policy and to situate it within historical and social contexts, focussing in particular on how policy is shaped by relations of power, drawing especially on Foucault's work on knowledge and power. Fairclough (2014) draws on Foucault's theories in relation to language, power and the state to argue that language and power are intrinsically connected and, as such, the way in which policy discourse is understood and interpreted is influenced by social and political structures. *'Discourse'* in this sense is understood to be an entity or sign in language or text, such that the sign has meaning attached which is constructed within social boundaries, beliefs and practices (Fairclough 2014).

Ball (1993, 2006, 2015) also draws on this understanding of discourse in seeking to frame a theoretical approach within the context of policy, where he seeks to articulate policy as *'discourse'* and *'policy as text'*. He contextualises much of his work on policy in education, and so it is fitting to consider his work in this thesis. Ball, in his 1993 paper, *'What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes'* seeks to conceptualise *'policy as discourse and text'* as a way of getting away from the idea of policy as a *'thing'* (p.11).

Ball (2006) emphasises the importance of the *'policy receivers'* and the *'policy texts'* in making sense of policy, and it is the agency of policy that is important. Lawton (1984) describes a disconnect between policy-makers and receivers in the policy process, but Ball argues that policy is not just a legislative moment, but a dialogue and a continual process. Ball wants to

*'approach legislation as but one aspect of a continual process in which the loci of power are constantly shifting as various resources implicit and explicit in texts are re-contextualised and employed in the struggle to maintain or change views'* (Ball 2006 p.13).

For Ball, how power and subjectivity frame possibilities for thought and action are key to understanding what policy is, and argues from a position that

*'we need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge', as discourses'* (Ball 1993 p.14).

In his view, policy texts are the locus where such discourses are translated and given expression of meaning, and are

*'representations which are encoded in complex ways....and decoded in complex ways'* (Ball 1993 p.11).

So, whilst policy-makers seek to ensure that their policies are represented in a particular way, that representation itself is contextualised within a myriad of interpretations, compromises and struggles, and when a policy text is received, it can be re-interpreted, misinterpreted, re-contextualised and transformed in 'policy spaces' by receivers to suit their own agendas and meaning. As such, a policy *'is both contested and changing'* (Ball 1993 p.11) and *'implementation may be driven by different interpretations of change'* (Ball 2006 p.9).

Ball argues that state control models of policy attempt to present texts as legitimised fact, rather than the context and implementation in practice, as central to the interpretation of the meaning of policy. Ball (2006) considers that there are three contexts of policy-making: firstly, the *'context of influence, where policy is initiated and discourses are constructed'*; secondly, the *'context of policy text production'*, where texts which represent policy are generally articulated to be of public good, and can include other second hand and intertextual productions, such as those produced by the media. Often, it is only these reproductions of policy text that are publically available, and so the general populus formulate their understanding based on these texts. The third context is *the context of practice*, and it is here that readers of the text draw upon their own social and historical context to make sense and meaning from the policy text. Ball concludes that

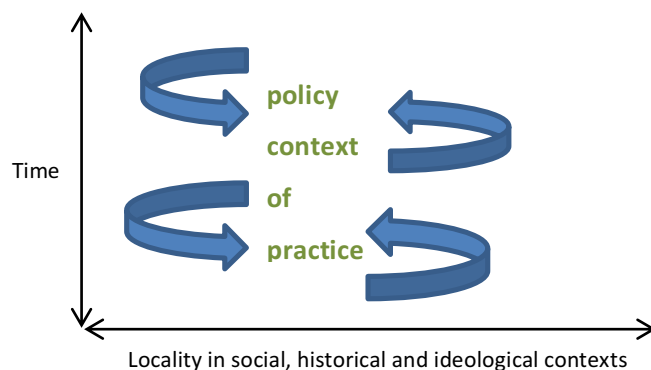
*'Policy makers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored.... the key point is that policy is not simply received and implemented within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated''* (Ball 2006 p.22).

In being re-created, the consequences for policy cannot be controlled by policy-makers, and hence space opens up for further discourses to be constructed; for Ball, it is *this* that is the policy cycle.

Taylor (2004) also draws on the work of Fairclough to examine discourse and its relationship to language in policy texts and, like Ball, uses education as a field of study in which to contextualise her research. For Taylor, analysis of the language of texts helps to highlight competing discourses, but she also seeks to examine how texts highlight discourses which are sidelined in policy implementation. Taylor argues that discourse analysis

*'can be used to explore how language works in policy texts, and in particular how it can be used to document hybrid genres and discourses, and to highlight competing discourses and marginalized discourses. These discursive and linguistic issues have implications for how policy texts are read, implemented, and how they may be used in emancipatory ways... it is possible to trace a subtle discursive shift in the policy implementation process, where social democratic discourses... have become marginalized'* (Taylor 2004 p. 444-445).

Thus far, this chapter has examined how comprehensions of policy have changed over time, moving away from the linear definitions which implied assumptions about the power of policy-makers, and suggested that policy was a process from formation to implementation. Phillips (2007 p.37) notes that these earlier definitions imply that policy is a *'technical process'*, whereas more contemporary views regard the *context* of policy as central to both process and implementation, a space where policy is formed, re-formed, and acted out, and is *'deeply imbued with values and ideology'* (Phillips 2007, p.37). For contemporary theorists, such as Ball, Fairclough and Taylor, policy is not just a *process*, policy is about *practice*. As such, policy can be represented as:



**Figure 3 – VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLICY, THE 'CONTEXT OF PRACTICE'**

To return briefly to the previous diversion, an assumption that policy-making is knowledge-based and rational; this '*policy context of practice*' understanding of policy challenges that view and hence Weber's (1958, 1978) belief that '*rational pursuit of efficiency and iron caged bureaucratisation*' was at the heart of modern society. In this comprehension, policy becomes much more fluid and unstable, and as such, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint the exact point of policy formation.

Much of the recent debate from policy theorists has delved further into this notion of policy context of practice, with particular emphasis on the importance of the *local* (Ayers and Marsh 2013, Newman 2013, Lowndes and McCaughie 2013, Van der Steen et al 2013) in policy-making, and the *agency* which individuals and local leadership have for influencing and changing policy in practice. Ayers and Marsh, reporting on the work of Van der Steen et al's analysis of schools' policy in the Netherlands state that

*'Their study shows that contextual factors and local circumstances can have a substantial, and sometimes unintended, impact on policy implementation and outcomes. In their view, only local actors are in a position to identify, predict and ultimately manage these causal influences and outcomes. This "moves the attention of policy makers from analysis ex ante towards the local knowledge of the process as it emerges"'* (Ayers and Marsh 2013 p.656).

Many of the notions identified in this section will be important to the thesis in considering the work of HEFCE. The loci of knowledge and power, and how that translates into different, and competing, discourses will be considered in locating HEFCE within HE policy-making. The locus of policy-making has become one of the most contested debates in policy studies in recent years, with discussions over the '*Quango State*' (Flinders 2008) and whether organisations such as HEFCE, have shifted policy-making from *government* to organisations whose roles are *governance* (Ayers and Marsh 2013). The notion that HEFCE acted as a buffer body opens up debate about Ball's *context of influence*, and whether it was able to re-contextualise government policy within its own ideological values, influenced by its own unique relationship with HEIs. HEFCE provides additional space for government policy to be re-formed before it is acted out in institutions in Ball's *context of practice*, which is explored in the context of the policy case studies. The notion that the '*local*', where local can be understood at both the institutional level or within HEFCE itself, as significant in HE policy will also be explored through an analysis of HEFCE's work and policy relationship with HEIs.

## 2.4 Approaches to policy analysis

This section looks at policy analysis as a field of research and how it has evolved over time as comprehensions of policy have been further developed by sociologists. This section is relevant to the thesis because it paves the way for understanding how the chosen theoretical framework can be articulated as an approach to analysing policy success and failure, explored fully in Section 2.5 (p.38). In order to examine policy analysis as a field of enquiry more fully, it is worth making a short historical detour into the changing conceptualisation of notions of public and private, and the conflict between them, since this has influenced the study of public policy in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his textbook of *Public Policy*, Parsons (1995) asserts that the relationship between public and private has dominated ‘*contemporary arguments about the role of ‘public’ policy*’ (p.4). This discussion is particularly pertinent to a study in HE, which has been the subject of considerable change in relation to understandings of the public and the private roles of universities and their funding in recent years.

‘Public’, as an idea, can be seen as the sphere of activity that is ‘*held in common*’ (Parsons 1995 p.3) and requires the intervention and regulation of government to ensure that the needs of all citizens are met, whereas ‘private’ comprises activities that are in favour of the individual. There is necessarily a tension between the two, and conflict between which interests should dominate, and at various stages of 20<sup>th</sup> century history the dominance of one or other standpoint has shaped how scholars of policy have viewed policy analysis.

### 2.4.1 A historical account of the public-private

In early 19th century England there was a very clear distinction between the public and the private, and an Adam Smith economist perspective dominated. Economic freedom was considered to be the most advantageous, using market forces for the maximisation of individuals’ interests which in turn best promoted the ‘*public interest*’ (Habermas 1989). Government’s role was to ensure that the conditions of economic freedom were such that individual interests were served. This meant that state intervention was minimal, since there was no need for excessive regulation.

However, the distinction between the public and the private began to be less clear in the late 19th century, where it became apparent that, in spheres such as education and housing, there was a need for more state intervention. In order to lift a good proportion of the Victorian population out of continual poverty, there needed to be growth in the skills of



workers and greater economic development. As such, there needed to be greater policy direction and legislation from government. Hence, Britain began to see the development of a new liberalism, with a greater balance between the public and the private interest. This was based on the belief that promoting the public interest required a certain level of 'knowledge', and public administration was the means to make it happen. This viewpoint drew on Weber's theories of rationality, as described in Section 2.3.2 (p.19), where knowledge is rational and as such a rationalist approach would naturally be in the public interest.

*'Ideas about the purpose of public policy-making were predicated on the belief that the role of the state was to manage the 'public' and its problems so as to deal with those aspects of social and economic life which markets were no longer capable of solving. The key to this brave new world was the development of a policy process and decision-making which was more informed by knowledge that it had been in the past' (Parsons 1995 p.6).*

After the Second World War, post-war liberalism began to take shape and this period saw the rise of greater public policy and public administration. However, this rise in public policy did not negate the tensions that still existed between the public and the private, and by the 1970s the problems of using public policy to promote the public interest, whilst still promoting the economic rights of individuals, were becoming apparent. As such, there was a shift back to what became known as the 'new right', with the appointment of a Conservative government at the end of the 1970s. This new vision of the public-private was advocated by Friedrich Hayek, a leading economist in the twentieth century, who argued that to resolve the tension between the two, there needed to be a reduction in the public sector and an expansion of market mechanisms. This position was adopted by the then Conservative government. However, this did not mean that the public-private had turned full circle, because in addition to the 'new right' was the rise of a new doctrine in public sector management. This new way of thinking continued through the 1980s and 1990s, and into the 21st century:

*'This argument that the demarcation between the public and private spheres should be left to the market has formed the dominant framework within which the theory and practice of public policy has taken place' (Parsons 1995 p8).*

This brief overview of the tensions between the public-private spheres and notions of the market, the state, public policy and public sector management are important to the thesis. HE is a prime example of how these differing ideological positions have been borne out in one sector of public policy over the last one hundred years. These ideas are explored more fully in Chapter 4, in contextualising HE policy.

### 2.4.2 Theoretical conceptualisations of policy analysis

Policy analysis is a multi-disciplinary approach to examining how governments make policy decisions, how policies are developed, implemented and evaluated and what influences and behaviour various actors, institutions, structures and history have in policy-making. How such analysis has developed needs to also be considered within the context of how policy itself is conceptualised, as described in Section 2.3 (p.15). Policy analysis draws on a range of other disciplines: political science, economics, sociology, psychology and history, as well as many other applied fields of study such as health, education and transport. There has been a wealth of studies in policy analysis and many theoretical, conceptual and analytical frameworks have been developed, particularly in the post-World War Two era.

This section examines two schools of theoretical thought which have been dominant in relation to approaches to policy analysis: *positivism* and *post-positivism*. Most policy analysis will follow one or other of these approaches to varying degrees, but there are other, more nuanced schools of thought as well. Positivism, prevalent as a position in the 1960s and 1970s, is considered to be the *rationalist* theory, and draws on qualitative technographic techniques to examine public policy, particularly from disciplines such as economics and especially in welfare economics, which expounds '*the notion that individuals, through market mechanisms, should be expected to make most social decisions*' (Howlett et al 2009).

Positivism recognises that such an idealistic position is not always possible, and so governments have to step in with policy decisions that will lead to better social welfare. However, this theoretical position is very much a top down approach, and is closely aligned to both the early nineteenth century views of the public-private relationship and the linear conceptualisations of policy considered above. Its principle failure is that it does not take into account the chaos of policy-making in reality, where judgements are not always rational, and can be political or value-laden. As such, it does not fit with more contemporary conceptualisations of policy.

A post-positivist theoretical stance, which has been more widely accepted since the 1990s, still recognises the value of qualitative analysis, but takes greater account of the normative and social behaviours of actors in the policy process, as well as the chaos of policy-making in reality. For post-positivists, the value judgement of policy-makers and other policy participants, such as other actors and interest groups, are of importance. For theorists such

as Fischer and Forester (1993), language, action, power and the role of persuasive arguments in policy decision-making are key to a post-positive approach. 'Non-decisions' are equally as important as decisions for analysis in this approach. Howlett et al describe some of the typical questions that post-positivists might ask, such as

*'does the program fulfil its stated objective(s)?, does the program fulfil these objectives more efficiently than alternative means available?... does the policy goal contribute value for the society as a whole?, does the policy goal result in unanticipated problems with important societal consequences?'* (Howlett et al 2009 p.29).

The post-positivist approach is much more in line with the contemporary understandings of policy that were considered in the later descriptions in Section 1.2 (p.2) (Ayres and Marsh 2013, Ball 1993, 2006, 2015, Bridgman and Davis 2004, Colebatch 2002, Hill 2009, Taylor 2004).

Many approaches to policy analysis have been developed in the last half century, all drawing to some extent on the positivist or post-positivist theoretical positions described above. For Howlett et al (2009), the best policy analysis approaches have certain key elements: they must have some knowledge of the actors involved, an appreciation of the ideas that shape policy decisions, and take account of the social and political structures,

*'actors, ideas and structures form the common ground where all policy theories converge – from different directions, and with distinctive points of view. It is in adopting and adapting these conceptual particularities that the potential for greater insight into policy-making and policy outcomes can be realised'* (2009 p.48).

Bobrow & Dryzek (1987) concur with this view in their post-positivist multi-disciplinary frames approach, where they advocate using more than one framework from a range of disciplinary perspectives to ensure that the best possible analysis can be accomplished. This thesis takes a post-positivist stance, and the multi-disciplinary frames approach is evident in the case study work, which sets out the ideological positions of government at the time of each policy intervention, the positions of policy-makers and other actors (HEFCE, HEIs) as well as the views of secondary actors and interest groups, in order to develop a thick description and deep insight into each policy. The framework proposed by McConnell, which is used to articulate a position of policy success and failure for each case study, is also post-positivist and multi-disciplinary, as it seeks to examine policy from a number of perspectives, which at the top level consider the process, implementation and political aspects of policy and at a more nuanced level, the desired objectives and outcomes and the values and direction of government.

### 2.4.3 Applied policy analysis

This section seeks to move from the conceptual and theoretical towards an applied framework for policy analysis. An exploration of how theoretical concepts can be operationalised to aid an analysis of policy will assist in articulating and justifying the chosen framework for the research in this study, as the theoretical framework is also the analytical tool applied to policy success and failure (Section 2.5, p.38). This section examines some of the historical and more contemporary policy analysis approaches described in the literature, and seeks to examine them in the context of HE studies and this study. Many of these can be categorised as either '*rational stages*' or '*systems*' approaches and, equally, as '*top down*' or '*bottom up*' approaches. All of these approaches have origins in either linear or more cyclical conceptualisations of policy, and are either positivist or post-positivist theoretical understandings to some extent. '*Rational stages*' approaches follow much the same line of thinking as the linear understandings of policy as considered in Section 1.2 (p.2), whereas systems approaches take a more post-positivist stance, which problematise policy in terms of ideology, interpretation and discourse.

The '*rational stages*' hypothesis is common in approaches to policy analysis that focus on the policy cycle. Lasswell (1971) is considered to be one of the pioneers of policy analysis and, as touched on in Section 1.2 (p.2), takes a rational stages approach. He developed the policy cycle as a way of addressing policy-making analysis and for looking at '*knowledge of*' and '*in*' the policy process. The policy cycle in Lasswell's terms is divided into seven rational stages: '*intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination and appraisal*' (in Howlett et al 2009) and it focusses on *how* government makes decisions. It allows the policy scholar to consider the policy process in bite size chunks, but what is missing from Lasswell's framework are any external influences on government decision making. Many other political analysts have drawn on Laswell's work to develop variations of the policy cycle, for example Hupe and Hill (2006), who argue that '*policy stages need to be replaced with a more complex model of the way in which policy decisions are inter-related or 'nested'*' (p.557), which they describe as still embodying the idea of stages, but more loosely.

Parsons (1995) and Howlett et al (2009) use the policy cycle as a way to examine the critical stages of the policy process in order to consider the relationships between actors, ideas and structures, although in both cases they acknowledge that this is also taking a '*stagist*' viewpoint. The stages are identified by Howlett et al (2009) as: '*agenda-setting, policy*

*formation, public policy design-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation'* and, similarly, as: '*meso, decision and delivery analysis*' by Parsons (1995). All of these approaches have one thing in common - they all contain different descriptions of the notions of policy decision, implementation and appraisal as part of the cycle. These are important considerations for this thesis, since these elements are evident in McConnell's framework for examining policy success and failure (Section 2.5, p.38). Equally, the approach for the formation of the case studies follows similar lines, examining the context for the formation of policy, how it was implemented and how it was evaluated. Indeed, it can be argued that HEFCE itself pursued a stagist approach to policy, and that these elements can be strongly observed in its policy initiatives, as will be considered in later chapters.

#### 2.4.3.1 *Decision making*

The decision making element of the policy stage/cycle is a much considered, and much contested, area for discussion by policy analysts. Early pioneers, such as Ward Edwards (1954) took a highly positivist, top-down approach, influenced by the work of Weber, in arguing that decision making by government, and hence policy, is rational, and decision-makers will make a *choice* that maximises the outcome:

*'The second requirement of rationality and in some ways the more important one, is that economic man must take his choices in such a way as to maximise something. This is the central principle of the theory of choice'* (Edwards 1954 p. 381).

In this model, government policy-making is seen to be adjacent to the market, and assumes that policy-makers will operate in the same way as decision makers in the private sector.

Herbert Simon's work (1991), which was also very influential in policy analysis, and was also a stagist and top-down approach, challenged some of these early assumptions about the way in which policy decisions are made. Simon advocated that individuals, and hence policy-makers, do not make wholly rational decisions, they exhibit '*bounded rationality*' influenced by their own history, abilities and time, and so they seek to make decisions that are reasonable rather than optimal.

Charles Lindblom was also very influential in the early development of policy analysis, and was perhaps the first to acknowledge that policy-making was more '*system*' like, without beginning or end. Lindblom's work begins to look like the more dynamic conceptualisations of policy, seeking to explain the influence of wider factors on decision making, the

discourse of other actors in the process, negotiation between actors and less tangible influences such as power. Lindblom advocated '*incrementalism*' in policy analysis, where policy is made and moved by increments, with internal and external interactions impacting on, and distorting, the policy process. He labelled his approach '*The Science of Muddling Through*' (1959). Lindblom's framework looks less rational, less top down and closer to a post-positive approach. However, one of the criticisms of this model is that it assumes that decision making will always refer back to the status quo, since decisions will always be compared with earlier decisions, and policy progress will be slow and never radical. In examining these early approaches to policy analysis in which the locus of the decision-making is the focus of the analysis, it is possible to trace parallels with the evolution of how policy was conceptualised from linear understandings to more contemporary theories, where policy is seen as highly dependent upon ideology and different discourses, and can be chaotic in its making. This is an important reflection for this thesis, since the locus of policy-making and the ideological positions of both successive governments and intermediary bodies such as HEFCE play a key role in how HE policy has been articulated and systematised in the last one hundred years, and will be explored in later chapters.

#### 2.4.3.2 Implementation

The second 'stage' of the policy cycle to consider is policy implementation, since a focus on implementation was an important pivotal moment in policy analysis. Early top-down models assumed that implementation was unproblematic, with decisions simply executed as expected. Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky (1984) are considered to be pioneers of the study of policy implementation, connected with their work in the 1970s on economic policy in the USA Economic Development Agency. They found that there could be multiple goals and decision paths for policy-makers, and that often implementation was compromised since it was not always '*carried out in the manner intended by policy-makers*', and often involved a certain amount of 'bargaining'. The work of Ball (1993) reflects this understanding, in his articulation of the *context of practise*.

Scholars such as Lipsky (1980) took policy implementation as the key to policy analysis and turned the top-down approach on its head, considering that this was not the key point of decision-making. Lipsky advocated a '*street level*' approach, in which the '*policy making community*' was dominant in terms of policy power. This bottom-up approach is also reflected in the work of Ball (1993), as considered in Section 2.1 (p.13), in which the *policy receivers* are key to understanding policy.

More recent approaches by policy analysts have moved away from top-down or bottom-up analysis, such that a 'third generation' of models has come to the fore. One of the earliest methods to consider how both approaches might be combined as part of a framework for policy analysis was devised by Lewis and Flynn (1978), as a *policy-action* framework, which considers implementation to be an evolutionary process. They

*'put forward a behavioural model which views implementation as 'action' by individuals which is constrained by the world outside their organisations and the institutional context within which they endeavour to act' (Parsons 1995 p. 471).*

In this model, it is recognised that the analysis of policy at the stage of implementation is key, but it also recognises that the approach taken by individuals in implementation is constrained, both within their own organisations and by external influences, including externally, policy-makers. Goggin et. al. (1990) took a similar approach, but with reference to game theory, looking at multiple variables such as policy changes over time and over different governments, and developed a complex model to attempt to predict how policies are implemented.

deLeon and deLeon (2002) consider an alternative approach to the top-down or bottom-up approach to policy implementation, arguing that implementation should be more democratic:

*'It does require that policy makers do more than listen to themselves, their in-house analysts, and extant interest groups. It requires that they make a participatory orientation more than a theoretic talisman and more realised in operations' (2002 p. 483).*

deLeon and deLeon (2002) suggest a framework *'to describe different types of accountability under varying conditions of ambiguity and conflict'* in policy implementation, and suggest that implementation should follow democratic procedures. However, they do acknowledge that their democratic framework does not take account of a number of other variables, such as resources, other government priorities or how policy might change over time.

For this thesis, the implementation stage is an important consideration. The way in which HEFCE implements policy will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4, but it is worth noting here that HEFCE attempts, at least on the face of it, to avoid a simple top-down approach. There is an element of consultation with policy receivers (HEIs) such that there is some discourse in addressing potential problems of implementation, and small amendments to policies are made as a result. The implementation stage is also critical to

the framework adopted in this thesis, since McConnell (2010) takes this stage to be one of the three dimensions by which policy success is evaluated, albeit in the guise of 'programme' (Section 2.5, p.38). To some extent, the McConnell (2010) framework is an extension of the work of Goggin et. al. (1990), and deLeon and deLeon (2002), in seeking to address a number of variables which include examining a policy intervention beyond the programme itself, to take account of, amongst other things, government ideological position, its goals and instruments, preserving reputation and electoral prospects.

#### 2.4.3.3 Evaluation

The third stage of the policy cycle, evaluation, considers how the policy has met its goals and how it works in reality. Nachmias (1979, 1983) is considered to be one of the earliest scholars to articulate evaluation as an important part of policy analysis. Much of the work in policy evaluation draws heavily from the positivist and rationalist movements, where evaluation is seen to be objective, systematic and empirical. As Nachmias points out,

*'the dominant paradigm of current evaluation research is goal-directed, views its role in decision making in a narrow sense, and is in the logical positivistic tradition'* (1983 p.77).

Parsons (1995) also notes that

*'The analysis of evaluation and the techniques and methods used in evaluation has, like so much else in public policy, been framed by positivist assumptions about knowledge and methods'* (p.563).

For Nachmias, the problem with such a positivist view is that, whilst evaluation analysis might follow the traditions of social sciences, it fails to account for the reality of the policy process or the 'political-bureaucratic estate'(p.77). He suggests that policy evaluation needs to be much more loosely coupled and harmonious with the policy process, and needs to go beyond simply seeking a 'continue or terminate' approach to evaluating policy.

More recent approaches to evaluation have also acknowledged that evaluation itself tends to be subjective and not value-free, and so, as Parsons concludes, evaluation is,

*'more fragmented and more alive to the political, value-based nature of the activity. The analysis of a programme or a problem is seen by many critics of the dominant paradigm as essentially a political process, full of values rather than some kind of scientific quest for truth or an objective answer'* (1995 p. 563).

A number of post-positivist approaches to evaluation have been devised; one of those, pertinent to this study, is the 'design approach'. In this approach, the political process, reality and the values surrounding the policy-making process are considered as part of the



evaluation, as are the values of the analyst. As such, it is recognised that a subjective approach is actually desirable, such that

*'The myth of neutrality is exploded. Analysts cannot avoid taking sides on very basic issues of political structure' (Dryzek 1993 p.229).*

Parsons, too, argues for such an approach. Like Nachmias, he suggests that evaluation needs to go beyond simply seeking to evaluate facts and establishing whether or not a policy has worked. The process, he argues,

*'is not to 'evaluate' in the textbook sense... the focus is on the construction of arguments and the improvement of the 'quality of debate'... frameworks are tools for discussion and critical dialogue rather than techniques to generate or provide 'answers', 'facts', costs or benefits' (1995 p. 566).*

The evaluation stage of the policy cycle is central to this thesis. The McConnell (2010) framework is firmly embedded in evaluation analysis, but is not set in the positivist traditions. Like Nachmias (1979), McConnell (2010) articulates a need to examine policy evaluation beyond simply asking 'did it work or didn't it?' and to evaluate the policy process, the programme and its place in politics as a whole. The construction of the research for this thesis takes the post-positivist *design approach* advocated above in examining the given government ideology and the context of the policy intervention. Following the design approach, in Chapter 3, I argue for an interpretative approach to policy analysis, and as such, my values, as the researcher, are inherent in the research.

Evaluation is also a key mechanism by which HEFCE examines its own policies. The vast majority of policy initiatives followed a similar pattern, with both summative and formative evaluation phases, frequently conducted by external agencies. The use of this technique by HEFCE is explored further in Chapter 4.

A key area of policy analysis evaluation that has begun to gain more credence since the mid-1990s is that of success and failure, which has not been explicitly address in the above discussion. Such notions are central to the work of this thesis, and central to the McConnell (2010) framework. This next section considers the scholarly literature on policy success and failure, before situating the work of McConnell (2010) both within the literature and the context of this study.

## 2.5 Notions of policy success and failure

Understandings of policy failure and success, as part of the evaluation stage of the policy cycle, are relatively new ideas in the field of policy studies. The last twenty years or so have seen a rise in studies on failure, although more frequently in the form of case studies as a response to particular policy episodes, rather than a systematic comprehension of how failure might be defined and analysed. A recent example of this is the book by King and Crewe (2013), *'The Blunders of Government'* which looks specifically at examples of policy failure by UK governments. Although interesting case studies, King and Crewe have been criticised (Bovens and 't Hart 2016) for failing to fully define what they mean by *blunder*. An articulation of what is meant by success and failure is an omission in many recent studies, and the emotive language used to describe failure in such studies is noteworthy: from 'human error', 'blunders', 'disasters', 'tragedies', 'crises' and 'fiascos'. There is less work on policy success, perhaps because success does not provoke such a strong reaction as failure, or perhaps because there is a perception that less learning is to be had from examining success. There has been even less scholarly work on comprehending *degrees* of success and failure. This section examines how policy success and failure have been described in the scholarly literature and introduces analytical frameworks for examining failure and success. Finally, this section takes a detailed exploration of the McConnell (2010) framework and his descriptions of the spectrum from success to failure. This section is central to the work of the thesis, since the construction offered by McConnell (2010) is adopted as the theoretical framework for examining policy success and failure in English HE.

### 2.5.1 Comprehending policy success and failure: opposite ends of a spectrum

One of the earliest attempts to define policy *success*, and to develop criteria to determine success, was developed by Kerr in 1976. In *'The Logic of 'Policy' and Successful Policies'*, she identified three types of success: *'goal attainment, implementation, and justificatory success'*, and suggests a set of formulaic conditions that define success, where a *'policy fails when it cannot achieve its goals'* or be implemented under the given conditions. She makes a distinction between success and failure: *'a policy that does not fail is successful'* (Kerr 1976 p.362).

Elements of this early work can still be seen in more contemporary understandings of policy success, particularly in comprehending the importance of determining outcomes and the policy programme (implementation). However, Kerr does not address issues such as the link

between the formulation of policy and its implementation, or the differing perspectives of different actors, which later theorists begin to challenge. For this study, the link between the locus of policy formation and implementation is key, since it can be argued that HEFCE has been unique in acting as an intermediary between government and HEIs and, as such, how and where policy is formed and implemented is of particular interest in articulating success and failure in this study.

McConnell (2010) suggests that there are three ways of looking at determining the nature of policy success: the *foundationalist* position, which articulates policy success as a 'fact', based on rational, positivist and technocratic interpretations (such as that advocated by Kerr), the *anti-foundationalist* position, where success is an anti-positivist matter of interpretation and judgement (such as that advocated by Bovens and 't Hart below), and a position based on *realism*. McConnell, in advocating a realism approach suggests a definition of policy success thus:

*'A policy is successful insofar as it achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve.'*  
(McConnell 2010 p.39).

However, there is a conflict here, since the perception of success is positioned favourably with the proponents of the policy. Those opposed to the original goals will see this *success* as *failure*.

Policy failure has proved equally difficult to define. Bovens and 't Hart's '*Understanding Policy Fiascos*' (1998) suggests that '*there is an absence of fixed criteria for success and failure*' (p.4) and like McConnell (2010) they argue that previous attempts at definition have been drawn from a positivist stance that relies on rational, technocratic and qualitative approaches and

*'the predominantly positivist mode of theory formation in fiasco analysis had conduced to a proliferation of adhoc hypotheses and incomplete frameworks'* (p.151).

Like Kerr, Bovens, 't Hart and Peters' earlier work (2001) defines failure as a position entirely opposed to success. In a more recent contribution, McConnell (2016) has attempted a more nuanced definition of failure, suggesting that

*'a policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent'* (McConnell 2016 p.671).

It is clear from these attempts to define policy success and failure that it is difficult to determine a positivist approach and conclude a definition that is entirely objective. Equally,

it is challenging to define success or failure as anything other than its opposite; that is to say, what is not a success, is a failure and vice versa.

*2.5.2 Dimensions of success and failure: process, programmatic and political*

The work of Bovens, 't Hart and Peters, although still viewing success and failure as opposing positions, takes a more anti-positivist and interpretative stance in developing a more nuanced approach. Bovens, 't Hart and Peters introduce a framework for analysis (2001, 2016) which distinguishes between *programme* and *political* dimensions of success and failure, which they define as the 'two logics of evaluation'.

<i>Reputation: Political assessment</i>	++	--
<i>Performance: Programmatic assessment</i>		
++	Success	Tragedy
--	Farce	Fiasco

(Adapted from Bovens & 't Hart (2016 p.657)

**Figure 4 - TWO LOGICS OF EVALUATION**

In this framework, programme is defined in the rationalist scientific tradition as the 'world of facts' (Bovens & 't Hart 2016 p. 256) where there are measurable outcomes, and political is defined as the 'world of impressions' (p.256) where the historical and cultural positions and perceptions of stakeholders are relevant to the perception of success and failure, and particularly how these are played out in holding policy-makers to account.

This notion of *programme* is a key concept for this study. Under this definition, evaluation is based on facts, and a policy will fail where it does not succeed in meeting its proposed outcomes. In HEFCE policy-making, the *programme* element is central to HEFCE's and government's evaluations of policy initiatives, where *facts*, measurable outcomes, determine success or failure. However, as an analysis of the case studies will demonstrate, success and failure at the programme level is not a binary concept. This is particularly conspicuous in the case study on the CETLs, which was a success in many respects at a local level but a failure at sectoral level (see Chapter 6). This concept of degrees of success or failure will be explored later in this section.

The work of Marsh and McConnell (2010) draws to some extent on the work of Kerr in recognising different types of success, and more heavily on the work of Bovens and 't Hart (2001) in distinguishing between *programme* and *political* dimensions, but also begins to develop a more multifaceted framework. For Marsh and McConnell, what is missing from the two logics of evaluation is the dimension of *process* in policy analysis. They argue that this is a crucial omission, and must be separated from the implementation stage, since a policy may be regarded as successful once it has emerged from the policy-making stage of the policy cycle, but a failure later at the programme stage. In addition, McConnell later argues that examining process is critical for examining failure, since

*'after extraordinary events and episodes, societal and institutional reflections on 'what went wrong', typically focus on processes that weren't followed properly' (McConnell 2011 p. 67).*

The *'process dimension refers to the stages of policy-making in which issues emerge and are framed, options are explored, interests are consulted and decisions are made'* (Marsh and McConnell 2010 p. 572). The *'programmatic'* dimension strongly reflects the work of Bovens, 't Hart and Peters (2001) in recognising the *'world of facts'* and describes the success of a programme (the implementation stage) based on meeting objectives and producing outcomes and evidence. The *political* dimension describes government's retention of the capacity to govern, and reflects the political logic developed by Bovens and 't Hart.

Marsh and McConnell propose a framework which outlines the *'three dimensions of policy success'* (2010) and go further than Bovens and 't Hart in identifying indicators to measure success in each dimension:

**Table 1 - MARSH AND McCONNELL'S DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESS**

Dimensions of success	Indicators of success
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legitimacy in the formation of choices: produced through due processes</li> <li>▪ Passage of legislation: legislation passed with no amendments?</li> <li>▪ Political sustainability: did the policy have the support of a sufficient coalition?</li> <li>▪ Innovation and influence: was the policy based on new ideas or policy instruments?</li> </ul>
Programmatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operational: was it implemented as per objectives?</li> <li>▪ Outcome: did it achieve the intended outcomes?</li> <li>▪ Resource: was it an efficient use of resources?</li> <li>▪ Actor/interest: did the policy/implementation benefit particular groups/interests?</li> </ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Government popularity: is the policy politically popular, did it help government re-election chances, boost government credibility?</li> </ul>

Adapted from Marsh & McConnell (2010) p.571

This framework is not without its critics, and Bovens and 't Hart (2016) are critical of separating out process, since they argue that the indicators of process success are too similar to those for political success, since they are both about reputation and legitimacy of the policy. For them, the *'technocratic side of process'* (p.659) is missing. In addition, Bovens (2010) suggests that Marsh and McConnell treat all three dimensions as equal in analysing policy success, but in fact they are not, since the programmatic and political dimensions are about outcomes, whereas process is concerned with what leads up to the adoption of the policy.

Bovens (2010) suggests that in incorporating process, the *locus, object* and *focus* of policy become more relevant than the dimensions (p.584). Bovens suggests that the original model might then be adapted, such that the technocratic element of process is articulated separately from the programmatic and political, which are redefined as policy outcomes, such that the logics of evaluation become represented as:

	<b>Programmatic</b> ++/--	<b>Political</b> ++/--
Policy process		
Policy outcome		

*(Adapted from Bovens (2010 p.585)*

**Figure 5 – REVISED LOGICS OF EVALUTION**

In defence, Marsh and McConnell are not suggesting that all three dimensions can be considered in isolation; they are indivisibly linked and, as such, there is scope for considering the technocratic in all aspects of the framework where that aids the analysis.

*'Our contribution here is to blend programme, political and process in a way which allows analysts and practitioners to approach the issue of success within a useful heuristic framework, as well as helping to develop a dialogue'* (Marsh and McConnell 2010 p.581).

However, McConnell (2016) also suggests that viewing the process, programme and political as separate elements is beneficial.

*'It is useful to separate them analytically because doing so helps develop our understanding of some of the internal tensions of policy failure, with governments failing in some respects but not others'* (McConnell 2016 p.236).

The notion of process, as separate from programme for the purposes of analysis, is also an important one for this study. HEFCE's unique position as a body between government and

institutions warrants discussion later in the thesis, in relation to the indicators of success identified in Table 1 above (p.41), and particularly in relation to the way in which HEFCE 'does' policy. Typically, policy is driven by government's ideological visions for educational and economic priorities, and manoeuvred through funding initiatives. The notion of *coalition* is particularly noteworthy in relation to the way in which HEFCE seeks to gain support for policy interventions, often through a process of consultation with institutions. Boven's view that the policy process and policy outcomes can be evaluated in programmatic terms also aids an understanding of HEFCE's position as an intermediary body, seeking to implement government policy whilst acting on behalf of HEIs, and adding an additional component to both policy process and outcomes. These themes will be explored in later chapters.

The second logic of evaluation advocated by Bovens and 't Hart, the political, allows for a much more interpretative approach to policy analysis, and the '*world of impressions*' creates the space for policy analysts to take account of value judgments, power relations and the impressions of different actors. They conclude that

*'Failure is not inherent in policy events themselves. 'Failure' is a judgement about events'* (Bovens and 't Hart 1998 p.21).

It is in the political arena that socially constructed *labels* of success and failure, which are not neutral concepts, are '*constructed, declared and argued over*' (Bovens and 't Hart 2016 p.654). McConnell (2015), too, observes that understandings of failure need to accommodate the differing views of what failure is and, as such, there will not be agreement on what success or failure means.

*'Understanding failure would be straightforward if there was universal agreement on failures being defined by breach of a universally agreed benchmark of X, but this is simply not possible, given the existence of multiple and often conflicting evaluation measures and also the propensity of policy opponents to emphasise those aspects that have failed to be achieved, and for policy supporters to emphasise those that have'* (McConnell 2015 p.227).

Such uncertainty over how to articulate success or failure begs the related question, '*success for whom?*' (McConnell 2011 p.65). Success can be a contested issue, and what might be a success for some could be a failure for others. Bovens and 't Hart (2016) acknowledge that a study of success and failure is also a study of the dynamics of political reputation, since this will be bound up in perceptions of 'success for whom'. For McConnell, success and failure can also be a politically constructed act, bound up with conceptualisations of power:

*'Failure is bound up with issues of politics and power, including contested views about its existence, and the power to produce an authoritative and accepted failure narrative'* (McConnell 2015 p. 222).

So for Marsh and McConnell (2010) this dimension in their framework is an important element in achieving a holistic approach to policy analysis, concluding that,

*'We need a framework which allows us to identify different indicators of success, while acknowledge that the internal and relational aspects of our criteria may reflect power relations and be perceived differently by different individuals/groups while remembering that some would claim policy success to be nothing more than a social construct reflecting power relations'* (Marsh and McConnell 2010 p. 570).

These notions in the political sphere reflect the contemporary understandings of policy in the post-positivist sense identified earlier in the chapter, particularly in relation to the work of Ball (1993, 2006) and that of Ayres and Marsh (2013) in identifying the context of practice as being critical to understandings of policy.

The political dimension is also important to this thesis in examining policy in HE. The existence of HEFCE suggests that there are multiple stakeholders, from government to HEFCE and institutions with multiple perceptions of what constitutes policy success. At institutional level, there are other vested interests, including students, researchers and other agencies, sometimes in other policy arenas, that might engage with institutions, including colleges and businesses, to name just a few.

The notion of a favourable political outcome is curious in terms of HE policy as will become evident from the application of the case studies to McConnell's (2010) framework that HEFCE policies, apart from those concerning fees and maintenance, rarely capture the public interest. As such, the question of *success to whom* becomes an important one, since HEIs effectively become the 'public' receivers of HEFCE policy.

HE is a good example of where there might be a degree of tension between the dimensions of process, programme and political. Where Bovens and 't Hart (1998, 2001, 2016) and Marsh and McConnell (2010, 2011, 2016) all recognise a degree of tension between the dimensions of programme and political, and in particular, as observed in the preceding paragraph, that success in one sphere could equally be a failure in the other.

*'the dynamic (dis)equilibrium between performance and reputation that may result are always the result of two different and only weakly related evaluation processes: the deterioration or improvement of its programme accomplishments as measured in technical assessment exercises; and the political waxing and waning of the coalitions of actors lending it support or criticizing it'* (Bovens & 't Hart 2016 p. 258).



*'the inclusion of 'politics' is important here, because it alerts us to the possibility of a disjunction between political and programme outcomes' (McConnell 2015 p.223).*

### 2.5.3 The 'grey areas in between' (McConnell 2015)

Thus far, notions of policy success and failure, and the theoretical frameworks examined above (Kerr 1976), Bovens 't Hart and Peters (2001), Marsh and McConnell (2010), have portrayed success and failure as being opposite ends of the spectrum, with failure being the logical conclusion where success is not achieved. However, as McConnell points out,

*'one vital part of the equation has still to be considered; namely, the fact that success is not an 'all or nothing' phenomenon' (McConnell 2010 p.55).*

The notion of tension between the evaluative dimensions described above further suggests that success and failure cannot simply be seen as opposing states. In specifically attempting to redefine a definition for failure, McConnell argues that failure is never as clear cut as outright failure. The main thrusts of his argument are not only that failure for one set of interest groups can be a success for others, but also there is a further challenge in

*'that there are multiple points in the policy cycle when an evaluation may occur, leading potentially to different outcomes. For example, projections of failure at the policy making stage may differ from an evaluation of outcomes after implementation' (McConnell 2015 p.229).*

In addition to the differing perceptions of success or failure for different interest groups, and variations over the policy lifecycle, there can be multiple competing goals for any policy intervention, and as such, success or failure can be multifaceted. For McConnell, analysing policy is very much a study of 'art and craft' and consequently analysts need to reject the foundationalist and anti-foundationalist positions, in order to adopt a position that accepts that policy is a messy activity that may succeed *or* fail, or succeed *and* fail, for reasons which may be both practical and ideological.

*'Once we conceive of studying policy failure as 'art and craft', we are better placed to navigate the messy realpolitik of types and degrees of failure, as well as ambiguities and tensions between them. The groundwork for doing so is based on a working definition of failure, namely that a policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent' (McConnell 2015 p.221).*

McConnell adapts his earlier work with Marsh to suggest a new framework for policy failure that still evaluates the process, programme and politics dimensions, but considers failure in a more nuanced way. As such, this model attempts to deal with some of the tensions that exist for different interest groups and how success or failure may occur at different stages.

**Table 2 – DEGREES OF POLICY FAILURE**

Criteria	Tolerable Failure (= resilient success)	Conflicted Failure (=Conflicted success)	Outright failure (=marginal success)
Process, programme, politics	Failure is tolerable when it does not fundamentally impede the attainment of goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is small and/or criticism is virtually non-existent.	Failures to achieve goals are fairly evenly matched with attainment of goals, with strong criticism and strong defence in roughly equal measure.	A policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent.

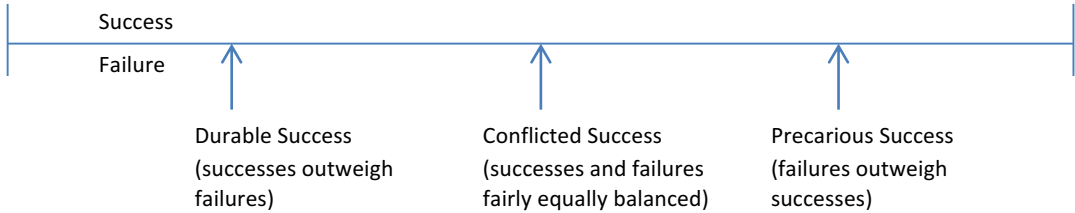
McConnell 2015 p.237.

McConnell attests that using this framework,

*‘helps us grasp the realpolitik of failure, that some failures are survivable and others not, while failure in some realms may actually be a consequence of success in others’* (McConnell 2015 p.237).

As well as beginning to understand failure in a more nuanced way, McConnell suggests that *‘success can co-exist with failure’* and as such, *‘evaluators need a typological framework to help group different types of outcomes with broadly shared characteristics’* (McConnell 2011 p.71).

Thus, a framework that turns the nuances of failure on its head to demonstrate nuances of success begins to emerge as:



Adapted from McConnell (2011 p. 71).

**Figure 6 – DEGREES OF POLICY SUCCESS**

These two framework examples in Table 2 (p.46) and Figure 6 (p.46) demonstrate how policy success and failure can be articulated in a more nuanced way. McConnell explores the *spectrum of outcomes*, the *‘grey areas in between’* policy success and failure. He suggests that

*'policy has multiple dimensions, often succeeding in some respects but not in others' and 'policies may succeed and/or fail in each of these [process, programme and politics] and along a spectrum of success' (McConnell 2010 p.345).*

McConnell introduces a more complex and nuanced spectrum of success and failure, adding more detail to the three dimensional categories of process, programme and politics, viz: *'success, durable success, conflicted success, precarious success and failure'* (McConnell 2010). In addition, McConnell provides a justification for each dimension on the spectrum to aid the analyst in seeking to determine a position. Although the visuality of the matrix suggests distinct division between each category, he acknowledges that,

*'there is no clear line dividing durable success and conflicted success (and between the latter and the next category, precarious success). Rather, they should be seen as broad positions on a continuum'* (McConnell 2010 p.60).

The spectrum of success and failure is represented thus:

**Table 3 - SPECTRUM FROM SUCCESS TO FAILURE**

<b>Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Process success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Process failure</b>
Preserving government policy goals and instruments.	Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements.	Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed.	Government's goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance.	Termination of Government policy goals and instruments.
Conferring legitimacy on a policy.	Some challenges to legitimacy, but of little or no lasting effect.	Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long term.	Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy.	Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy.
Building a sustainable coalition.	Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement.	Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation.	Coalition on the brink of falling apart.	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition.
Symbolising innovation and influence.	Not ground-breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive.	Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading (at times) to criticisms from both progressives and conservatives.	Appearance of being out of touch with viable alternative solutions.	Symbolising outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues.

<b>Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Programme success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Programme failure</b>
Implementation in line with objectives.	Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations.	Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems.	Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend.	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives.
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls.	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high-profile instances of failure to produce results.	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
Meets policy domain criteria.	Not quite the desired outcome, but sufficiently close to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria.	Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high-profile examples, eg. on-going wastage when the criterion is efficiency.	A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention; eg. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency.	Clear inability to meet the criteria.
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.	Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended.	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering.	Damaging a particular target group.

<b>Policy as politics: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Political success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Political failure</b>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders.	Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks.	Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working both for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure.	Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability.	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit.
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing.	Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed.	Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected.	Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue.	Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government's capacity to govern.
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government.	Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded.	Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has prompted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes.	Entire trajectory of government is being compromised.	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government.

*Adapted from McConnell (2010)*

This framework is helpful in allowing the analyst to determine a position that is more subtle than outright success or failure. McConnell suggests that there is often *conflict* between different types of success, because there can be some success in one dimension, but less success in another, and what is perceived to be a success for one interest group, could be a failure for another. McConnell argues that in the '*realism*' position of defining success,

*'there is often trade-off for policymakers between the three realms of policy which at times sit uneasily alongside each other. Striving for success in one realm can mean sacrificing, intentionally or through lack of foresight, success in another. Such trade-offs and tensions are at the heart of the dynamics of public policy'* (McConnell 2010 p.357).

He identifies these as contradictions which can result in a successful process but unsuccessful programme, successful politics but unsuccessful programmes, or successful programmes but unsuccessful politics (McConnell 2010).

I have chosen this framework as the theoretical approach to analysing success and failure because, for me, it recognises that success and failure in policy is a messy business, where success and failure can be multi-dimensional, succeeding or failing for practical as well as ideological reasons. Success and failure can be differently interpreted by actors at different times, and as such can be conflicted. The distinctive nature of policy-making in HE in England, and in particular the existence of an intermediary body, needs an analytical framework that is able to recognise these many facets and in particular the potential for conflict between the interest groups and the process, programme and political dimensions.

That is not to say that the McConnell framework is without its critics, or that there have not been other theorists who have attempted to improve on the perceived inadequacies of the framework. A critique of the framework is offered in Chapter 8, but for completeness this section briefly observes some of those criticisms.

It has already been noted above that Bovens (2010) is critical of McConnell's treatment of the three dimensions as equal in analysing policy success, suggesting that it needs to acknowledge that there is a distinction between the *process* which leads to policy and its *outcomes* (programme and political). Gray (2011) also takes issue with McConnell's emphasis on a *realism* approach and, in his view, an analysis of success does not work for all contexts, where it might be more appropriate to examine other aspects of policy, such as an examination of resources, to understand how different actors identify issues. Gore (2011), whilst acknowledging that the framework is useful in helping to illuminate enquiries around policy development and implementation, suggests that it has some omissions, in

particular that the framework is unable to take account of implementation gaps, and more importantly for this study, it assumes a one dimensional view of government, and



*‘ignores the key role of sub-national units and inclusive partnerships in influencing and implementing policy.....little attention is paid to how policy filters between different tiers in a national (or even supranational) policy’ (Gore 2001 p.48).*

This criticism in particular is extremely relevant to this study, given the focus on HEFCE as an intermediary body, and this will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

More recently, Newman (2014) suggests that the framework is lacking in that it does not explicitly determine who benefits from a policy and its interpretations. He suggests re-framing the dimensions into four categories: *‘process, goal attainment, distributional outcomes and political consequences’*.

*‘By evaluating these aspects of a policy separately, it is possible to provide an assessment of policy success that can account for different aspects of success and differing interpretations’ (Newman 2014 p.203).*

What is interesting about the perspective on this framework is that the spectrum of success to failure is not ‘defined’ in the style of a sliding scale, as shown in the adaptation below. To some extent, the adoption of a sliding scale tackles one of the criticisms of Gore (2011), who suggests that the McConnell framework *‘does bring with it a certain rigid stylisation’* (p.49). However, it is my view that whilst the sliding scale might allow for more fluidity, it makes articulating choices for the extent of success or failure less defensible, and as such, I rejected this as an option for the chosen framework.

	Process	Goal attainment	Distributional Outcomes	Political Consequences
<p><b>Success</b></p>  <p><b>Partial Success</b></p>  <p><b>Failure</b></p>				

Adapted from Newman (2014 p.202).

**Figure 7 – MEASURING POLICY SUCCESS**

## 2.6 Policy learning

This section briefly considers theoretical approaches to policy learning. Policy learning, in this context, is understood to be the way in which governments and organisations use knowledge of policy processes, programmes and outcomes to view problems and solutions to inform future policy decisions (IPP 2018). This is significant to the study, since it helps to answer the research question '*does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in higher education?*'. Whilst this question will be explored in detail in Chapter 8, it is helpful here to briefly articulate some of the theoretical approaches understood in the literature. This study does not seek to add to the body of literature on policy learning, but to adopt an approach to operationalise it in seeking to answer this specific research question.

Policy learning has become a significant step in the evaluation stage of the policy cycle, and in a sense completes the policy cycle, where theorists have attempted to problematise how governments are able to learn from their own policy episodes, or from observing policy in other jurisdictions. An understanding of policy learning is particularly pertinent to this study, since the case studies have been chosen from a very specific ideological period, that of New Labour, a government keen to instil evidence-based policy-making in government, as Sanderson, writing during that period argues:

*'the notion of evidence-based policy making has gained renewed currency in the UK in the context of the current Labour Government's commitment to modernise government'* (Sanderson 2002 p.4).

Much of the early literature on policy learning concentrated on conflict-based theories (Bennett and Howlett 1992), where it was understood that governments learned from how their previous policies had fared and amended their future actions in the light of the consequences and, as such, learning is concerned with conflict and power. These theorisations held strong rationalist assumptions about policy learning. However, for theorists such as Helco (1972), such an approach fails to take into account knowledge acquisition, *political learning*, not just by governments, but other actors and society as a whole. Bennett and Howlett (1992) also argue that the '*object of learning*' (p.288), what is being learned about, is not well theorised. They contend, then, that policy learning is not just about resolving conflict, it is in fact three highly complex processes: '*government learning, lesson-drawing and social learning*' (p.289). For them, it is important to

conceptualise policy learning in this way, in order to be able to operationalise policy learning for analysis. Rose (1991) contends a further conceptualisation of *lesson-drawing*, where policies in one jurisdiction are observed by other governments, and the perceived successes emulated.

May (1992) draws on these theorisations in conceptualising two alternative forms of policy learning, '*instrumental learning*' and '*social learning*', where

*'Instrumental learning entails lessons about the viability of policy instruments or implementation designs. Social learning entails lessons about the social construction of policy problems, the scope of the policy, or policy goals'* (p.331).

May (1992) also suggests that these two types of learning can be contrasted with '*political learning*' which examines '*lessons about policy processes and the political prospects of a policy*' (p.332). May's constructs allow for a more interpretative approach to policy learning. This conceptualisation of policy learning has a strong relationship to McConnell's (2010) three dimensions of policy success, particularly in articulating policy '*process, programme and politics*' and in articulating the importance of examining policy instruments and goals, the benefits for different interest groups and the sustaining of a government's political reputation to maintain their broad direction and values. Indeed, May (1992) asserts that his conceptualisation of policy learning offers much for examining policy success and failure, where

*'policy failures are useful to consider since failure serves as a trigger for considering policy redesign and as a potential occasion for policy learning... policy success might be said to provide a stronger basis for learning by making it possible to trace conditions for success'* (p.341).

More recently, Howlett (2012) has used McConnell's three dimensions of process, programme and politics to link his conceptualisations of policy learning as '*thin (technical-strategic) and thick (political-experiential)*' (p.539) to learn from policy failure. There are also echoes of the work of Sanderson (2002), who, like McConnell, advocates a '*realist*' (p.8) approach to policy learning with a *multi-method* approach.

May (1992) articulates his distinctions in the forms of learning and the sources of evidence that might be considered for each approach in order to conceptualise and operationalise his method (Table 4, p.53). Since May's approach to policy learning is so strongly aligned to McConnell's dimensions of policy success, I consider that it is a worthwhile approach to examining policy learning in the context of this study. This approach will be used in Chapter 8 to articulate what might be learned from the three policy episodes to illuminate future



policy-making in HE. The thesis does not proposed to critique this theorisation as adequate for policy learning, merely to use it as an instrument to aid understanding of learning from the policy episodes.

**Table 4 - POLICY AND POLITICAL LEARNING**

	<i>Policy Learning</i>		<i>Political Learning</i>
	<i>Instrumental</i>	<i>Social</i>	
<b>Entails learning about:</b>	Viability of policy interventions or implementation designs.	Social construction of a policy or problem	Strategy for advocating a given policy idea or problem.
<b>Foci:</b>	Policy instruments or implementation designs.	Policy problem, scope of policy, or policy goals.	Political feasibility and policy processes.
<b>May lead to:</b>	Understanding of source of policy failure, or improved policy performance in reaching existing goals.	Changed expectations concerning existing goals, or redefinition of policy goals.	More sophisticated advocacy of a political idea or problem.
<b>Requisite conditions:</b>	Improved understanding of policy instruments or implementation based on experience or formal evaluation.	Improved understanding or alteration of dominant causal beliefs about a policy problem or solution within the relevant policy domain.	Awareness of political prospects and factors that affect them.
<b>Prima Facie Indicators:</b>	Policy redesign entailing change in instruments for carrying out the policy – eg. inducements, penalties, assistance, funding, timing of implementation, organisational structures.	Policy redefinition entailing change in policy goals or scope – eg. policy direction, target groups, rights bestowed by the policy.	Policy advocates change in political strategy - eg. shifting arenas, offering new arguments, employing new tactics for calling attention to a problem or idea.
<b>Potentially confused with:</b>	Superstitious learning involving presumed superiority of a given instrument; mimicking behaviour.	Policy redefinition unrelated to change in dominant causal beliefs within a policy domain.	Haphazard change in political strategy, unrelated to understanding of political dynamics.
<b>Requires evidence of:</b>	Increased understanding of policy instruments or implications.	Change in dominant causal beliefs within the relevant policy domain.	Awareness of relationship between political strategy and political feasibility within a given advocacy coalition.

(adapted from May 1992 p.336).

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to situate the study within the fields of enquiry, HE studies and policy analysis. The study adds to previous work in examining HE system policy, a stream of HE research that has gained credence in the UK in recent years, as the locus of policy-making has shifted with the changing ideological positions of successive governments. The existence of an intermediary body between government and institutions, unique to English HE, adds an interesting dimension to the study of HE policy-making. HE studies is less well theorised than other disciplines (Tight 2012, 2018) and whilst theorists are beginning to

adopt theoretical positions from other disciplines to illuminate an understanding of policy and policy-making, what has not been well articulated is a theorised approach to policy success and failure and, in particular, a more nuanced approach to examining degrees of success and failure. This study adds to the field of enquiry in this respect by utilising a theoretical framework from political sciences to illuminate characteristics of English HE policy success and failure by considering three particular episodes.

This chapter has also situated the work within the field of policy studies, and has sought to articulate both historical and contemporary understandings of policy. Historical conceptualisations of policy were rationalist and linear in their approach, with a strong emphasis on rationalist state control. More contemporary understandings recognise that policy is historically and socially constructed and that many actors in the process bring with them their own constructs, values and ideology. As such, policy is less linear and more dynamic, and can be articulated as a '*concept in use*' (Colebatch 2002). Contemporary understandings recognise the power relationships, the influence and behaviours of actors and, as such, that policy has agency, within a '*context of practice*' (Ball 1993, 2006). More recent theorisations have sought to understand policy in terms of discourse, often competing discourses (Ball 2006, Taylor 2004), and the value of the policy text becomes central to its construction, and even deconstruction, within the context of practice. These contemporary understandings of policy are central to this thesis, since the location of policy-making and the, often competing, ideologies and constructs of the actors in HE policy, whether government, HEFCE or institutions, are central to how policy might be viewed, implemented, contested and evaluated within the context of HE.

This chapter also examined the changing understandings of policy analysis, and considered in particular three stages of the policy cycle: policy setting, implementation and evaluation. Early approaches to policy analysis were considered before moving to more contemporary post-positivist conceptualisations, which take a less technocratic approach in articulating a qualitative and interpretative approach to policy analysis, where the behaviours and value judgements of actors take a central role. This work then considered a more recent development in the understanding of policy evaluation, that of policy success and failure. Early conceptualisations considered success and failure to be binary distinctions (Kerr 1976, Bovens, 't Hart and Peters 2001) but began to theorise programme and political success as key concepts in understanding policy success and failure. More recent work by Marsh and McConnell (2010) added a third dimension, policy process, to these concepts. Finally, the

work of McConnell (2010) was explored, in developing a theorised framework approach to a more nuanced spectrum of success and failure, and the '*grey areas in between*' (McConnell 2010). This approach recognises that success or failure can be differently interpreted by different actors at different times, and an analysis of policy needs to take account of the temporal, spatial, cultural and political interpretations, as well as recognising that there will be conflict between these on the three dimensions of process, programme and politics. This understanding of success and failure is central to the work of this thesis. The work of HEFCE, and the locus of policy-making within its jurisdiction, is tempered by its relationships with successive government ideologies and often competing ideologies of HEIs. The McConnell framework was utilised to articulate a position of success and failure in these respects for the chosen policy episodes.

Finally, this chapter considered theorisations of policy-learning to aid an illumination of characteristics, similarities and differences in the chosen HE policy episodes, in order to offer insight into future policy-making. The work of May (1992) was used to operationalise a theoretical position in this respect.

Chapter 3, in discussing the overall research approach, provides more detail on using McConnell's framework as a tool for analysing policy success and failure, and describes the chosen research methods for adopting the framework.

## Chapter 3: Approach, theoretical framework and research methods

### 3.1 Approach to the research

This study takes a *qualitative* methodological research approach, as is common with much social science research. Methodology within this context of social science research is understood to be the '*systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study*' (Berg and Lune 2012). The study adopts a '*post-positivist paradigm*' (Guba and Lincoln 2005) common in qualitative research, in recognising that policy analysis requires more than a technographic approach, in which solely scientific methods are utilised in the analysis, and in accepting that the knowledge, values and histories of both the observed, and the researcher as observer, are not independent of the research. This aligns well with contemporary interpretations of policy and policy analysis, as described in Chapter 2, which also adopt a post-positivist approach in asserting that policy is bounded by cultural and societal values.

The study adopts an inductive reasoning approach in identifying patterns and observations in the case study data in order to develop some hypotheses in relation to the success or failure of the chosen policy episodes, and from this I propose to draw some conclusions in relation to HE policy-making. In line with a '*grounded theory approach*', as advocated by Guest et al (2014 p.11) the treatment of the case studies is such that the first part of each is a summary of 'what happened, when and what were the outcomes' with supporting data, in order to provide the initial data collection, before moving on to an identification of themes and an analysis of interpretations supported by the data, linked to a theoretical model.

Identification of the research approach is an important part of the research design process, in order to ensure that the approach is appropriate for the study in question and to develop knowledge in relation to the chosen field, and this study aligns itself well to an *interpretative* approach. Interpretative approaches attest that human beings make sense of their world and attach meanings to it through context and, as such, contextualisation is important in making sense of particular phenomena. This is particularly appropriate in seeking to understand policy and the socially constructed and subjective nature of policy analysis. Fischer and Forester (1993) assert that '*interpretive policy analysis*' is an

academically recognised method in the analysis of governing, and Colebatch (2014) argues that interpretation is an essential element in policy analysis:

*'taking an interpretative approach to policy should not be seen as a methodological option...but as an integral element of policy analysis'* (p.349).

Yanow (2011) also advocates an interpretative approach to policy analysis, and attests that *'local knowledge'* is key in understanding how policy actors make context specific sense of policy and its implementation. She stresses the importance of the contextual nature of knowledge, and as such argues strongly for an interpretative approach:

*'this focus on interpretation of meanings made by actors in policy and agency contexts lies at the heart of an interpretive ontological, epistemological and methodological stance'* (p.16).

This notion of local context in an interpretative approach is particularly important for this study, given the unique position of HEFCE in acting as an intermediary body. Yanow attests that the position of agencies, such as HEFCE, are just as key in making sense and meaning of policy and hence the locus of organisation is equally important to process in interpreting policy:

*'The acts of legislators and decision makers, and the actions of implementing agencies [are] potentially as central in communicating policy meanings as the enabling legislation itself. In including agency actions, policy analysis draws on ideas from organisational studies (including that aspect of public administration) as much as it does on ideas about policy processes developed within political science'* (Yanow 2011 p.8).

This concept of context is key to answering the research question, *'what can an analysis of HEFCE policy making reveal about the locus of power in policy making in higher education?'* which will be explored through the case studies and in more detail in Chapter 8.

Interpretative approaches can be open to the criticism that the evaluation is not sufficiently robust. I have observed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria to establish *'trustworthiness'* in the study of the *'credibility'* of the data and chosen texts, the *'transferability'* of my illuminations and observations to HE policy beyond the case studies, the *'dependability'* of the findings in being able to repeat the study by application of the framework to draw the same conclusions and *'confirmability'* of the study in declaring my own position in relation to it. These criteria are explicitly addressed in 3.6 below, and are implicit throughout the research design as described throughout this chapter.

For my theoretical approach, I have adopted the framework *'three dimensions of policy success: spectrum from success to failure'* established by McConnell (2010). This framework

is discussed in detail in 2.5.3, and the rationale for this theoretical approach is discussed in 3.2 below.

I have chosen case studies as an appropriate research method for articulating success and failure in policy episodes, since they are distinctive in supporting an interpretative approach (Stake 1995) and for aiding the development of a thick description (Geertz 1973b). The rationale for this method and a justification for the chosen cases is explored in 3.3 and 3.5 below. I have also taken a thematic analysis approach (Clarke and Braun 2017, Guest 2014, Nowell et al 2017) to the case studies, since thematic analysis is an appropriate research method to use in qualitative and interpretative research approaches, *'can be applied across a range of theoretical'* frameworks (Clarke and Braun 2017), and has *'theoretical freedom'* (Nowell et al 2017 p.2). The rationale for this approach and a description of the design approach is discussed in detail in 3.3. The data set used for the case studies comprises relevant historical documents, which include primary and secondary sources, and these are described in detail in 3.5.

### 3.2 Theoretical framework

Malterud (2001) describes a theoretical framework as follows:

*'The theoretical framework can be equated with the reading glasses worn by the researcher when she or he asks questions about the material'* (p.486).

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is McConnell's (2010) *'three dimensions of policy success: spectrum from success to failure'*. The fundamental assumption of McConnell's framework is that policy success and failure is not a binary position, and success or failure is possible in any *and* all of the dimensions of the policy process, programme or politics. Equally, success and failure itself is more nuanced and policies are rarely a complete success or an outright failure, with some elements of the policy enjoying some degree of success, with others being conflicted and heading towards some degree of failure. The detail of the framework is described in Table 3 (p.47). As McConnell points out,

*'There is no clear line dividing durable success and conflicted success (and between the latter and the next category, precarious success). Rather, they should be seen as broad positions on a continuum'* (McConnell 2010 p.60).

My premise in this study is that, like other policy domains, HE policies are not outright successes or failures and that by using the McConnell framework as the looking glass through which to enquire into historical policy episodes, it is possible to illuminate patterns

and observations in relation to the extent of success and failure in the dimensions of process, programme and the politics to develop some conclusions for policy-making in HE.

McConnell recognises that his framework is interpretative and, as a consequence, there are many methodological challenges to be overcome, both in the data and in articulating the values of the analyst in making interpretative judgements that must be recognised:

*'Assessing policies is riddled with ambiguities, information deficits, and value conflicts rendering it necessary for judgements and different choices to be made'* (2010 p.95).

However, he is unapologetic in recognising the *'arts and craft'* nature of such an interpretative approach:

*'Locating the outcomes of [success and failure] in any particular category is not an exact science. There will always be differences of interpretation and complex methodological issues to be recognised, as well as judgements and rationales for placing outcomes in any particular category'* (McConnell 2011 p.71).

*'Placing aspects of failure in these categories should be considered something of an intellectual mapping exercise involving judgement in order to get sense of the forms, strengths and interconnections of failure. Very few policies will fit neatly into the same category but the weighing up what factors are/are not important, is part of the 'art and craft' of analysis'* (McConnell 2015 p.237).

As such, the policy evaluator is open to criticism for making particular value judgements in using McConnell's framework. More detail on how I ensured trustworthiness in the research design and decisions is further explored in 3.3 and 3.6, but for the purposes of describing the theoretical framework, it is helpful to note that McConnell provides a ten-point scheme to offer guidance on *'weighing up different outcomes when there is conflict between them'* (McConnell 2010 p.96) and the consequences of issues (Table 5, p.60), in order to address such a criticism. He suggests that analysts need to think about these in working through the criteria for assessing success and failure. These questions form the basis for generating the coding for the study, which is explained in 3.3.

**Table 5 - SUMMARY OF MCCONNELL'S 10-POINT SCHEME TO HELP GUIDE RESEARCHERS IN ASSESSING THE SUCCESS OR OTHERWISE OF A POLICY**

1	Do you want to assess process, programme and/or politics?
2	What time period do you want to assess?
3	What benchmark will you use to ascertain success: Government objectives, Benefit to target group, Before-and-after, Policy domain criteria, Who supports the policy, Another jurisdiction, Balance sheet, Newness and innovation, Ethics, morality and the law?
4	Are you confident that sufficient and credible information is available in order to reach a conclusion?
5	Are you confident that you can isolate the policy outcomes from all other influences on these outcomes?
6	To the best of your knowledge and/or instincts, do you consider a hidden agenda to be at work?
7	Does the sphere of policy you are assessing (process, programme, politics) have more than one goal?
8	Are there any unintended consequences, including success being greater than planned?
9	Does the policy fall short of meeting the targets that were set?
10	Are you assessing more than one policy realm (process, programmes and politics)?

(McConnell 2010 p.96-101)

In choosing this framework, it is not to say that I am unaware of other conceptual frameworks that might have been adopted instead. For example, in Chapter 2, other frameworks were acknowledged, particularly those that specifically take a HE policy analysis approach, such as Hyatt's (2013) *'framework for critical analysis of HE policy texts'*, Bacchi's (2009) WPR model, in which she takes a discourse analysis approach to examine *'What's the Problem Represented (WPR)'* through a framework, and Jungblut's (2015) two-dimensional analytical framework used to hypothesise whether different political parties favour different HE systems and therefore policy outputs. However, these approaches have very different conceptual frameworks; for example, Hyatt's discourse analysis approach examines contextualisation of the meaning of policy texts and allows for *'investigation of the relationship'* between *'language, power and processes, and actors'*, and the framework recognises that

*'systems of power affect people by the meanings they construct and represent in policy texts and processes'* (Hyatt 2013 p.843).

Jungblut's framework, whilst helpful in examining the politics dimension and addressing HE as a system, does not, for me, help to address the policy process or programme elements of a policy episode.



As such, these frameworks do not explicitly offer an instructive lens for examining success and failure in a nuanced way in relation to the three dimensions: process, programme and politics. The framework proposed by Newman (2014), described in Figure 6 (p.46), draws on that of McConnell, but proposes a sliding scale of success and failure, rather than a spectrum with clearly articulated categorisations. I contend that, whilst this model allows for a greater interpretative methodology, rather than the *rigidity* (Gore 2011) of the McConnell categorisations, in my opinion it lays the analyst open to being less able to defend their interpretative positions on the scale because it loses the nuanced and more illustrative categorisations of '*success, durable success, conflicted success, precarious success and failure*' (McConnell 2010), in favour of the less defined success, partial success and failure.

### *3.3 Research design: methods of reading and recording analysis*

The two main research methods used in this study are case studies and thematic analysis, using documents as the data to inform a thick description of the policy episodes and thematic analysis to systematically capture interesting features from the data. The theoretical framework described above is then applied to each case study, in order to provide an interpretative narrative and evidenced justification for positioning the policy episode under each dimension on the framework for an analysis of success and failure. The approach taken is used to ascertain whether there are any similarities and contradictions to be understood from the analysis of those episodes, to illuminate recommendations for future HE policy. Since this study is contextualised within the field of contemporary HE, these case studies have been chosen from policy episodes formulated by HEFCE, as the key agency in policy formation.

#### *3.3.1 Case studies*

Case studies are central to the study and have been chosen as an appropriate research method because one of their most distinctive characteristics is their emphasis on interpretation (Stake 1995), and hence they fit well with the chosen epistemological orientation (Yin 2014) for this study. Case studies are empirical enquiries which allow the researcher to examine complex social phenomena within a real world context (Yin 2014, Merriam 1988) and are used to explain, describe, illustrate and illuminate particular incidents. Hence, they lend themselves well to the examination of policy episodes. Case

studies are also particularly useful for historical research, where the researcher is reliant upon methods such as documentary analysis, rather than direct observation or experimentation.

Case studies are also a useful tool when the research requires an element of comparison, as in this study, which seeks to identify commonalities and distinctions between the policy episodes. Yin suggests that they are useful

*'to explain the presumed causal link in real world interventions that are too complex for survey or experimental methods'* (Yin 2014 p.19).

Equally, Tight (2017) suggests that small-scale case studies are helpful when they are *'triangulated.. for example by comparison with other similar case studies'* (p.30). Chapter 2 established contemporary understandings of policy to be historically and socially constructed, which recognises power relationships, the influence and behaviours of actors, and the agency of policy within a *context of practice* (Ball 1993, 2006). All of these complexities can be understood in contemporary HE policy-making, which recognises the multifaceted relationship between government, HEFCE and institutions and, consequently, the context within which policy formulation and implementation is played out. Case study research in this context, then, is beneficial in making comparisons between policy episodes and in trying to answer the research question *'does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in higher education?'*

### 3.3.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a common research method in qualitative analysis, and is used to identify and examine patterns, called themes, within the data which help to explain a particular phenomenon by producing thick descriptions. This method is particularly useful for interpretative methodologies and for undertaking documentary research, which examines themes in texts. Guest et al (2014), note that

*'A thematic analysis is still the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within textual data'* (Guest et al 2014 p.10).

Thematic analysis uses either an inductive or a deductive approach (Clarke and Braun 2017). This particular study uses an inductive approach, since the analysis, as with grounded theory, is driven by a theoretical framework, and it is the use of the framework that helps to identify particular phenomena within the data. Clarke and Braun (2017) and

Nowell et al (2017) advocate that, since thematic analysis demonstrates high levels of flexibility, it has *theoretical freedom* and thus can be applied to many different theoretical positions.

There are many different schemas for undertaking a thematic analysis; for example, Guest et al (2014) advocate an *applied thematic analysis* approach which, whilst being interpretative, has a strong emphasis on positivist assumptions about the thematic nature of the data. One of the most common, and fitting well with the interpretative nature of the chosen theoretical framework, is that developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), who divide the research plan into six distinct phases. I have used these six phases as the basis for my research design. The phases proposed by Braun and Clarke are:

- 1) *'Becoming familiar with the data*
- 2) *Generating codes*
- 3) *Searching for themes*
- 4) *Reviewing themes*
- 5) *Defining and naming themes*
- 6) *Report (thick description)'*

For the purposes of this chapter, phases 3, 4 and 5 in relation to themes have been condensed into one section below.

### *3.3.2.1 Becoming familiar with the data*

The sources of texts and data for each case study and the rationale for their selection, are described in 3.5, but here it is important to establish how the texts were read, and, in particular, what techniques were used in establishing the credibility of the texts, using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluation criteria to ensure trustworthiness in the research. The notion of trustworthiness is explored more fully in 4.6.

The reading of texts is central to the research design of the study, since they are historical and social documents, which lend themselves to an interpretative study of the context of policy-making in each case (Bowen 2009). For Atkinson and Coffey (1997) and McCulloch (2004), documents are *'social facts'* and as such for historical research, they attest that documentary analysis may be the only reliable approach.

In the first instance, each document was classified as either a primary or secondary text and was given a unique identification number. I then undertook an *'analytic strategy'* (Yin 2014) as the research approach to the data, in which there are multiple readings of the content of the texts. The first reading of the texts used an analytical technique called *'explanation*

*building*' (Yin 2014, Stake 1995) to develop a descriptive account of the policy episode, identifying the origin, chronological timeline, organisations, actors, decisions, activities and outcomes of the episode. This explanation building provides the contextual richness to create an account of the policy episode. Much of the data for this reading of the texts comes from the primary data sources, such as HEFCE circulars, consultations and evaluation reports. Then I undertook multiple readings of the texts in order to establish the codes and identification of the themes as described below and summarised in Appendix B. These multiple readings are established techniques of *prolonged engagement*, which seek to *establish credibility*, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

It is also important to declare the use of another technique used to establish credibility of the data sources at this point, which is *triangulation*. This technique uses multiple data sources as a method of validation and verification (Patton 1999) of the data and is a commonly used technique for establishing trustworthiness in the phase of familiarising oneself with the data (Nowell et al 2017). Triangulation is also used as a technique to *'increase the understanding of complex phenomena'* (Malterud 2001 p.487). In the context of this particular study, triangulation was established through the sampling of a range of both primary and secondary data sources, such that the contextual richness was achieved, not just from HEFCE's own documents and reports, but from others such as government texts, independent evaluations, media reports and academic commentaries. These are listed in Appendix A for each case study.

### 3.3.2.2 *Generating codes*

The second phase of thematic analysis is the *generation of codes* (Scott 1990, Scott 2000, Bowen 2009), where *'codes are the building blocks for themes'* (Clarke and Braun 2017).

*'Qualitative coding is the process of reflection and a way of interacting with and thinking about the data... coding allows the researcher to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the data'* (Nowell et al 2017).

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) advocate developing an *'priori template of codes'* (p.82) in order to complement the research questions of the study in question, and it is while generating these codes that the adoption of the theoretical framework is established, since *'codings are essentially a way of operationalising theoretical concepts'* (Scott 1990 p.9).

To develop the coding for this study, I used the ten research questions proposed by McConnell (Table 5, p.60), in order to provide a lens to focus on the relevant characteristics

of the data. It is important to note that the questions proposed by McConnell are intended to be broad and applicable across a range of policy domains and, as such, some questions held more relevance in the context of HE than others. The codes were then cross-matched against the framework *'three dimensions: a spectrum from success to failure'* (McConnell 2010) to ensure that the coding addressed the categories on the matrix. This ensured that the coding was sufficiently rich to provide both themes, and a suitably thick description to demonstrate a justification for where on the spectrum I considered each case study to be in relation to success and failure. The coding is described in Appendix B. Each document was then analysed to see where relevant codes could be identified. Not every code was evident in every document, but the frequency with which they were referenced was noted. In addition, key sections of text were highlighted where they demonstrated important referencing to the coding.

### 3.3.2.3 Searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the next stage was identifying themes from the texts that had arisen as a result of the multiple readings to collate and code the data. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) describe the search for themes

*'as being important to the description of the phenomenon' and involves 'careful reading and re-reading of the data. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis' (p.82).*

The coding is an important stage of the process, in illuminating data of relevance to the research questions and the theoretical framework, and the coded data is extracted into the themes. The identification of themes helps to

*'bring meaning and identity.... A theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole. Themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas and experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone. A theme is not necessarily dependent upon quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question' (Braun and Clarke 2006).*

Following the advice of Nowell et al (2017), I produced a matrix in relation to the coding identified in Appendix B in order to explore themes relevant to each case study. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases, these were then reviewed in order to accommodate the theoretical framework and hence articulate a position of success or failure in relation to each dimension. Concurrent with an inductive thematic analysis approach in identifying

patterns, the themes for each case study were identified in part by the degree to which they assumed importance in both the primary and secondary texts, but also by their significance in relating to the theoretical framework. As such, my centrality as the researcher, and my interpretation, are significant to the choice of themes. My position in relation to the study is further described in 4.6.1. This also means that the account of the episodes and selected themes are biased towards the research study, and so there is a caveat that the description of the episodes will concentrate on particular aspects of the data in relation to identifying success and failure as opposed to other aspects of how the policy might be viewed. Nowell et al (2017) suggest that this is acceptable in inductive thematic analysis. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phasing approach, the themes were given names, which are reflected in the subheadings in the case study chapters.

#### 3.3.2.4 Report

The case studies are described in Chapters 5,6,7, in the form of a thick description. In each case the first part of the chapter is an account of the episode, including a description of the origin, the context within English policy-making, a timeline of events, the organisations and actors involved in both the policy formation and implementation, the activities and the outcomes. The second part of the chapter examines how the policy was viewed, both from 'official' primary sources, such as formative and summative evaluations, and secondary texts, such as academic commentaries and media reports. The themes identified in the analysis are reflected in this section. This section includes data and quotes from the texts in order to demonstrate the identified themes, as advocated by Nowell et al (2017):

*'Extracts of raw data need to be embedded within the analytic narrative to illustrate the complex story of the data, going beyond a description of the data and convincing the reader of the validity and merit of the analysis'* (p.11).

Most of the interpretative nature of the work is conducted in Chapter 8, which, for each case study, provides a mapping of the description of the policy episode against the theoretical framework, to seek to establish a position on the success/ failure spectrum in relation to each of the *'three dimensions of policy process, programme and politics'* (McConnell 2010). Chapter 8 also seeks to identify any commonalities and differences between the policy episodes, drawing on these to yield insight into future HE policy-making. As such, this chapter seeks to meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) second trustworthiness evaluation criteria, *'transferability'*, to demonstrate that the findings can

be equally appropriate in other policy contexts. They conclude that thick descriptions are a valuable technique for establishing transferability:

*'[they act] as a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations and people'* (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

### 3.4 Selection of case studies

Chapter 4 provides the context for the research in terms of the history and features of policy-making in England and, importantly, the role of HEFCE since 1992 and situates the chosen cases within the work of HEFCE. For the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to justify the choice of case studies, and this section describes the process and motivation for the particular selection. The first stage of research for this thesis was to undertake a comprehensive review of the policy work of HEFCE since its inception in 1992 and to develop as full a picture of policy-making as possible, through the construction of a timeline of policy episodes and revisions. This timeline is included in Appendix C. Policy episodes were categorised according to HEFCE's own classifications of its work, which it tended to replicate in the structures of both their annual reports and on their website. These were:

Learning & Teaching;  
Widening Participation;  
Research, Economy & Society;  
Leadership and Management and Governance.

I added a further category, 'Finance, Estates & Assurance', to capture policy episodes that did not fit within the other categories. Data on policy episodes was gathered through a *triangulation* of the reading of HEFCE annual reports, circular letters, reports from - or commissioned by - HEFCE and HEFCE Board minutes. The Board minutes mostly served to provide context for policy decisions, partly because minutes are not available on the website before 2003, and after 2003, minutes were in part missing where discussion was either commercially sensitive or referred to individual institutions.

The composition of the timeline established the extent and range of policy activity conducted by HEFCE throughout its history, and also revealed a pattern for how policy-making tended to be formulated and addressed. As might be expected for a funding council, the vast majority of policy episodes were driven through the establishment of funding made available to institutions over a specified period of time. These were

formulated in order to drive the behaviour of institutions towards particular strategies, identified by government and HEFCE as important for furthering HE. A typical pattern suggests that policy was driven by government through particular education acts and comprehensive spending reviews, which then established the policy direction for HEFCE. The locus of policy-making, as either being driven by government, or HEFCE itself, is a notable feature of HE policy-making, which is explored through the case studies. Typically, funding would be made available for an initiative and HEFCE would launch a consultation with institutions prior to seeking bids for funding. Policy episodes would typically, but not always, be reviewed through a formative evaluation, before being concluded with a summative evaluation, usually commissioned by HEFCE and conducted by independent researchers. That is not to say that all policy-making followed this 'project' approach, since HEFCE also sought to drive behaviour through regular modifications to recurrent funding policies. For this study, I established that the selection of case studies needed to offer sufficient depth and breadth, particularly in the availability of document data, to allow for a full description and interpretation against the theoretical framework. In addition, there needed to be sufficient data available to allow the conditions of the ten-point scheme (as described in Table 5, p.60) to be met. As such, the criteria for choosing case studies were that:

- a) They were sufficiently time bound, since bounding the case is important in case study research, but also the ten-point scheme suggests that identifying an end point is beneficial in applying the theoretical framework. As such, I chose not to select recurrent policies, such as funding formulas based on student numbers, as they are subject to constant amendments and re-iterations. The time-bound nature of the theoretical framework is an important topic that I will return to in the critique of the framework in Chapter 8;
- b) The policy episode had clear objectives and proposed outcomes, particularly in allowing benchmarking for the benefit target group. This was important in being able to address point three in the ten-point scheme;
- c) The policy episodes followed a 'typical' policy approach by HEFCE, such that they were launched, sought consultation with institutions, sought bids for funding and were evaluated in terms of meeting objectives and benefits for the target group;
- d) There were sufficient '*sources of data to allow for a thick description*' (Geertz 1973b) from primary sources of data such as archival records in the form of HEFCE



circulars, consultations, other government documents and independent evaluation reports to HEFCE, in order to develop proposed themes for analysis;

- e) There were sufficient secondary sources of data to allow for a richer and more textured analysis from sources such as newspaper articles, parliamentary questions and reports and scholarly articles which explored the identified themes of the chosen case studies;
- f) The choice of case studies allowed for 'replication', not 'sampling' (Yin 2014) so that they either produced a similar analysis ('*literal replication*') or contrasting results ('*theoretical replication*') (Yin 2014 p.57) in order to help answer the supplementary research question seeking to identify similarities or contradictions in the process, programme or politics dimensions of chosen policy episodes;
- g) There were sufficient documentary data available to allow the application of Yin's (2014) '*case study tactics*' to test for the quality of the research design: '*construct validity*' (using '*multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence*'), '*internal validity*' (pattern matching, explanation building, addressing rival explanations), '*external validity*' ('*using replication logic in multiple-case studies*'), and '*reliability*' ('*using case study protocol*') (Yin 2014 p.45);
- h) The availability of data also needed to be sufficient to ensure that the case studies were sufficiently robust to meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluation criteria.

Time boundedness was a key consideration in selecting case studies from a particular timeframe of HEFCE policy episodes. The Dearing report in 1997 had proposed that mass HE, whilst desirable, was not financially sustainable, and so a funding mechanism needed to be established whereby students contributed to the cost of their education. This was swiftly followed in 1998 by the Teaching and Higher Education Act, and the establishment of a means tested fee. The Higher Education Act in 2004 established an increase in fee to £3,000 per annum and fee increases continued to be a recurring trend. 1997 also saw the New Labour government elected, with an election pledge to ensure that there was a 50% participation rate in HE by 2010. Funding for HE was a priority for the new government and a comprehensive spending review in 1998 saw the introduction of additional funding. In 2001, HEFCE received an additional 10% (£1bn) in funding over three years to tackle future expansion and widening participation. One of the key features of the New Labour government was an ideology dominated by a 'Third Way', characterised by market-based reforms and wider policy aims around technology, e-government and new managerialism. In response to both the additional funding to support growth and widening participation,

and a need to ensure that HE institutions were offering value for money in an increasingly marketised area of policy, HEFCE introduced a plethora of new policy initiatives between 2000 and 2006 (see timeline in Appendix C), many of which were in supporting learning and teaching. 2006 saw a step change in policy-making, with a new Chief Executive for HEFCE and a change in focus as HEFCE became the chief regulator for HE under the Charities Act 2006. This was swiftly followed in 2008 by the global financial crisis and a further change of focus for HE amid considerable funding cuts and the introduction of variable fees. For these reasons, I chose to select case studies that were launched within the period 2000-2006, since this was a period rich in HEFCE policy episodes which reflected New Labour's 'Third Way' ideology. This ideological position is important as it is explored through the contextualisation of each case study.

In recognition of the focus of this period's policy-making in supporting learning and teaching initiatives, I chose to select three case studies from that particular policy category: learning and teaching. Selecting from one category allows for a greater richness in identifying common themes or contradictions arising from the policy episode, rather than selecting from more than one category, where common themes may be more difficult to identify. As such, this would meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluation criteria in establishing transferability.

The selected case studies shown in Table 6 (p.71) were chosen in meeting the selection criteria. That is not to say that other policy episodes would not also have met the criteria, but for me these stood out as offering sufficient opportunities to demonstrate enough similarities and differences in order to illuminate insights into HEFCE policy-making. As the researcher, I have to admit to a slight bias towards choosing the e-University as one of the chosen case studies, as it has been perceived to be an outright policy failure, and as such it serves as an excellent test for examining success and failure in a more nuanced way.

**Table 6 - MATCHING OF CHOSEN CASE STUDIES AGAINST SELECTION CRITERIA**

Policy episode	Time boundedness	Clearly identified proposed outcomes and benefit to target group	Typical pattern of policy process	Sufficient sources of primary and secondary documentation
The e-University	✓ 2000 – 2004	✓ Target numbers identified Expected increased funding for institutions Target group: home and overseas students	✓ Launch Consultation Bids for funding Formal enquiry (evaluation)	✓ See Appendix A
Centres for Excellence in Learning & Teaching	✓ 2005 – 2010	✓ Enhance professionalisation/ reputation of L&T through infrastructure and technology, rewarding staff Target group: staff and students	✓ Launch Consultation Bids for funding Formative evaluation Summative evaluation	✓ See Appendix A
Lifelong Learning Networks	✓ 2004 – 2010	✓ Increased numbers of students undertaking vocational qualifications to meet 50% participation Increased HE/FE engagement Target group: widening participation	✓ Launch Consultation Bids for funding Formative evaluation Summative evaluation	✓ See Appendix A

### 3.5 Sources of data and documents

The primary and secondary documents used for each case study are listed in Appendix A.

#### 3.5.1 Selection of the texts

In selecting the documents for analysis, I followed the selection criteria noted by John Scott (1990), Hart (2001) and McCollach (2004). They contend that, in the first instance, selected documents must be authentic in their source and authorship, the material must be credible and reliable, and any potential bias on behalf of the authors acknowledged. In addition, the selected texts must be representative of all the likely documents that might be available, and so sampling is a key issue. Scott (1990) attempts to classify types of documents in terms of authorship and access to generate a typology of modern documents, and in Scott's terms, documents selected for this study tend to form type 11, (*governmental papers to which there is open access through archives*) and type 12, (*British official publications*) such as Acts of Parliament and the Hansard record of parliamentary debates. Some are type 8,

(*published documents of a private source*), such as newspaper articles. In selecting the relevant documents and ensuring a manageable sample, the primary texts were taken to be critical to the analysis, and secondary texts were selected on the basis of either being commonly referenced in the bibliographical analysis of primary texts, or that they offered insights of particular interest to the case study, and in particular the analytic themes identified as a result of the analysis of the primary data sources.

The main reference tools used to select the primary texts for each case study were the HEFCE website (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>) for circular letters, consultations and evaluation reports. The parliamentary website ([www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)) was used in key word searches for acts, bills, committee and other governmental reports and Hansard for the report of official proceedings of the Houses of Commons and Lords. The primary texts were also very often used as sources for identifying other primary and secondary texts, and these were identified through a process of cross-checking bibliographies in a '*bibliographical analysis*' (Hart 2001). The Times Higher Educational Supplement (THES) electronic archive was also used in key word searches for media reports. The University of Sheffield Library electronic resources and Google Scholar were also used in a second level search for identifying learned journal and other media contributions as secondary texts.

I did consider using interviews with key actors who would have been involved in the development of the policy episodes at that time, as a supplementary source of data, and to increase triangulation as a technique for further establishing credibility. However, I rejected this approach, since many of those key actors would have moved on and might be difficult to contact, given the length of time since the policy episode, and hence the number who could be interviewed would necessarily be small. In addition, their judgements may also have been clouded by time, by their level of involvement and by subsequent events, which might significantly sway the documentary findings. This approach was also rejected for pragmatic reasons considering the time it would have taken to travel to, and conduct, the interviews, which would have been difficult given the nature of my full-time employment.

### *3.5.2 A note about authoritative texts and evaluation reports*

The researcher is aware that many of the chosen documents central to the findings for each case study, such as HEFCE circulars and commissioned evaluation reports, may be seen as having a particular bias. Scott (2000) in his book '*Reading Educational Research and Policy*' cautions that '*authoritative documents*' (p.19) are constructed to give the impression that

the truth is represented, and it is important to acknowledge the '*directiveness*' of any given text. Scott also cautions researchers that

*'readers of policy texts need to be aware of the need to read between the lines and understand that reading as framed by assumptions held by the writer(s) of the text'* (p.19).

For Silverman (1997) it is important to acknowledge the audience for each text, as this too will affect the construction and content of that text. Scott also cautions researchers against the perils of reading and analysing research reports, particularly in terms of their internal, external and objective validity, and notes that it is important to articulate that such reports are positioned by a set of social markers and power relations (p.48), as do Cochran Smith and Fries (2001) in their work on warrant.

Barnett and Parry (2014) contend that some actors in the policy process (such as HEFCE) may act as gatekeepers in order to influence or control findings and consequently this is challenging to the researcher in accepting the neutrality of their work:

*'Policy research, especially in a situation freighted with ideological conflict is a site of challenges: is there available a position of value neutrality to the research team?'* (Barnett & Parry 2014 p.82).

As the researcher, I acknowledge that these considerations are particularly important to my approach to the study, since HEFCE documents form a substantial part of the data upon which the thematic analysis is constructed. I concede that in each case, the particular authors of evaluations, regardless of their assumed independence, would have been aware of different ideological positions in play between government, HEFCE and institutions, and the differing power relationships between them. As such, they may present their reports in a way that favours a dominant power relationship. This issue will be explored further in 4.6.2 below in articulating the trustworthiness of the study.

### *3.6 Issues: the researcher and trustworthiness of the study*

#### *3.6.1 Positionality of the researcher*

As has been explored more fully in Chapter 2, policy-making is very much a constructed phenomenon, being historically, socially and culturally situated, and consequently policy analysis is equally recognised as being socially constructed. As such, it is impossible to ignore the position of the researcher, as a social being, as central to the interpretative methodology adopted in this study. I recognise that my own frames of meaning and

positionality will influence the way in which the research has been framed. As Scott (1990) asserts, 'no researcher can escape the concepts and assumptions of his or her own frame of meaning' (p.31). Malterud (2001) asserts that 'reflexivity' is an important consideration in qualitative research

*'at every step of the research process and reflexivity starts by identifying preconceptions brought into the project by the researcher, presenting previous personal and professional experiences' (p.484).*

In the spirit of openness, I recognise that my own professional background as a manager in an academic department of a Russell Group university over the last eighteen years will have influenced those frames of meaning and interpretations. I myself am part of the policy cycle process at a very local level, as receiver and interpreter of many policy episodes instigated by HEFCE although, it has to be noted, not directly by those chosen as case studies. I recognise that the research methodology and research design were not the only viable approach, and that they have been influenced by my own preconceived ideas, knowledge and understanding.

I equally recognise that the chosen research methods will exemplify the framing and positionality of the researcher. Case Studies themselves, whilst seeking to establish a *thick description*, will embody the interpretative stance of the researcher. As Merriam notes,

*'The importance of the researcher in qualitative case study cannot be overemphasised. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher..... The researcher as instrument is responsive to context' (Merriam 1988 p.19).*

Equally, the selection of texts and particularly the approach to the thematic analysis will embody the positionality of the researcher. However, I would argue that since the chosen theoretical framework adopted for this study is itself interpretative in nature, it is appropriate to select research methods which are also interpretative.

It is also relevant to note that I recognise that my own background in HE administration has influenced the way in which I interpret the analysis of the case studies against the theoretical framework, particularly in relation to the '*three dimensions of process, programme and politics*' (McConnell 2010). As a professional administrator, I have to declare a bias towards areas in which I have the greatest interest and therefore the process and programme implementation aspects of the framework are of greater interest to me professionally than the politics dimension.

Finally, I have to declare that, as a result of the study and delving into the work of HEFCE, I have developed a deep respect for the work of policy makers within the organisation and thus HEFCE's recent demise saddens me.

### 3.6.2 Ensuring trustworthiness in the study

In order to mitigate against criticism that the interpretative nature of the theoretical underpinning and research methods used in this study suggest that it is not robust, or trustworthy, it is beneficial to apply Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria to establish 'trustworthiness' in the study: *'credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability'* (Lincoln and Guba 1995).

They suggest that to establish *credibility* in the study, triangulation is an acceptable technique. As described in 3.5 above, triangulation was achieved through a thematic analysis of sources of data, using both primary and secondary texts, which gave a voice to different actors in the policy episode, as well as commentators such as academic scholars and the media. It was noted in 3.5.2 that I recognised the power relationship of HEFCE in relation to primary evaluative texts and the challenges that such data sources pose to the researcher. However, I would advocate that the triangulation of data through the inclusion of secondary texts helps to mitigate the accusation that HEFCE acted as gatekeeper in the construction of primary texts, since the data sources present a multi-dimensional view of the episode.

A further criticism of this study might be that I did not triangulate the documentary analysis with other research methods in order to ensure that the data collection and findings were robust. This would be a legitimate criticism, but I maintain, as Bowen (2009) argues, that

*'the rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, the immense value of documents in case study research, and its usefulness as a stand-alone method for specialist forms of qualitative research. Understandably, documents may be the only necessary data source for studies designed within an interpretive paradigm,... or it may simply be the only viable source, as in historical and cross-cultural research'* (p.29).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is important to show that the study has *transferability* to other contexts and that thick descriptions are a useful technique for demonstrating this. This study demonstrates transferability by using the thick descriptions of the case studies to articulate commonalities and differences between the studies, in order to yield some insight into future HE policy-making. This is the basis for answering one

of the supplementary research questions. The third criterion for Lincoln and Guba (1985) is *dependability*, 'where the findings are consistent and could be repeated'. I would suggest that the theoretical framework, and the consistent application of the ten-point scheme for assessing success and failure against the '*three dimensions of process, programme and politics*' (McConnell 2010), should ensure that the application of the framework at different times would produce the same results.

Finally, the study should show *confirmability*, or the degree to which the findings are moulded by the position of the researcher. Techniques for demonstrating confirmability include reflexivity. I have argued for an interpretative approach to this study, since policy research is socially, culturally and historically constructed, and as such warrants an interpretative approach. I have also declared my own positionality in relation to this study.

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter has described the overall approach to the research design for this study, in being qualitative and interpretative. The rationale for the choice of theoretical framework, McConnell's (2010) '*three dimensions of policy success: the spectrum from success to failure*' has been articulated, and the chosen research methods, case studies and a thematic analysis of documentary sources have been rationalised. My positionality as the researcher, as a social being in the interpretative approach, is recognised as being central to the research design and conclusions. This chapter has also sought to evidence how the research design techniques meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness evaluation criteria.



## **Chapter 4: Contextualising the Research: An historical commentary on higher education policy-making in England and the role of the intermediary bodies, the work of the HEFCE (1992 – 2018) and situating the case studies as examples of HEFCE’s role in policy-making**

### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter contextualises the research by firstly providing an historical account of English HE policy-making, with Sections 4.2 (p.78) to 4.6 (p.84) describing policy development since the start of the twentieth century and a discussion on the role of the intermediary bodies between government and institutions (UGC, UFC, HEFCE). This discussion informs the research by illuminating the changing nature of those intermediary bodies and their influence on the locus of HE policy-making, through shifts in successive governments’ political ideological standpoints and policy agendas. This is important for the thesis because in Section 4.9 (p.120), I return to the idea of a relationship between the role of the intermediary body and the locus of influence of policy-making since this is helpful in addressing the research question, *‘what can an analysis of HEFCE policy-making reveal about the locus of power in policy-making in higher education?’*, which is discussed in Chapter 8. Sections 4.7 (p.86) and 4.8 (p.89) provide an account of the work of HEFCE from 1992 – 2018, informed by wider government policy agendas and reforms. The HEFCE policy data gathered for the timeline in Appendix C is used to enrich this account and to highlight particular policy episodes to demonstrate the breadth and scale of HEFCE policy-making during different phases of its existence. This is important to the research since it provides the data set from which I selected the chosen case studies, and illuminates the way in which HEFCE has implemented governments’ HE policy agendas, how it has influenced and implemented policy-making and how it has had to adapt its own ideological position to accommodate shifts in its role. This helps to address the research questions by identifying policy episodes that indicate success and failure, as well as common characteristics and differences in the way in which HEFCE has articulated and addressed them.

This thesis concentrates on HEFCE, rather than the work of the other UK Funding Councils (Northern Ireland Higher Education Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales,

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council) , although I recognise the importance of all four funding councils in shaping the landscape of HE since 1992. As the researcher, I have to declare an interest in HE policy in England, since my professional history is entirely contextualised within English HE institutions.

This chapter makes reference to a number of HEFCE circulars, reports and other published documents. These are referenced by their identification number, eg. 14/2006 (circulars) and 2006/14 (reports and other documents). These are listed in the references under 'HEFCE'.

## 4.2 *Inside outwards policy*

Before the twentieth century, there were a very small number of universities in England, and the majority of funding came from private endowments. The notion of a 'system' of higher education (Tight 2009) did not exist and policy-making was at an institutional level. The autonomous roles of universities were more cognisant of the regional and industrial associations of the business elite, rather than the state (Cochrane and Williams 2010). Shattock describes this phase of university history as *inside outwards* driven policy (Shattock 2006). Although HE did expand in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, with newly formed universities such as the University of Durham, new institutions tended to establish themselves in the mould of the ancient institutions, Oxford and Cambridge, and consequently HE was still, for the most part, for the elite. The establishment of the civic universities in the twentieth century sought to more evenly spread HE throughout the country, with a strong focus on the regional industrial need to train workers, which Tight (2009) describes as '*a Victorian, private sector version of the contemporary UK widening participation policies*' (p. 14). Alongside the establishment of more universities, there was also an expansion of a range of colleges, aligned to particular professions and focussed on vocational training, such as art and design, and teaching training, and an establishment of technical colleges. This divide in universities and colleges, and the polarisation of university education and vocational training was to continue to be a contested issue throughout the history of English HE. As Tight (2009) describes:

*'the liberal/ vocational tension was deeply embedded in the emergent UK higher education system before the end of the nineteenth century, and has remained a key issue ever since'* (p.11).

At this point in history, government and institutions operated under the *Haldane Principle*, whereby researchers chose how to spend research funds, rather than as a result of

decisions motivated by political ideologies. Following the First World War, there was a decline in private funding of universities, but equally a greater appreciation of how universities might be able to contribute to the economy, particularly through training in sciences and technology. Thus, the state began to take a role in funding HE and, in 1919, the University Grants Committee (UGC) was established. It had no statutory basis, and its primary role was to distribute grants to institutions and to act as an advisory committee, establishing the financial needs of universities and making recommendations to government (directly to the Treasury). It received income as grant-in-aid, where public funds came directly from central government, but decisions on its use were independent of the state. Taggart suggests that:

*'The UGC established itself as an enabling organisation that supported rather than planned the activities and direction of the universities. And this is an important distinction. The fact that the UGC allocated government funding did not lead the UGC to move to the conclusion that it had the right or responsibility to manage the higher education sector' (Taggart 2003 p.39).*

The Committee established itself as an intermediary between universities and government, as *'an ideal 'buffer' body'* (Tight 2009 p.24) and from the universities' point of view, maintaining this relationship was considered crucial if their autonomy was to continue. However, government warned universities that if they wanted to maintain that autonomy, they needed to retain a large element of private funding and not look to the state to provide. In 1936, Neville Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, warned universities that

*'if this [autonomous] character is to be maintained.... this condition places a limit upon the extent to which the universities should look to the state as a principal source of revenue' (TES March 1936 - in Salter & Tapper 1994 p.106).*

### **4.3 A system of higher education**

Despite the government warning, by the end of the Second World War the state had become the principal funder of HE. The 1944 Education Act, and the first post war Labour government, saw an increased interest in social reform and, consequently, a greater percentage of the population completing a secondary education. Therefore, there were more young people suitably qualified to enter HE. In addition, the state required more of the population to develop relevant skills to undertake new forms of work to expand the economy which had suffered during the war. Hence, there was an expectation that universities would increase student numbers and undertake more scientific research to

address the economic situation. To meet this new demand, state funding, which prior to WW2 had been £2.25m annually, increased to £8m in 1945-6 and £16.6m by 1950-51 (Tight 2009 p.60).

The Barlow Report (1946) acknowledged that if universities were to meet the economic needs of the nation, then greater guidance from government would be expected (Salter & Tapper 1994). Consequently there was a change to UGC's terms of reference, gaining a greater role in planning, with funding directed at particular activities. Institutions were expected to respond to government priorities, which brings into question the commitment of government to maintain the Haldane Principle.

*'Thus by 1947, the UGC had already changed its role from a distributor of money to an agent of planning, even though the planning was of the simplest kind, depending on collecting estimates from universities and comparing them with 'targets' set out in official papers' (Tight 2009 p.125).*

This increased role in central planning is a critical step change in the history of HE, since the notion of HE as a 'system', with a national provision and priorities, begins to be given greater credence. The relationship between the state and HE had shifted and there was the potential for policy to become a contested area, with institutions feeling a loss of autonomy and greater state control. However, in reality there was little conflict, since institutions were content to expand student numbers and invest in research, and the state was content to fund it. UGC therefore, despite its change of focus, was still able to act out its role as a buffer body. As Taggart points out:

*'Within the framework of a post-war consensus, the UGC did not need to play the role of mediator between government and the university sector. There was nothing to mediate: the Government was willing, within the constraints of the budgetary process, to provide ever increasing funding to the universities' (Taggart 2003 p.40).*

#### **4.4 Massification whilst maintaining the unit of resource**

During the 1950s and 1960s, with a return to a Conservative government, there was a rapid expansion in the number of HE institutions, with a number of regional colleges achieving university status. In 1955, the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) was established, followed by a growth in the number of Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs), offering technical diplomas in HE. The 1960s saw the establishment of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the creation of more than 30 polytechnics across the UK, with degrees validated by CNAA. The development of the polytechnics saw the creation of the *binary divide* between polytechnics and universities (Parry 2001, Tight

2009). This expansion of HE institutions was matched by an expansion in student numbers and the *massification* of HE (Tight 2009). Critically, this expansion of student numbers was matched by an expansion of both academic staff numbers and government funding and, consequently, the unit of resource was maintained.

There continued to be pressure from government for universities to take more account of the scientific and economic needs of the country, resulting in a number of reports and policy reforms, such as the 1951 White Paper, *Higher Technological Education*, the 1956 White Paper, *Technical Education* and the 1961 White Paper, *Better Opportunities in Technical Education* (Tight 2009). In response to such reports, there were policy interventions by the state to control the student population in subject areas beneficial to economic expansion. HE's ideological standpoint, that policy direction should be for the social good, where social good is defined as a good which does not depend upon public policy or funding (Mor Barak 2018), began to be called into question: '*the fading power of the traditional ideal in this arena is matched by the irresistible rise of the economic ideology of education*' (Salter & Tapper 1994 p.125).

In 1960, the Anderson Report, *Grants to Students*, proposed a means tested maintenance system for supporting students through their studies, paving the way for the recommendations of the subsequent Robbins Report, *Higher Education* (1963), to be a viable proposition. The Robbins Report, considered to be a further watershed moment in HE, articulated a need for a more equitable HE system, whereby those who were qualified to enter HE should be given the means to do so by removing barriers to entry. Robbins proposed an expansion in student numbers from c.200,000 in 1962/3 to more than 500,000 by 1980/1 (Tight 2009), to be met by new institutions, expansion of existing institutions and enabling the CATS to become universities. Robbins principally recommended expansion of numbers in science and technology subjects to meet the demands of the economy, although in practice this period saw a huge expansion of social sciences subjects (Tight 2009). Some critics have subsequently argued that Robbins did not go far enough in the proposed expansion, and that government projections already took account of it (Greenbank 2006).

While growing student numbers was matched by an expansion of state funding to maintain the unit of resource, this period also saw a crucial change for the UGC. Shattock argues that the Robbins Report '*proved to be a watershed in determining the future structure of the policy-making machinery*' (Shattock 2012 p.90), since it was instrumental in a review of how

the Treasury allocated public funds. This review meant that, by 1964, UGC no longer had a direct relationship with the Treasury, coming instead under the new Department of Education and Science (DES), and thus the Committee was firmly within the remit of education policy-makers. For the first time, UGC had to compete with other sectors of education for funding. The relationship between the two bodies could often be tense, as the DES had '*values which conflicted with those of the UGC*' (Salter and Tapper 1994 p.120). Consequently, the locus of policy formation began to shift, with UGC having to make decisions about where to put resource, potentially putting it in conflict with institutions and their autonomy in pursuing their own policy decisions.

#### *4.5 A policy of efficiency*

The 1970s began with a Conservative administration, but this was followed by a minority Labour government from 1974. The decade saw the beginnings of the pursuit of HE policy with a focus on more with less, increased student numbers with less unit of resource. The economic crisis of 1974-75 gave the DES the opportunity to introduce greater control over institutions, setting target student numbers for individual institutions, initiating greater efficiency in the use of resources and cuts to grant. A 2% reduction in grant between 1972 and 1977, and 30% inflation, saw real terms funding cuts for UGC and institutions (Taggart 2003).

The election of a Conservative government in 1979 saw a change in policy direction that was directly in accordance with monetarist economics and new public management. There was greater state control over university standards, with government introducing regulation as a way to improve quality whilst facilitating increased efficiency. It was during this period that the fee subsidy for international students ended, resulting in them paying full economic cost, and funding for home students was reduced by 8.5% by 1983-4 (Tight 2009).

The continued economic crisis in the early 1980s led to an ideological shift and a rise in the influence of neo-liberal thinking, as well as further, and more drastic, cuts to public expenditure. Incremental increases had meant that by 1980, more than two-thirds of HE income came in the form of a single block grant from UGC (Williams 1992), thus government felt justified in drastically reducing it by 15%. UGC however, went against government wishes and cut student numbers, rather than the unit of resource (Parry 2001). In 1983 the NAB was formed to control funds and student numbers in polytechnics and

colleges. The mid 1980s began to see more government rhetoric on efficiency with further reports such as the 1984 National Advisory Board (NAB) Report, *A Strategy for Higher Education*, UGC's own report on a strategy for HE and the 1985 Green Paper, *The Development of Higher education*, recommending greater efficiency and management of HE. In 1985, the Jarratt report, *Efficiency Studies in Universities*, was published, recommending a review of UGC and proposing that institutions began to take a more managerial approach to strategy. This was swiftly followed by the 1987 White Paper, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, which consolidated the economic purpose of HE and further strengthened the need for improved quality and efficiency. The report also committed the government to increasing student numbers and, indeed, participation between 1988 and 1994 increased from 15% to 30% (Tight 2009). Much of this growth was achieved through driving down the cost of the unit of resource, and through increased student numbers in the polytechnics and colleges. Shattock (2008) argues that it is in the 1980s that the policy drivers for HE began to change

*'from being self-governed to state-governed, and are derived from a set of policies designed for the reform and modernisation of the public sector for the economy'* (p.181).

Throughout the 1980s, UGC continued to act as a buffer between the universities and the state, putting forward the views of the sector and negotiating block grant. It was during the latter half of the 1980s that block grant separated funding for teaching from that for research, and UGC introduced an element of driving funding through formula, although the formula was not published. As a result of the change of constitutional arrangements within the DES, and the continued economic crisis putting pressure on public finances, the buffer relationship was being called into question. Critics questioned *'Whose side is the University Grants Committee on?'* (Taggart 2003 p.42) and UGC was ultimately forced to re-examine its role:

*'from the moment the UGC accepted responsibility for managing the cuts in recurrent grant in 1979-80, it implicitly accepted responsibility for actively managing and for re-shaping the university system to cope with the cuts in government funding'* (Taggart 2003 p.47).

This subtle shift in UGC's role begins to see a move from Shattock's *'inside outwards'* (2006), where institutions were the locus for HE policy development, to the now familiar *'outside inwards'* policy approach to HE, where the state has a greater role in developing and implementing policy.

## 4.6 Quasi market policy

A further turning point came with the 1988 Education Reform Act, which abolished UGC, and replaced it with a statutory body, the Universities Funding Council (UFC). The Conservative government wanted to move away from a position where block grant was the major funding mechanism for institutions, proposing instead that both students and industry played a greater role, and sought to achieve this through the establishment of a new funding council without the legacy of UGC. Block grant, which had represented more than two-thirds of HE funding in 1979-80, was continuously reduced such that, by 2010-11, it represented just 31.4% of income (Brown and Carasso 2013). The UFC was matched with the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC), replacing the NAB, which removed polytechnics and colleges from the control of local authorities, whilst still retaining the binary divide with universities. The mechanism for the distribution of block grant for both councils was through formula funding, where funds were allocated on a competitive basis. It was PCFC that created the 'core plus margin' approach to the allocation of funding (Parry 2001), whereby the majority of funds was allocated on the basis of previous student numbers, with bidding for additional numbers. There was a subtle difference in the purpose of these new Councils from previous regimes, and hence the relationship between HE and the state:

*'their function is to provide funds in exchange for the provision of specific academic services [teaching and research] rather than to subsidise institutions'* (Williams 1992 p.13).

Taggart (2003) argues that this was an important step change:

*'The funding body became a purchaser on behalf of the Government. And the role of purchaser was an important step in the transformation of the funding body from a provider of grant (UGC) to a regulator and manager of the higher education system'* (p.57).

The introduction of competition for funding was the starting point for HE to be perceived as a 'quasi market' (Parry 2001). A 1989 speech by the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, is purported to be the first time that 'market' was linked to HE (Brown and Carasso 2013), and policy reforms which followed were aligned with market economics, including a rise in fees for fee paying students and, in 1990, the introduction of top-up loans, which would in time replace maintenance grants. The Conservative government saw the market as the way forward for both raising competition within HE and introducing greater student choice alongside expanded student numbers.



This was a momentous moment in the history of HE policy-making, since it represents a point at which there is a moment of conflict between the *outside in* approach to policy (where the state had significant control over the policy agenda for HE, and was responsible for the majority of its funding, with controls over student numbers and efficiency of delivery) and, in a sense, a return to *inside out*, where institutions are subject to market conditions and reliance on public funding begins to diminish. However, as noted below, any return to *inside out* conditions was quashed by an increase in regulation of the market.

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act introduced one of the biggest changes in the HE sector, with the short-lived UFC and PCFC abolished in favour of four regional funding councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The new Councils introduced a single funding structure for teaching in all institutions and a national system for assessment of quality. As a consequence, the binary system for universities and polytechnics was removed, polytechnics became universities overnight, and universities and colleges were now open to competition between each other. Thus, HE evolved into a '*fully market orientated system*' (Parry 2001 p.124). However, as noted above, this market was also highly *regulated*, both in student numbers and quality assurance. The increase in intervention and regulation by the state was firmly in line with the new public management rhetoric, and the '*outside inwards*' approach (Shattock 2012, Coffield and Williamson 1997) that had become a dominant feature of the 1980s and 1990s under the Thatcher Government.

The 1992 Act represents a turning point that threatened the autonomy of institutions and changed the nature of the intermediary body from a *buffer* to one that acted as an *agent* of government, despite the guarantee that the funding councils had constitutional independence from government. The 1992 Act

*'was to place these various inputs into a statutory context which, besides extending them, greatly reinforced the hand of the Minister and Department against the funding councils and universities'* (Salter & Tapper 1994 p.205).

For Shattock, this move firmly established '*outside in*' policy-making:

*'We have in my view staggered almost unknowingly to a situation where the state has taken over policy making because the insider organs that once generated policies have been weakened or no longer exist. The UGC, whatever its shortcomings, has been replaced by Funding Councils who make policy through adjusting funding formula'* (Shattock 2006 p.138).

This commentary has provided an insight into the development of HE policy and the changing role and influence of the intermediary bodies against the political and economic conditions over the last century. This is useful in informing an understanding for the creation of the HEFCE and other funding councils, and in order to articulate the work of HEFCE in the forthcoming sections. The sections below are significant for this research since they seek to both illuminate and articulate the policy work of HEFCE against the backdrop of changing government ideologies and policy agendas, and situate the chosen case studies within those contexts.

#### *4.7 The Higher Education Funding Council for England*

The four Funding Councils were established on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1992, under the Department for Education (DfE), and they assumed responsibility for funding from PCFC and UFC on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1993. The core functions of the Funding Councils were: to act as a funding and intermediary body between government and institutions; the allocation of recurrent, capital and special funding; assessment of the quality of research; assessment of the quality of teaching, and monitoring the financial health of the sector and individual institutions.

The Act sets out the role formally as:

- *'To administer funds to support education and research in higher education institutions;*
- *To administer funds to support prescribed higher education courses in further education colleges;*
- *To provide the Secretary of State for Education and Skills with information relating to all aspects of higher education teaching and research, including the financial needs of the sector;*
- *To secure the assessment of the quality of education at institutions that receive HEFCE funding'. (Source HEFCE Annual Report and Accounts 2005-06).*

The Act gave the Secretary of State greater control over the Funding Councils in terms of appointing the board and the terms and conditions of funding.

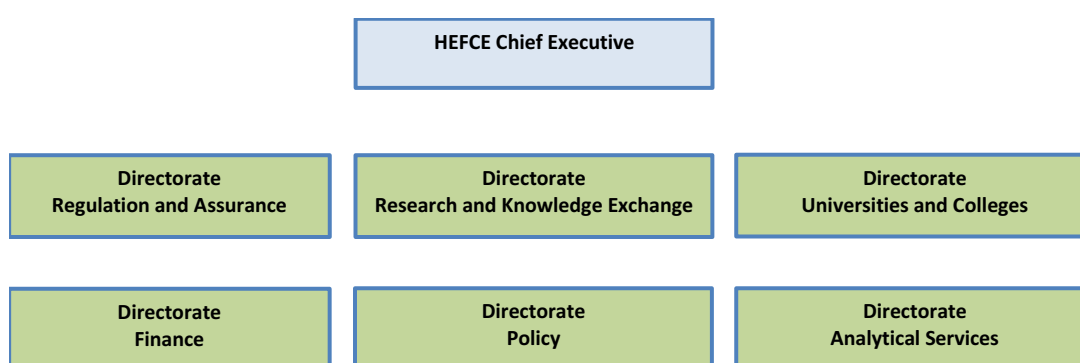
##### *4.7.1 Structure of HEFCE*

HEFCE was overseen by a Board of 15 members, with all members appointed by the Secretary of State for Education. The Board consisted of a Chair, HEFCE Chief Executive as chief operating officer, a number of members selected from higher education institutions (a minimum of eight), and other interested publicly funded bodies, such as the NHS, industry and the professions. All appointments were made under the guidance of the Office of the

Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). Government was represented by an assessor from the relevant government department and a small number of observers from other funding bodies and the National Union of Students (NUS). In the interests of transparency, papers and minutes of the Board, other than institutionally or commercially sensitive discussions, have been published on the HEFCE website since 2003.

Below the Board, there were a number of strategic advisory committees which related directly to the policy work of HEFCE: Teaching excellence and student opportunity; Research and knowledge exchange; Leadership, governance and management; quality, accountability and regulation. There were also joint advisory committees with the other Funding Councils.

The work of HEFCE was split into a number of directorates, introduced in 2002 and revised in 2012, which reported directly to the Chief Executive, as summarised in Figure 8 (p.87). Within each directorate, there were a number of heads of functions, such as communications, funding, quality, and governance. Reporting to the Director of Universities and Colleges, there were eight regional consultants, introduced from 1999, who liaised directly with the senior management of institutions. From 2000, HEFCE also had a small number of national teams, focussing on particular policy areas: disability, action on access, innovations, and enhancing student employability, although these were lost under a re-structure in 2012.



**Figure 8 – HEFCE DIRECTORATE**

Melville (2018) notes that this structure has been an important feature in determining the locus of policy-making:

*'a key feature of HEFCE has been that the development of HE policy has resided almost entirely with the council and its executives, rather than with civil servants and ministers. Notably, while it was the general view that in the UGC days of the 1980s and 1990s many 'special' funding decisions were made personally by Peter Swynnerton-Dyer [then Vice Chancellor Cambridge University], the UFC and HEFCE have developed open and transparent funding models.'* (Melville WOKNHE 2018).

#### 4.7.2 HEFCE mechanisms for distributing funding, enabling policy

The approach taken by HEFCE to form and implement policy is an important part of the policy process. Government informed HEFCE of its available grant through the *annual grant letter*, which morphed from the *letter of guidance* established in 1988 for UGC. Taggart (2003) notes that this was the

*'primary mechanism... for ensuring that the Government has been able to link its overarching framework for higher education policy with the funding bodies' policies'* (p.58-9).

The annual grant letter set out the funding to be provided for core activities, teaching and research, and established particular funding priority areas. In turn, HEFCE used the available funds to steer policy and priorities through the financial memorandum with institutions. This point is an important one for this study, and in particular for a discussion on the locus of policy-making. As will be further explored later in this chapter, and further in relation to the case studies, there were moments where it was HEFCE itself that influenced the government's annual grant letter.

Funding was distributed through three distinctive mechanisms: recurrent funding (generally based on formula), capital funding and special projects funding, with some policy areas funded in a multitrack approach of combined formula and special initiative funding. Both capital and special projects funding generally required institutions to bid for time-limited funds, and in competition with each other. The special projects initiative mirrored the *Enterprise in Higher Education* initiative, set up in the late 1980s by UGC, where institutions bid for funding. Selby (2018) notes that this was a classic HEFCE approach:

*'this initiative followed a classic HEFCE approach to policy-making in an area in which there was little prior knowledge – identify a problem, offer some financial opportunities, with the parameters broadly defined, and seek proposals from HEIs'* (Selby WOKNHE 2018).

The mechanism by which policy was enacted within HEFCE is important to this study. All three of the case studies, in order to meet the criteria set out in Chapter 3, can be categorised as special project funded initiatives.

One of the chief mechanisms by which HEFCE formulated and implemented initiatives to drive forward policy interests was through a consultation process with the sector. Typically, consultations were held for large scale policy changes, such as the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), later called the Research Excellence Framework (REF), but also on smaller, time limited, special funding initiatives, particularly where a bidding process was required. Minor changes to recurrent funding methodologies did not generally result in a consultation. The consultation process typically involved some re-negotiation of elements of the policy process or programme, based on the views of those in the sector. Taggart suggests this is an important part of the policy-making process:

*'every HEFCE policy has a peer-review input either through the advice of the HEFCE strategic committees [or] through sector wide consultation'* (Taggart 2003 p.89).

Kernohan (2018) agrees, contesting that

*'HEFCE, historically, has been pretty good at setting policy transparently and openly. It publishes its board minutes, consults widely with the sector, and even where decisions are made that go against a consensus, it is clear around its rationale for doing so'* (Kernohan WONKHE 2018).

Shattock is more sceptical about the consultation approach, suggesting that it is more top down than genuine consultation:

*'While the rhetoric of higher education policy making is dominated by the word 'consultation' it is neither on an agenda created in Government nor in the universities themselves'* (Shattock 2006 p.139).

Initiatives which were categorised as special funding were typically subjected to an independent formative and summative evaluation, with the formative evaluation occasionally leading to some changes in approach, dependent upon recommendations. Formative and summative evaluations were funded by HEFCE, and whilst HEFCE set out the aims and objectives, evaluations were typically carried out by independent consultants.

#### *4.8 Policy phases in HEFCE's history*

I have consolidated the policy work of HEFCE into five separate time periods, where the change in period represents a distinct change in the policy direction or the role of HEFCE, informed by changing government ideologies, Acts of Parliament and economic pressures

(summarised in Table 7, p.90). I contend that there is a strong relationship between these distinct phases and the changing relationship between government, the intermediary body and institutions, which will be explored later in this chapter. This section provides some historical context to each time period, and then uses the timeline of policy episodes and initiatives detailed in Appendix C to provide a synthesis and commentary on the evolving policy agenda, clustering policy endeavours and highlighting particular episodes to articulate the work of HEFCE. The research methods for developing the timeline of policy episodes are explained in 3.4. Where data has been drawn specifically from circulars, letters or HEFCE Board minutes, these are referenced in the narrative.

**Table 7 – SUMMARY OF POLICY PERIODS FOR HEFCE**

<b>Time period</b>	<b>Prevailing government</b>	<b>Principle acts and events instigating change</b>
1992-1997	Conservative	1992 Further and Higher Education Act (end of binary system, Funding Councils established) 1997 Dearing Report (recommends student contribution to funding HE)
1998-2006	Labour (Blair government)	1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act (introduction of means tested fees) 2004 Higher Education Act (variable top up fees £3k from 2006) 2006 Charities Act (HEFCE becomes principle regulator for HE)
2007-2010	Labour (Brown government)	2007 Further Education and Training Act (formation of, and investment in, companies and charitable incorporated organisations by HE) 2008 Global recession 2009 <i>A New Framework for Higher Education</i> ('consumer revolution') 2010 Browne review, <i>Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education</i> (greater choice, student finance plan, part-time variable fees) 2010 spending review cuts of more than £300m to HEFCE
2011-2016	Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition (to 2015) Conservative (from 2015)	2011 White Paper – <i>Students at the Heart of the System</i> (variable fees to £9k, promotion of interests of students) 2012 Change of focus for HEFCE, invest on behalf of students 2013 HEFCE greater regulatory insight 2015 Nurse review of research councils (proposes UKRI) 2016 Brexit
2017-2018	Conservative	2017 Higher Education and Research Bill HEFCE closes Office for Students established Research and Innovation UK established

## 4.8.1 1992 - 1997

### 4.8.1.1. Further growth

The early years of HEFCE from 1992 to 1997 saw continuing growth in student numbers, with an expectation that one third of 18-21 year olds would have attended HE by 2000. However, growth was also met with the introduction of the Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MASN) in 1994, in order to control student numbers to contain public expenditure. This effectively ended '*market led growth*' in favour of a '*highly regulated market*' (Parry 2001 p.125). HEFCE's role in administering funding under a regime of cuts and tight public spending meant a greater role in allocating funding to assist institutions in financial crisis, and echoed the change in ethos for UGC in the 1980s, where it had to take a greater role in managing the university system during a period of cuts. This period saw a continuation of policies begun in the 1970s with a steer towards underpinning HE's role in the economy as well as driving down the cost of the unit of resource, with government imposing efficiency gains on the sector of 7.5% over three years from 1996. Whilst student numbers had doubled since the 1970s, and public funding for HE had increased by 45% overall, the unit of resource had decreased by 40% (NCIHE 1997).

### 4.8.1.2. Targeted funding

Up until 1997, much of HEFCE's policy work was concentrated on recurrent funding for teaching, based on the core-plus-margin funding formula introduced by PCFC, and HEFCE's teaching funding methodology remained broadly similar until 1998. Policy interventions focussed on establishing clarity in teaching funding, initially for Additional Student Numbers (ASNs), continuing education and minority subjects (2/94, 10/94, 29/94) as well as specific discipline areas in science, engineering and technology (6/95) to drive forward government's agenda in concentrating efforts in science based disciplines. A further example of targeting teaching funding to drive economic interests was targeted funding for former Soviet and East European subjects (32/95), which were seen as countries likely to experience considerable economic growth with the downfall of communism in the eastern bloc.

In 1994, HEFCE began to dedicate special project funding in what could be described as the beginnings of a widening participation policy. Notably, HEFCE revised its policy on access funds, allocating £3m for projects which supported special educational needs students. In response to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, £6m was allocated from 1996-1999 for

projects which expanded the quality of '*provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities*' (9/96, 23/96). HEFCE also directed recurrent funding towards non-traditional learners such as part-time and mature students (19/96, 21/96). This is an example of where HEFCE sought to drive its own policy agenda outside of government, since widening participation was not, at that stage, part of HEFCE objectives.

Special project funding was also introduced to enhance the development of best practice in learning and teaching, with phases one and two of the Development of Teaching and Learning in 1995 and 1996 (29/95, 22/96), and a focus on technology from 1997 with the introduction of special project funding of £3.5m over three years in the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (14/97). Special project funding for enhancing learning and teaching was a strategy pursued by HEFCE throughout its existence.

One of the consequences of greater participation in HE was '*credential inflation*' (Tight 2009 p.82) with more of the labour market seeking to gain postgraduate qualifications. In 1996, HEFCE, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP) and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) commissioned a report into postgraduate education. Chaired by Professor Martin Harris, The Harris Review, made recommendations mostly in relation to standards and funding (Hogan 1997), which were implemented in 1998. Institutions had already been asked in 1995 to identify allocation of teaching funding for undergraduate and postgraduate separately, which for critics like Shattock (2012) represented a further deterioration of institutional autonomy.

Teaching quality was also a major area of policy for HEFCE which continued to 2018, but unlike recurrent research funding, HEFCE resisted any attempt to link teaching quality to funding. Until 1997, and the establishment of the Quality Assessment Agency (QAA), quality assessment of teaching was undertaken in-house by HEFCE. Policy on the teaching quality assessment method, which included self-assessment by disciplines and the provision of data sets, was introduced in 1993 (3/93) and a framework for quality assessment was introduced in 1994 (33/94). HEFCE also led on policies which influenced the national system of teaching in HE, with policies on the organisation of the academic year (6/94) and the length of degree courses (1/94).

#### *4.8.1.3. Research funding*

Research funding continued in much the same terms as it had under UGC and UFC, with research quality recurrent funding (QR), having been introduced in 1986 with the



establishment of the RAE. The first RAE under HEFCE was concluded in 1992, which was considered to be more robust and rigorous than that conducted in 1989 (Tight 2009). RAE 1992 saw a reduced number of units of assessment and greater emphasis on transparent definitions of quality. The policy on the dual funding of research, where recurrent quality funding was allocated by HEFCE and the Research Councils fund specific projects (7/93) was introduced sector wide, including post 1992 institutions, in 1993. There were few special funding initiatives for research in the early years, other than the Joint Research Equipment Initiative, which continued until 1999 (09/96).

#### 4.8.2. Dearing – a turning point in funding

The turning point for this period was the publication of the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997), following an inquiry into HE commissioned by the then Conservative government, with backing from the Labour shadow cabinet. It recognised that a continuing expansion of student numbers and high levels of state provision of funding was not sustainable and so, unlike the Robbins report, Dearing explicitly addressed the issue of funding. Dearing, which was a reflection on the marketisation, massification and regulation (Parry 2001) of HE, recognised that HE was underfunded, but that to meet the funding gap there would need to be a shift from the public to the private (Tight 2009), and more specifically a greater contribution from graduates:

*‘the costs of higher education should be shared amongst those who benefit from it. We have concluded that those with higher education qualifications are the main beneficiaries, through improved employment prospects and pay. As a consequence, we suggest that graduates in work should make a greater contribution to the costs of higher education in future’* (NCIHE 1997 p.28-29).

As Wager (1995) points out, this enabled government to change the cash flow to universities instead of increasing public expenditure. Although funding was the key recommendation to come from the Dearing report, there were other recommendations in relation to widening participation and exploitation of technologies in learning and teaching, themes which continued through the work of HEFCE, as will be explored later in this chapter. The end of this period also saw a change of government, with New Labour taking office and assuming the responsibility of implementing the recommendations of the Dearing Report.

### 4.8.3 1998 – 2006

#### 4.8.3.1. New Labour rhetoric - growth, inclusivity and New Public Management

New Labour brought new rhetoric on expanding student numbers to provide skilled workers in the emerging globalised knowledge economy, and a more inclusive social mobility agenda. These principles became New Labour's *'Third Way'* and, as this section will demonstrate, became the key drivers for much of HEFCE's policy work up to 2006. New Labour's election manifesto promised 500,000 Additional Student Numbers by 2010, increasing the participation rate to 50%. Institutions were able to bid for ASNs year on year, particularly in targeted disciplines or those that encouraged greater diversity of intake such as sub-degree level courses. As such, there was a steer towards funding policies which favoured widening participation. Vocational education and reform of qualifications became key policy initiatives, and hence a greater focus on HE in colleges and an emphasis on employer engagement and the regional economy. Selby (2018) notes that

*'the period around the turn of the century was a time of great development in HEFCE policy, most particularly in the area of widening participation, but also in the development of policy towards HE in Further Education Colleges'* (Selby WONKHE 2018).

Following Dearing, the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act saw the introduction of means tested top up fees, with a £1,000 fee introduced. Six years later, the 2004 Higher Education Act saw a further step change, with variable top-up fees up to £3,000 introduced from 2006. Consequently, by 2006, institutions were receiving only 60% of the former block grant for teaching (Brown and Carasso 2013). In 1998, the student maintenance grant was replaced with loans, thus further shifting the costs of study towards individuals, although they were re-introduced for some student groups again in 2004. The introduction of tuition fees is seen by many (Shattock 2012, Tight 2009) as the point at which a real market was created for HE, as it moved further away from a solely state funded supplier to a part privately funded enterprise, where supply was influenced by demand. The shift away from state funding meant that the role of HEFCE as the funding body had begun to alter. In 2004, Sir Howard Newby, then HEFCE's Chief Executive, announced that with the introduction of variable fees, HEFCE's role would be to secure the public interest and, in HEFCE's 2003-04 annual review, it is noted that *'the focus on the learner in higher education will become even more critical once variable fees are in place'* (p.3).

Despite the shift towards a greater contribution from students, considerable funding still came from the public purse, and the period 1998-2006 could be described as the golden

years for HEFCE, under the Blair government. There was an additional £1.4b of research funding over three years from 1998 and an additional 10% in real terms for additional student numbers and increasing access. The Spending Review (1998) announced additional funding for science, engineering and technology subjects, and investment in staff. Also receiving targeted funding were specialist areas such as Chinese Studies (1999), performing arts institutions (1999), Former Soviet and Eastern European Studies (2000) and two new medical schools with 1,000 additional places for medicine (1999,2000). Thus, despite the move towards a full market, the state was still highly influential in controlling the supply of HE.

Under the Blair government, HEFCE continued to apply its long standing methodologies to recurrent funding for teaching and research, maintaining fundamental principles but with adjustments and changes along the way. A large number of special funding initiatives were also introduced which sought to embed change within the sector. Using funded projects to drive certain policy agendas became a common approach by HEFCE, maintained right through to 2018. Taggart (2003) notes that

*'The financial levers of the HEFCE are arguably seen at their most extreme in the case of earmarked funding for special initiatives.... HEFCE was increasing the proportion of funding through the more closely monitored and regulated special initiatives... special funding represents 18% of the total HEFCE budget [for 2003-04]' (p.100).*

Another strong theme to emerge during New Labour governance was New Public Management practices, particularly public sector reform, which built on the managerialism approaches of the previous Conservative government. This ideological position taken by the New Labour government was to dominate not just HE policy, but all government policies and reforms, in all policy arenas, such as health and education (Shattock 2012,) and was characterised by increased performance management in the public sector and the commercialisation of public services, with elements of competition (Cutler & Waine 2002). HEFCE introduced a raft of guidance for institutions in relation to financial assurance, and leadership and governance, where there had been less focus in the early years. In 1988, the annual strategic plans required of institutions were replaced by three year corporate plans with a focus on financial strategy (98/13), and a special fund of £2.5m was made available for three years to implement strategies for costing and pricing activities (98/32). HEFCE was concerned to ensure effective use of its funding and, following the government's Transparency and Accountability Review in 2000 (17/00), implemented the Value for Money Steering Group's recommendations for improving facilities management and

support services (00/14). The implementation of a framework, Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) for institutional reporting came into effect in the same year. Accountability continued as a strong theme following the Spending Review in 2004, which focussed on achieving efficiencies in the public sector. Consequently, new codes of practice for audits and accountability were introduced in 2004 and, in 2006, changes to the financial memorandum provided for greater accountability whilst reducing the cost burden of financial reporting (12/2006). The launch of the HEFCE sustainable development initiative in 2005 aimed to tackle long-term sustainability in institutions (28/2005) with HEIs being asked to consider the use of shared services in 2006 (20/2006). As such, efficiency in relation to the unit of resource was still very much on the agenda. It is noteworthy that there is a subtle change to HEFCE's mission in 2003, as recorded in the annual reports, with *cost-effectiveness* being introduced as a focus.

Closely linked to New Public Management rhetoric and greater financial accountability was a focus on special funding initiatives to improve governance and leadership. The Spending Review of 2000 granted £50m for investment in staff in institutions, and HEFCE set up an Equal Opportunities Action Group. In 1999, HEFCE invested £10m over three years to develop good management practices programmes (99/54) and £330m over three years from 2001 funded the development of human resources strategies in institutions (01/16). The Leadership, Governance and Management Fund was set up in 2004, with £10m over three years (2004/26). As well as special initiatives funding, HEFCE also consolidated the fund for '*rewarding and developing staff*' into the core teaching grant (2004/03), thus establishing staffing policy within recurrent funding. These initiatives culminated in 2006 with the publication of the Higher Education Workforce Framework (2006/21).

The introduction of fees meant that there was greater public interest in teaching standards and value for money, and so HEFCE continued to invest heavily in learning and teaching development, such as the Teaching and Learning Development Programme, implemented in 1997 with £3.5m over three years (14/97) and £7m in 2003. The Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund also received considerable levels of funding: £26m in 2000, £32m in 2001, £31m in 2002 (99/26) and a further £158.5m over three years from 2006 (2006/11). A task group chaired by Sir Ron Cooke reported on quality and standards of learning and teaching in 2002 (02/15) and, in 2003, HEFCE, Universities UK (UUK) and SCOP recommended that there should be a single institution responsible for standards in teaching development in HE. The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education,

which had only been established in 2000 on the recommendation of the Dearing Report, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (with 24 subject discipline centres) and HEFCE's National Coordination Team for the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund were merged to form the Higher Education Academy (HEA). In the following year, the Leadership Foundation was established by UUK and SCOP, with an affiliation to HEFCE. Both these organisations survived funding cuts and mergers for many years, before finally being merged into Advance HE in 2018.

In response to the 2003 White Paper's commitment to reward and enhance excellence in teaching, the creation of Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CETLs) (2004/05) was launched in 2005. This policy episode was HEFCE's largest funded learning and teaching initiative, with £335m over the five years, and it also followed a typical special project process, with institutions competing for funding. The purpose of the initiative was to raise the profile of *'teaching and learning as a professional activity'* (DFES 2003) in line with the status of research, in order to justify the charging of fees and to prove value for money, in line with both marketisation of HE and new public management policies. What was of particular interest about this initiative was that HEFCE had been deliberately hands-off by not defining what it meant by 'excellence' and not requiring strong accountability measures to be met by institutions, and as such was atypical of HEFCE's initiatives at that time. The success of CETLs was very much contested, with some pointing to a range of individual institutional successes, but others questioning the legacy of the £335m invested. For me, this represents an interesting study in terms of perceptions of success and failure and, consequently, I have chosen this as one of the case studies.

#### *4.8.3.2. Teaching funding to drive economic development, social inclusion and value for money*

Much of the focus of HEFCE learning and teaching policy during this period was on driving New Labour's agenda in meeting economic needs, particularly in science and technology, with formula funding attracting additional funds and ASNs for specific disciplines, and special funding initiatives such as the New Technology Institutes, which received £25m of capital funding in 2002 (01/47). ASNs were targeted at Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) high cost laboratory based subjects, dental, medical and medicine related courses, and also subjects which were considered strategically important but vulnerable to closure, such as modern languages and Islamic studies. By 2003, participation in higher education had increased to 43%, but a further 250,000 ASNs were required if the

government was to meet its target of 50% participation in HE by 2010. The recurrent funding methodology, which had been in place since 1992, with relatively minor modifications, was subject to a full review in 2005, with implementation set for 2007-08.

Aligned with a policy agenda to improve teaching standards, HEFCE continued to assert a strong presence in teaching quality assurance. Following a period of in-house quality assurance by HEFCE, it was sub-contracted in 1997 to the QAA, although HEFCE remained active in providing policy and guidance, particularly in setting benchmarks for performance. This decision was made in part to ensure that funding was entirely separate from quality assurance, a position which HEFCE sought to maintain throughout its history. A framework for qualifications based on national standards came into effect in 2001, and a new framework for quality assurance in 2002 saw the abolition of subject reviews, and the introduction of independent institutional audits conducted by the QAA. The QAA had its contract renewed in 2004 to deliver the revised quality assurance framework (2005/35).

Concurrent with a drive to ensure value for money, the New Labour government was keen to ensure that, with greater access to HE and more choice of courses, data should be provided to help students make those choices. Consequently, the provision of public data started to become a key feature of HEFCE policy work, in line with their revised remit to secure the public interest, and a website for national teaching quality information was established in 2003 (2003/52, 04/2005) with the first pilot of the National Student Survey (NSS) that same year. The NSS was launched nationally in 2005 and, with minor modifications to the data set over the years, continues, now under the remit of the OfS. It is noteworthy that many of these policy themes have continued to date, with the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) being the focus of teaching quality and value for money.

Social inclusion and widening participation became a significant strand of policy work for HEFCE right up until 2018, although it was not explicitly one of the original aims of the Funding Council. It is noteworthy that Greenbank observes that, prior to the Deering Report, HEFCE had little interest in widening participation:

*'Prior to the Deering Report, HEFCE was unenthusiastic about the idea of HEIs playing an active role in widening participation.... Yet in response to the Deering Report, HEFCE changed its position. It stated that while it still believed that many of the causes of under-representation originated from outside the HE system, it felt that 'higher education can make a contribution to redressing particular imbalances' (HEFCE, 1997, para 24). Moreover, within a few years social class and widening participation had become a 'major priority' for HEFCE' (Greenbank 2006 p.148).*

In the early part of the period, widening participation initiatives only accounted for around 2% of teaching funds (Stiles 2002) but there was an increasing amount of activity and policy steer. In 2000, the Action on Access Team was created, and institutional behaviour was influenced by incentivising formula recurrent funding with special premiums for part-time and mature students (10/97, 98/09, 2003/48), special funding incentives including £1.5m in 1998 and £7.5m in 1999 for regional widening participation (98/35, 99/24), and increased access funds in 1998. Institutions were encouraged to move away from the *deficit model* (Apperley 2014) approach favoured by Dearing, whereby the onus is put on the learner to bridge the HE gap, to one where institutions were encouraged to accommodate widening participation. Participation rates for students from specific neighbourhoods became one of the widening participation drivers in 1999, with enhanced funding from 2001 (01/29), and widening participation target-setting for institutions became a condition of grant from 2002 (02/22, 2002/49).

By 2003, the government's social mobility agenda was firmly established, not just within HEFCE and the institutions, but beyond, with both regional and national organisations supporting widening participation. HEFCE was successful in a £9.4m European Social Fund (ESF) bid under Objective 3, Lifelong Learning, which resulted in the development of the Partnerships for Progression Initiative. In 2004, HEFCE and the DfES formed Aimhigher, by merging the Partnerships for Progression Initiative and Excellence Challenge funding, to be a regionally based umbrella organisation for widening participation activities. Summer schools, which had been a special funding initiative since 2000, were also integrated into Aimhigher in 2004. The Schwartz review into fair and transparent admissions to reduce barriers to HE reported in 2004, setting out principles for fair access, and the Office For Fair Access (OFFA) was established, as an independent regulator of fair access to HE in England (subsumed into the OfS from 2018). OFFA worked closely with HEFCE in ensuring that all institutions that charged fees had an access agreement and, consequently, widening participation strategies were no longer required as a condition of grant from 2004, since additional strategic requirements were imposed on institutions by OFFA (21/2004). For critics like Shattock (2008), the creation of OFFA presented an opportunity for government to intervene further into universities' autonomous selection of students.

Disability was a key area into which funding was directed, and HEFCE's National Disability Team was created in 2000. £6m of special funding was provided to develop quality provision for disabled students in 1999 (99/08), and a further £5.4m in 2002 (02/21).

Additional funding for disabled students also became part of the recurrent funding formula (98/66).

In 2000, the New Labour government announced two new initiatives that sought to address the 'Third Way' agenda, in using HE as a driver for both increasing global economic competitiveness and social inclusion, by addressing the skills gap and widening participation. In a landmark speech by David Blunkett (then Secretary of State for Education and Employment), the e-University (00/43, 00/44) was announced. HEFCE was to allocate £62m in funding to encourage institutions to develop on-line programmes as part of a national e-University brand which would attract both international students, and hence substantial income, and home students unable to attend HE in its traditional form. Blunkett saw the e-University as a major 'dot.com' competitor to the successful on-line programmes being developed in the USA. What was novel about the e-University initiative was that it was to be a public-private enterprise, with private companies as partners. The e-University, UKeU, launched its first on-line courses in Autumn 2003 but, just one year later, after a succession of difficulties, it was wound up, resulting in a House of Commons Education and Skills Committee inquiry in 2004.

This particular policy episode is of interest, as there is some debate about whether the initiative was driven by government or HEFCE in the first instance. It was also firmly established within New Labour's 'Third Way' as an initiative which used a private enterprise business model to drive both widening participation and maintain the UK's market position in the global knowledge economy. It was unique in this respect, not a model previously pursued by HEFCE, although in all other respects the initiative followed the typical HEFCE format in requiring institutions to bid for special project funds. Although generally considered to be an outright failure, the e-University initiative is interesting in that it can be used to determine a more nuanced level of success or failure in relation to the '*three dimensions of process, programme and politics*' (McConnell 2010). As such, I have also chosen this policy episode as a case study.

In the same 2000 speech, David Blunkett announced the creation of the Foundation Degree (13/00), which would drive the social mobility and skills agenda. Foundation Degrees would be developed in the traditional HE institutions, but also as HE level qualifications in Further Education Colleges (FECs). Like UKeU, there was an expectation of public-private partnership, in this case from regional employers. For New Labour, there was a strong correlation between economy and society, and a persuasive narrative was coming from



government around the development of skills, the region and local employers, as well as social mobility through regional FECs and HE institutions. The relationship between HE and FECs had become a core part of the HEFCE agenda, particularly with the transfer of responsibility for funding HE provision in FECs from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to HEFCE in 1999 and a code of practice in the same year (99/63). In 2003, HEFCE stated that

*'The development of a wide range of collaborative arrangements between higher education institutions (HEIs), and between HEIs and colleges from the further education sector, is likely to be an important feature in the coming years. Supporting such arrangements will be a key priority for the SDF [Strategic Development Fund]. In this context, we are interested in exploring the potential for multi-partner collaborations, piloting new arrangements, and providing incentives for institutions to develop innovative and flexible programmes of study, particularly in regional and sub-regional contexts' (2003/28).*

Foundation Degrees were funded through the recurrent funding methodology, attracting ASNs (2003/48) and a 10% premium from 2004. Foundation Degrees met their proposed target numbers in 2010, and continue to this day, although there has been a decline in interest in recent years, both from potential students and from government in supporting the qualification.

A strong feature of HEFCE policy had been in relation to encouraging HEI collaboration with other regional institutions, almost since its inception. The Restructuring and Collaboration Fund had been set up in 1997, to provide non-competitive funds to help institutions which required major restructures or, more particularly, assistance with merging with other local institutions. By 1999, an additional £10m had been provided under the fund, which was now extended to support collaborative activities involving multiple HEIs (99/34). By 2003, this fund had been superseded by the Strategic Development Fund, which provided £90m of special funding over three years (2003/28). This fund focussed specifically on collaboration with FECs and, despite the continued divide between the liberal and vocational providers of HE observed by Tight (2009) and noted in 4.2 above, HEFCE continued to pursue policies throughout its history which addressed this divide.

One of HEFCE's major special funding initiatives was collaboration between HEFCE, the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and the DfES, to fund Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) (12/2004) as networks between HEIs, FECs and regional employers to facilitate vocational progression to HE. Aligned with the emphasis on collaboration between HEIs and FECs, the government was prioritising the review of skills required to meet changing economic

demands, and increase participation in vocational training. The Leitch Review of Skills, commissioned in 2004 and reporting in 2006, aimed to '*maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice*' (HM Treasury 2006) through an optimisation of the UK's skills mix, and culminated in the 2006 White Paper '*Further Education: Training Skills, Improving Life Chances*'.

LLNs were very much in line with 'Third Way' rhetoric, requiring HEIs to work together with FECs to facilitate vocational progression to HE, but also having strong connections to employers at a regional level and key sector agencies. The initiative, although strongly aligned to government's agenda was widely thought to have been initiated by the then Chief Executive of HEFCE, Sir Howard Newby. What was also distinctive about this policy approach was that it was the first time that HEFCE had tried a 'bottom up' approach, where the exact structure and terms for LLNs were not prescribed, unlike the majority of HEFCE policy initiatives which conformed to the very prescriptive bidding process. In this case, there was no bidding process as such; proposed LLNs would develop business plans in consultation with HEFCE regional consultants, as well as FECs, HEIs, SSCs and RDAs. The rationale for developing such a policy approach was that the initiative was purported to be sector driven, rather than prescribed by HEFCE. LLNs joined a plethora of government initiatives aimed at the skills agenda with multiple partnerships and, as such, the dynamics of a bottom up approach and engagement with other sector agencies makes it an interesting choice of study to determine whether these factors contributed to its success or failure in respect of the process, programme or political dimensions. I have chosen LLNs as the final case study.

#### *4.8.3.3. The birth of 'third stream'*

New Labour's rhetoric around economy and society, and particular focus on the regional economy, established a strand of HEFCE policy work that was a dominant feature during the Blair administration. RDAs were created in 1998, primarily for the economic development of nine English regions and, in the same year, the Learning Age Green Paper recommended the development of regional structures to accommodate links between HE and communities. Thus, the link between regional economies and HE was established. In response, HEFCE introduced regional consultants in 1999, whose remit was to liaise with regional institutions. The link to the regional economy instigated what became known as 'third stream' funding and became a core part of HEFCE policy in 1999, through the Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC), with £22m per

annum (99/16). In 2001, Business Fellowships (01/06, 01/25) and the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HIEF) (00/22, 00/34) were introduced, building on the activities of HEROBC, with £80m over three years. In 2003, HEIF was consolidated as permanent third stream funding with £187m over three years (2003/34) and a further £238m over two years from 2006 (2005/36,/46, 2006/30). A key feature of HIEF funding was the requirement for collaboration between regional institutions.

By 2004, Government had announced a ten year Science and Innovation Investment Framework, which sought to improve the country's global competitiveness in science and technology by investing in scientific, engineering and technological intellectual and research capabilities, and promoting innovation directly to companies. As a result of the Lambert Review on business-university collaboration, which recommended a 50% increase in third stream funding, HEFCE committed to third stream as a permanent strand of funding for HE. Consequently, £12m of special funding was made available, with financial support from the Office for Science and Technology (OST), for the Knowledge Transfer Capability Fund for two years, which supported institutions in meeting the needs of local businesses through research and knowledge exchange (2005/05). The pilot Beacons for Public Engagement Initiative was launched in 2006, with £8m over four years (2006/49) to support centres based in institutions with public engagement activities.

#### *4.8.3.4. Research – aligned to the economy*

Research received substantial funding under the Blair Government, as it sought to ensure that the research interests of universities were aligned with the economic needs of the country, particularly in science and technology and the emerging global knowledge economy, under the Science and Innovation Framework. Funding was channelled through a range of special funding initiatives, such as the £23.5m Joint Research Equipment Initiative (4/97) and the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) with £600m in 2001 (26/2002), £845m in 2003 (2003/06) and £903m in 2006 (2006/30). The Research Capability Fund was announced in 2003, which would continue until 2009 (29/2005) with £20m in 2003, and a further £17.5m in 2004, to support emerging research in targeted discipline areas such as social work, arts based subjects, media and cultural studies, performing arts and sport.

Recurrent grant remained mostly unchanged in the early part of the period, with only minor alterations to the funding methodology. However, postgraduate research was a focus of policy interventions, with postgraduate research students removed from the

teaching funding methodology and included as a single support stream within recurrent research funding. Revisions to the QAA code of practice in 2004 included minimum standards for postgraduate research degree programmes (18/2004) and, in 2005, a new element of recurrent funding for research was introduced for undertaking research funded by charities (16/2005), which continued until 2018.

The Roberts review of the RAE was published in 2003, and this resulted in a number of recommendations with regards to expert judgements and panel structures, the best fit for subjects and the assessment burden (2003/22). HEFCE undertook a review of the QR recurrent methodology, agreeing a more formulaic approach (2003/38) and new criteria for RAE2008 was announced in 2006.

Continuing the agenda to ensure value for money, the costs of research were considered by HEFCE, with the publication of a report describing the method for recovering the Full Economic Cost of research and other activities (05/2003). As such, 'FeC' became the standard method of costing research within the sector.

#### *4.8.3.5. Capital funding driven by key priorities*

Provision of capital funding for estate was a substantial funding stream during the period, with both special funding initiatives and the incorporation of capital funds within recurrent grant from 1997 (6/97). Over four years from 1998, £135m was provided to improve poor estate (97/22, 98/50). Capital funding was also used to support learning and teaching priorities, with £90m of formula based funding from 1999-2002 to support learning and teaching infrastructure (99/26) and, in 2003, a sizeable amount was invested through special funding to improve capital and IT provision, with £494m between 2004-06 (2003/26). Of that £494m, HEFCE sought to drive spending towards certain policy priorities, with £117m used to improve provision for students with special educational needs, and £60m to improve science and engineering laboratories. Additional capital funding by formula for learning and teaching (£95m over three years) was announced in 2006 (2006/12). With a greater focus on the provision of HE within FECs, £22m was provided in 2006 to support capital projects in FECs (11/2005).

In line with government priorities in investing in science and technology research, £30m was allocated for refurbishing research laboratories (97/23), an additional £7m for Metropolitan Area Networks (98/17) and £150m of formula funding from 1999-2002 to support research capital projects (99/52). As with other funding priorities, value for money

and driving down the unit of resource became a key consideration for HEFCE in relation to the estate. In 2005, a Space Management Group was created to review efficiency and sustainability in space management, resulting in the introduction of space cost drivers within institutions.

#### 4.8.3.6. *The locus of policy-making*

It is evident from the HEFCE policy initiatives and funding methodologies highlighted above that the New Labour government's priorities in the 'third way' policy-making were a key focus within HEFCE in prioritising funding for driving regional skills development, business collaboration, science and technology, and social mobility through widening participation. Another key theme underlying much of the policy work was a focus on value for money and efficiency, evident within all the main policy areas of learning and teaching, research and capital funding. For Shattock, this focus on cost efficiency was the driver behind the locus of policy-making lying with government, not HEFCE:

*'This was a body [HEFCE] set up to monitor and encourage institutional competition to promote the most cost effective use of resources within an imperative to contain public spending; policy was pushed 'upstairs' to the Department to be delivered through annual letters of guidance from the Secretary of State' (Shattock 2012 p.83).*

Analysis by Stiles (2002) supports this hypothesis, in suggesting that

*'over the 1990s, HEFCE funding methods evolved to reflect government aims of expanding student places and reducing unit costs, while increasing equity, access and competition as well as teaching and research quality... development of Funding Council allocation methods over the 1990s reflected a spirit of conservatism that served to perpetuate higher education structures in a hostile public funding environment' (Stiles 2002 p.711/730).*

However, despite these assertions, there is some evidence during New Labour years suggesting that HEFCE did have some influence over broad policy direction, which perhaps demonstrates the strong relationship between government and HEFCE at that time, as HEFCE found opportunities to develop and steer policy. Taggart points to instances where this is demonstrated:

*'There are areas where the HEFCE has effectively developed its own policies without the obvious impetus from Government' (Taggart 2003 p.90).*

One such instance was a correlation between funding and teaching quality, which had been desired by governments since 1988. HEFCE had strongly resisted this approach and in 1997 outsourced one of its key functions in assessing quality to the QAA as described above, in

order to disconnect funding from quality. By 1998, the expectation of linking funding to quality had been abandoned (Taggart 2003) and this is a good example of where HEFCE was able to exercise control in order to protect the sector.

The 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, also demonstrates an instance where HEFCE appeared to influence government policy thinking. Taggart (2003) recounts a situation where HEFCE chose to delay publication of its 2003 strategic plan, in order to await the publication of the White Paper. Government had already had sight of the draft strategic plan, and when the White Paper was published many of the key themes were a reflection of the HEFCE strategic plan:

*'When the White Paper was published in January 2003 there was a remarkable measure of symmetry between the Autumn 2002 draft HEFCE strategic plan and the chapter headings in the White Paper. All of the key themes from the HEFCE draft paper were included in the White Paper'* (Taggart 2003 p.94).

For Taggart, this demonstrates the extent to which government at that time had faith in HEFCE to deliver its HE agenda, and suggests that government viewed HEFCE more as an agent of government, rather than the buffer so enjoyed by UGC:

*'This may indicate that the DfES has a high measure of trust in the ability of the Council to deliver on a demanding and complex agenda for higher education over the rest of the decade. It would appear that the Government views HEFCE as a safe, trusted and professional pair of hands'* (Taggart 2003 p.95).

As such, this is an important moment for this research, since it demonstrates a tension between HEFCE as an agent of a government, heavily involved in the promoting of New Labour's 'third way' agenda (and thus very different from the UGC's buffer role), and yet equally, HEFCE's purported influence over government's thinking in HE policy development. This moment is particularly significant for this thesis, since the case studies have been chosen from the New Labour period, and in all three cases there is evidence of HEFCE playing a key role in the initiation of the policy episodes.

#### 4.8.4 2007 – 2010

This period in HEFCE's history saw a continuation of New Labour's 'third way' ideology, but under the administration of Gordon Brown as Prime Minister until 2010, when a general election resulted in a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government. ASNs were targeted at specific disciplines and a widening participation agenda to increase HE

participation to 50% by 2010. That target was in fact missed in 2010, with only 45.8% participation, although the rate climbed to 49% in 2011.

2007 saw a further shift in the public-private funding of HE, with variable fees of £3,070 introduced, thus further increasing the contribution expected from students. In the same year, HEFCE became the principle *regulator* for 110 HE institutions under the 2006 Charities Act, and hence a further subtle shift in the remit of the Council. An event which was to have a substantial impact on future policy for HE was the global financial crisis in 2008, resulting in the commissioning of the 2010 Browne Review of HE funding: *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance*, which recommended proposals for greater choice for students, the removal of the cap on tuition fees, student finance plans and the introduction of part-time fees. These notions had already been at the forefront of ministers' minds since, in 2009, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) announced the Higher Education Framework, *higher ambitions: the future of universities in the knowledge economy*. This document itself represented a watershed moment, effectively ending public funding of universities in favour of increasing the contributions from students and employers. The emphasis on students as customers, competition between institutions for funding, and business-facing institutions are noteworthy in the framework.

This period saw a reduction in funding to HEFCE as a result of the comprehensive spending reviews in 2007 and 2010, following significant cuts to public expenditure to reduce the country's borrowing requirements, leading to the Secretary of State announcing £180m of efficiency savings for HE in 2009 and a further £135m in 2010. £20m of special funding was made available to deliver '*efficiency and value for money through shared services*', announced in 2010 (07/2010). The focus was on increasing access and participation whilst increasing efficiency and reducing costs, and government launched the University Modernisation Fund, with £270m for increasing access and efficiency.

The focus on efficiency savings meant that by the end of the period, HEFCE's internal organisation had been restructured, with the loss of the international collaboration team, closure of subject centres in the LTSN, and replacement of HEFCE regional teams with three institutional teams.

#### 4.8.4.1. Targeted student participation with less resource

ASNs continued to dominate the recurrent funding methodology, in order to meet the 50% participation in HE target by 2010, and were specifically targeted at key areas and disciplines such as foundation degrees, strategically important and vulnerable subjects, STEM, and health (2007/06), 04/2007, 05/2008, 32/2008, 22/2009). In 2007, HEFCE published a strategy on employer engagement to support flexible learning in the workplace, and allocated 5,000 ASNs in 2008 on a co-funded basis with employer engagement (03/2007), thus strengthening policies in relation to employer engagement and HE and FEC collaboration. As such, in 2009, employer engagement and skills became embedded as one of HEFCE's strategic aims. However, there was tension between the need for more ASNs to meet target and a requirement to reduce costs, and so a number of policy shifts were introduced to reduce grant. These included the phasing out of funding for Equivalent Level Qualifications (ELQs) in 2008 (2008/13), withdrawal of funding for old and historic buildings and phasing out of additional support for Foundation Degrees in 2010 (2010/08). To meet unanticipated student support costs, HEFCE introduced clawback of funding in 2009-10 to discourage institutions from recruiting above 2008-09 numbers (2009/08) and also introduced the setting of specific student number controls for institutions in 2010 (2010/08). The University Modernisation Fund, aimed at improving efficiency and reducing costs, was itself reduced from £270m to £152m in 2010 (14/2010) and then abolished in 2011 (2011/07).

Some investment to drive student recruitment in specific disciplines and for specific groups of students took place, although with substantially reduced resources than under the Blair government. For example, a focus on science and engineering continued to dominate, with £75m over three years from 2007 to 'support chemistry, physics, chemical engineering and mineral, metallurgy and materials engineering' (13/2007) and £25m recurrent funding was made available for very high cost laboratory subjects in 2009 (2009/08). The policy on strategically important and vulnerable subjects was reviewed in 2010, and aligned to the government's *New Industry, New Jobs, Higher Ambitions and Skills for Growth* agenda (2010/09), thus further aligning HE to government priorities. Whilst there were some time-bound special funding initiatives to support learning and teaching, such as the £5.7m pilot programme, established in 2009 to develop a digital repository of learning materials, and a £13.6m Graduate Internships Scheme to help with employability, funding was relatively modest compared with the previous period.



Widening participation remained a key focus for HEFCE, with institutions expected to focus on disadvantaged learners (2007/12), and the funding methodology was amended in 2009 to support the additional costs of working with schools in disadvantaged areas (2009/30). Disability also continued to be a key focus, with continued recurrent and specialist funding (2009/49). However, initiatives and funding incentives were fewer than under the Blair administration and there were no large scale special funding initiatives. Aimhigher funding was extended to 2011, with a focus on targeting lower social economic groups, areas of deprivation and care leavers, and a £21m Aimhigher associates scheme was announced in 2008. Policy on widening participation and fair access was published in 2008, with a focus on better links with schools and colleges, and partnerships between HEIs and communities (2008/10). Retention of students had become a key focus since the introduction of variable fees, with £1m over three years from 2008 introduced to disseminate good practice (08/2008), increased funding for under-represented groups at risk of non-completion (2008/12) and a change in the funding method in 2009 to include funding for improving retention (2009/30).

For quality assurance, a new credit framework and guidelines were published by the QAA in 2008 and 2010, and new arrangements for auditing collaborative provision, and new policy on quality assurance systems for institutional audit, were also published (2010/17). The shift of focus for HEFCE to ensure the public interest saw a growth in HEFCE's role in providing publically accessible information, with a new Unistats website introduced in 2008 to provide course data in order to facilitate students' choices. The NSS and Destination of Leavers' from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys were also extended to include FECs, in line with a policy to encourage greater collaboration across the sector.

Despite the continuation of significant spending cuts, capital funding continued for learning and teaching, with £1,085m over three years from 2008 (2008/04). However, institutions were asked to bring forward spending from 2010 to address the economic position, and capital investment funding for FECs was put on hold in 2009 (12/2008). This was perhaps the first of a number of policy interventions that saw funding cuts aimed at FECs.

#### *4.8.4.2 Research – cuts and quality based on metrics*

Research funding was also subject to reductions in recurrent funding, aligned with public sector cuts, with a revised policy on the purpose and funding of QR published in 2008, and the funding element for the 'best 5\*' departments discontinued in 2009. The recurrent

grant methodology was further amended in 2010, with enhanced funding for disciplines aligned to government strategic priorities, such as STEM, geography and psychology. There were very few special funding initiatives during this period, a notable exception being £6m transitional funding for eight medical schools to build research capacity. In line with HEFCE's increased role as provider of publically available information and protector of the public interest, a policy on open access to research publications was agreed in 2007.

The biggest change in research policy came in 2007, with the announcement that a new research quality exercise, the Research Excellence Framework, would replace the RAE after 2008. The REF was announced '*as a single unified framework for assessing and funding research across all disciplines*' using bibliometric techniques and assessment of impact (13/2008, 34/2008, 04/2010). The REF saw the introduction of new metrics on measuring research impact, which proved to be problematic, since many critics argued that impact was difficult to measure, and it required researchers to have impact outside academia, which undermined academic freedom. Following consultation with the sector, David Willetts, then Universities and Science Minister, announced in 2010 that the REF would be delayed by a year, whilst further work on the measurement of impact was conducted. Like learning and teaching funding, some capital funding for research was made available from 2008, with £1,276m for three years although, once again, institutions were asked to bring their spending forward to accommodate likely future reductions in funding.

#### *4.8.4.3 Third stream – conflicting policies*

Third stream activities continued to be well funded from 2006-2010, with substantial HEIF funding of £396m from 2008-2011 (2008/02). However, HEIF funding was also incorporated into recurrent grant allocations to support all forms of knowledge exchange (2008/12): this meant the Centres for Knowledge Exchange were discontinued after a final allocation of £8m in 2008 (2008/02), and there was a move towards performance as the basis for the allocation of funds. This came to fruition in 2011, when HEIF funding was calculated on performance metrics alone, rather than funding by volume. In line with HEFCE's new strategy, Strategic Development Fund funding was re-focussed to prioritise employer engagement and, in 2008, the Economic Challenge Investment Fund was announced, providing £25m of matched funding to support employer engagement. It is noteworthy that just months later, HEFCE announced that there would be no more funding for employer engagement activities (36/2008), thus reflecting the disposition at the time for continual refinements to cut public expenditure. In the same year, and perhaps in conflict

with HEFCE's position to move away from employer engagement, government announced the New University Challenge: *unlocking Britain's talent, setting out 'how local higher education, delivered or supported by universities, unlocks the talents of people and drives economic regeneration'* (18/2008). The document proposed that HEFCE conduct a consultation on a scheme for new HE centres to stress the importance of how local HE institutions could work with local business and regional organisations to support community access to HE. In 2009, HEFCE published a policy and process for developing new HE centres (2009/07), although these did not fully come to fruition.

#### *4.8.4.4 A decline in focus on leadership*

Unlike the previous period, where there was a strong focus (and significant funding), for governance and leadership, this period saw a marked reduction in comparison, as a direct result of required public sector cuts. In 2007, HEFCE provided direction to institutions through the publication of policies on race, disability and gender equality (2007/01) and notably, given the continued financial constraints on the sector, a policy on severance for senior staff in 2009 (06/2009). The continuation of the Leadership Foundation was announced in 2007, with very modest funding of £4.5m until 2012, and a further £10m for the Leadership, Management and Governance Fund 07/2009). However, this fund was withdrawn completely in 2010 (13/2010), significantly reducing the focus on supporting leadership.

#### *4.8.4.5 The locus of policy-making*

There are perhaps two significant events which contributed to a change in the relationship between HEFCE, government and institutions during this period. Firstly, the reduction in block grant to 60% by 2010, and significant cuts in special initiative funding, meant that HEFCE began to lose its strength as a funding body and, indeed, it began to refocus its purpose by acting as the defender of the public good, through an increased role in providing information to support choice. Secondly, during 2010 HEFCE acquired additional powers as chief regulator for HE under the 2006 Charities Act and, as such, HEFCE's role was to ensure compliance, by '*exercising control and management of the administration of the charity*' (HEFCE 2006). As a consequence, there was a change to the financial memorandum with institutions, where HEFCE gained greater powers of financial control and governing bodies became directly accountable to HEFCE in matters of finance. This represents a significant shift from the buffer relationship previously held by the

intermediary body, as will be discussed in Section 4.9 (p.120). For Shattock, this marks a significant change:

*'increasingly universities had become absorbed into a state accountability apparatus. This significantly rebalanced the nature of state-university relations'* (Shattock 2012 p.199).

This observation is of particular significance to this study, as this change in HEFCE's role meant that its responsibility for policy development and influence began to diminish as it lost its strength as a funding body to influence change, but it gained strength as the body ensuring the financial accountability of institutions. As can be discerned from many of the policy initiatives described in the previous sections on HEFCE's policy work, and particularly recognisable in the chosen case studies, much of HEFCE's work in driving institutional behaviour towards particular policy goals revolved around the provision of special funding initiatives. As a result of a combination of very significant cuts to public expenditure, particularly for teaching-related funding, and a focus on performance-related funding in research and third stream activities, HEFCE's role in policy development through highly funded initiatives is less discernible. Hence, there are fewer suitable candidates that meet the criteria to be developed as case studies.

#### 4.8.5 2011 – 2016

The period 2011-2016 was witness to turbulent times in UK governance, with a coalition government of Conservative and Liberal Democrats from 2011 and a fully Conservative government from 2015. The leave vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum added further turbulence for HE, with concerns around European staffing, students and research collaborations. The period saw momentous change for HE in England, with two White Papers: *Students at the Heart of the System* in 2011 and *Success as a Knowledge Economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice* in 2016. The 2011 White Paper emphasised the need for greater competition through dynamism, and recommended an increase in the variable fee up to a maximum of £9,000. The White Paper also contained provision for new types of private sector providers, and a stronger emphasis on students as customers. This prompted the increase in fees from 2012 (with most institutions charging the maximum £9,000 for the vast majority of courses), and a shift of focus for HEFCE: in 2012 to invest on behalf of students and, in 2013, to have greater regulatory insight as a result of funding and regulatory reform. Regulatory reform resulted in a new operating framework from 2013 and the introduction of the 'HEFCE register' which listed all

'appropriately recognised' institutions and new providers, and held those institutions to account through *compliance*. HEFCE acknowledged this shift in focus in their 2010-11 annual report, reflecting the character of the White Paper:

*'future arrangements will require close collaboration on a regulatory framework which will need to be transparent, fair and proportionate, and to protect the interests of students, the public and taxpayers. They will also need to include measures to further student choice and opportunities'* (HEFCE Annual Report 2010-11 p.3).

This was accompanied in 2012 by a new framework between BIS and HEFCE and an internal restructure of HEFCE. In 2016, HEFCE no longer reported to BIS, but to the Department for Education (DfE), the rationale being that the Department could take a holistic view of lifelong learning. A further change in focus for HEFCE was its increased powers under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which enabled it to monitor institutions and how they prevented people from being drawn into terrorism.

The 2016 White Paper proposed a stronger emphasis on regulation and the introduction of the TEF, which awards teaching quality with a bronze, silver or gold rating. This proposal suggested the return of the link between funding and teaching quality, which had consistently been resisted by HEFCE, proposing that from 2020 teaching quality results determine whether institutions can raise tuition fees. Although TEF 1 took place in 2016, with the subsequent TEF 2, and now TEF 3 which focusses on discipline level (and is one of the key activities that has been passed over to the OfS), there has been much criticism, both within the sector and in the media, over imperfections of the framework. In addition, the 2015 Nurse Review of the research councils proposed the establishment of an umbrella organisation which would fund research quality, thus removing the responsibility from HEFCE. These proposals prompted the creation of the Higher Education and Research Bill in 2016, and the ultimate demise of HEFCE, which is considered in Section 4.8.6 (p.118).

Another key shift within HEFCE policy during this period was a change of emphasis in the way that HEFCE allocated funding. Special funding initiatives had always been a key feature of the HEFCE landscape in driving institutional behaviour towards particular policy goals, but in 2012, special initiatives funding reduced from £208m to £125m and there was a move to channel most funding through recurrent routes (03/2012).

There was still a strong focus on accountability and value for money, although not as strongly evident as it had been in the New Labour years. TRAC continued to be the tool by which the costing of activities was considered by HEFCE, although proposed changes in

2013 to make TRAC data transparent to students was met with much criticism from the sector (2013/09). A focus on efficiency and shared services continued, with £250,000 of funding for *'developing and disseminating good practice in shared services'* (27/2013). There was far less emphasis on policy in relation to leadership, management and governance of institutions than in previous years, as a casualty of public sector funding cuts and the need to prioritise other key areas.

#### *4.8.5.1 Learning and teaching – funding shifts and waves*

The shift in funding for learning and teaching away from HEFCE resulted in a plethora of policy statements, shifts in policy emphasis and new initiatives to focus effort on the student as customer. In 2011, all elements of the *'teaching grant, with the exception of widening participation and improving retention'*, were subject to a 4.28% cash reduction (2011/07) and, in 2014, there was a £20m reduction in the recurrent teaching grant. In 2012, when the new fee regime was introduced, students achieving AAB were no longer included in the Student Number Control (SNC); in 2013, more students were taken out of the SNC policy and, in 2015, SNC was abolished altogether. The new fee regime was also introduced for part-time as well as full-time students, and consequently part-time student registrations dropped by 40% which, despite some amendments to the funding methodology, have to date never fully recovered. By 2015, HEFCE had sought to simplify its recurrent funding methodology for teaching, such that the three stage recalculation process was removed (30/2013, 29/2014). The amount of recurrent grant continued to decline, particularly the supplement for 'old regime' students, which was reduced by £54m in 2016, although funding was maintained in real terms for high cost and STEM subjects (03/2016).

HEFCE still had some control over the funding of specific disciplines, with financial incentives for strategically important and vulnerable subjects (09/2011), high cost subjects, STEM (for which some new disciplines were now included in classifications, such as sports science) and a relaxation of the ELQ policy for some STEM subjects and students taking a year abroad (14/2013). In 2011, despite HEFCE's previous assertion that employer engagement was no longer a policy focus, 20,000 ASNs were provided for co-funded employer engagement as part of a workforce development programme (03/2007), but by 2012, co-funded places were phased out and HEFCE had announced that workforce development was no longer a policy priority.

The vast majority of policy decisions in the period were in relation to the recurrent funding methodology, with little special initiative funding. However, what little was available was focussed on other areas of the sector, such as taught postgraduate students, with £25m of special initiative funding in 2013 to stimulate progression to taught postgraduate (PGT) (2013/13) and £50m in 2014 as matched funding towards the cost of studies as part of a Postgraduate Support Scheme (32/2014). Following the Sainsbury review of technical skills pathways and qualifications, HEFCE turned its attention to degree apprenticeships, with £11m for the Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund (06/2016).

In 2011, as part of HEFCE's new role in supporting students and providing information on choice and opportunities, HEFCE published a policy on the provision of information about HE in response to the White Paper, including the establishment of Key Information Set (KIS) data to be provided by institutions on all courses (2011/18) and include data from surveys such as the NSS and DLHE, (2011/18). The first KIS data was produced in 2012 and published on the new UNISTATS website (16/2012). By 2014, institutions were being asked for more transparency, and asked to provide students with information on income and expenditure, as part of the government's Supporting Public Accountability initiative (06/2014). HEFCE launched data maps of HE provision in 2014, thus enhancing its role in the provision of publically available HE data. Provision of data was extended to postgraduate provision in 2015, with the development of the Steps to Postgraduate Study decision-making tool launched.

Increasing participation continued to be a priority for government, and although participation had increased to 49% in 2011, the participation rate declined sharply to 42.1% in 2012 with the introduction of the higher fee cap. However, despite this drop in 2012, participation continued with an upwards trajectory to rise to 49.1% by 2016 (source: DfE 2018).

Policy steers and recurrent funding incentives were still at the forefront of HEFCE's widening participation agenda, but these too were subject to funding cuts during the period. Indeed, Aimhigher, which had been the flagship umbrella organisation for widening participation funded by two government departments and HEFCE, was closed in 2011. Under the coalition government in 2011, a National Scholarship Programme was announced, which provided £300m of matching funding over three years to support students whose household income was less than £25,000 (13/2011, 2011/10). However, the programme was short-lived and, following a re-calculation of its funding method to

concentrate funding in institutions with a greater number of students from low income families (2013/02), together with a £50m reduction in funding in 2014 (32/2013), the programme was abolished in 2015 in order to concentrate funding to support postgraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds (24/2013). A relatively modest £25m was provided over two years as special initiative funding in 2014 to support a national Network for Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) between HE and FE (20/2014). However, with a now wholly Conservative government, and a push from the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, the NCOP became a recurrent funding stream with £90m over two years in order to meet the PM's goals of increasing participation from disadvantaged backgrounds by 100%, and doubling the proportion of students from ethnic minority groups (27/2016). Disabled students also continued to be a focus for HEFCE, with funding doubled to £40m, albeit with revised weightings (03/2016). However, despite a strong steer towards increasing participation from certain groups through these funding initiatives, by 2016 formula funding for widening participation had dropped from £68m to £54m (03/2016).

Capital spending for learning and teaching through the Capital Investment Fund continued to be a priority, both for HEIs and for HEFCE funded FECs, with increases year on year from 2012-14 (05/2012, 2013/08, 03/2014), and there were moves to drive capital investment towards particular priorities, with £200m made available in 2014 for investment in STEM facilities (02/2014). Like many of the funding initiatives being introduced post 2011, this required matched funding from institutions themselves. HEFCE introduced a change of emphasis during this period, with many capital policy funding initiatives being driven towards the reduction of carbon emissions, such as the Revolving Green Fund (16/2011, 29/2012). Indeed, in 2012, capital funding became '*conditional upon carbon management plans and improved environmental performance*' (16/2011).

#### *4.8.5.2 Research – quality judged by impact*

Although recurrent research funding was also subject to cuts at the beginning of the period, with an overall reduction of 1.1% in 2011 (2011/07), by 2016 QR funding had increased by £20m (03/2016). HEFCE continued to invest in research capability; from 2012, £100m of additional funding was made available over three years to support research facilities (2012/12) and there was £240m to support postgraduate research. The UK Research Partnership Investment Fund for capital funding was introduced in 2013, with four consecutive rounds in the four years to 2016 of over £400m in funding (2012/31, 2013/35, 2014/17, 2015/33). However, there were also changes to the QR funding methodology,



such that two star research outputs were no longer funded (03/2012) and, in the light of the 2014 REF results, the parameters for the funding method were reviewed (03/2015). A further shift of emphasis came in 2014, when institutions were required to comply with the Concordat to Support Research Activity, as a condition of grant (153<sup>rd</sup> Board Meeting minutes).

The key event in HEFCE's research policy in the period was the first REF submission in 2014, with its increased focus on the impact of research. In 2016, the Stern Review reported on a review of the REF guidelines, recommending that there was an even greater emphasis in future REFs on the impact of research. However, there had been criticism of this approach, and a study by the RAND Corporation in 2014 found that both defining impact and authenticating the impact had proved problematic. Another key outcome from changes to the REF post-2014 was the implementation of an open access framework (2013/16, 2014/07, 32/2016, 2016/35), such that the findings of research are publically available, thus enhancing its transparency.

#### *4.8.5.3 Economy and society*

Third stream activities continued to be a feature on the HEFCE funding landscape, albeit much reduced in comparison with previous years. The Strategic Development Fund (SDF) was replaced in 2012 by Catalyst Funding, specifically targeted to promote activities such as projects which enhanced the sector's contribution to economic growth, the NUS's green fund (2012/12) and higher level technical education (2014/21). The Catalyst Fund became a catch-all fund for supporting activities in other key policy areas, such as the 2016 focus on teaching innovations in addressing barriers to success and safeguarding (20/2016, 36/2016), thus significantly simplifying the funding of special initiatives.

#### *4.8.5.4 The locus of policy-making*

This phase in HEFCE's history saw the locus of policy-making shift wholly to that of *outside-in*, as HEFCE became chief regulator, and its ability to influence policy through special funding continued to diminish, both as a consequence of continued cuts to public funding and cuts to learning and teaching grant through increased student fees. Indeed, a good many of the special funding initiatives, which had previously given HEFCE the potential for influencing institutional behaviour, became absorbed into recurrent funding in learning and teaching, research, and third stream funding. Hence shifts in policy direction tended to be characterised by incremental shifts in the recurrent funding formulas. The focus on the

student as consumer meant that HEFCE found its role more as provider of information and less as influencer of policy.

The consequences for this study are that in this period of HEFCE's history, there are few policy initiatives that adequately meet the criteria to be considered as case studies. There are few special funded initiatives resulting in adequate formative and summative evaluations, and little policy development work which has resulted in sufficiently rich discussions and review by other commentators.

#### 4.8.6 2017 – 2018

As a consequence of the White Papers noted in 4.8.4 above, and the Nurse review, The Higher Education and Research Bill had its first reading in the House of Commons in May 2016 and received Royal Assent twelve months later. The Bill recommended further significant changes to the funding and regulatory structures for HE, most notably the demise of HEFCE and the introduction of a new HE regulator, the OfS. The Bill also saw the merger of the Research Councils, and the research funding functions of HEFCE transferred to a new body, UKRI. By April 2018, formula funding for teaching and regulatory responsibilities had been transferred to the OfS, and formula funding for research had transferred to UKRI. As such, the funding of teaching and research had been truly separated.

The OfS is essentially an amalgamation of the student-facing functions of HEFCE and OFFA. The specific purpose of the OfS is to *regulate* the market for HE. What little state funding that remains will come straight from the DfE:

*'We will establish a new market regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) that operates on behalf of students and tax payers to support a competitive environment and promote choice, quality and value for money. In doing so we will put students at the heart of how higher education is regulated. The OfS will be explicitly pro-student choice, a champion of transparency, and will make sure that a high quality higher education experience is available for students from all backgrounds'* (House of Commons Education Committee report February 2017).

Other HE agencies were also subject to significant change within this period, with the UUK and GuildHE Bell Review of the sector agencies recommending a merger of the Leadership Foundation, the HEA and the Equality Challenge Unit, and this was fulfilled in 2018. Data collection for the sector was also subject to change and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data collection was rebranded as Data Futures from 2019-20. In a further

move to distance HE funding from the state, the government also sold part of the student loan book to the private sector in 2017. Evans (2018) notes that the OfS had not been set up to work co-operatively with sector agencies, and indeed the review of such agencies means that

*‘the balancing influence of HEFCE’s cooperating bodies has been broken up and reshaped’* (Evans WONKHE 2018).

Much of the policy work of HEFCE in its remaining months was focussed on preparing for the transition of its regulatory functions to the OfS and QR funding to UKRI, and hence there were very few new initiatives, with most work resulting in minor changes to the funding methodologies. Special initiative funding had been almost completely withdrawn, with the exception of the Catalyst Fund, which provided funds to support focussed initiatives, such as tackling religious-based hate crime (3/2018) and supporting the mental health of postgraduate research students (40/2017). However there was a continuation of the Capital Investment Framework with £324m to support both teaching and research (07/2017). Overall though, the demise of HEFCE and its influence in policy was evident from 2017.

Much of the policy work in 2017-18 supported the development of TEF, including changes to the NSS data set to include private providers (30/2016). In addition, HEFCE continued to support government’s focus on apprenticeships, with a continuation of the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund, although funding was modest at only £5m for 2017-18 (06/2016). Overall, teaching recurrent grant declined, by £40m in 2017, although there was still a focus on driving some areas of policy, such as changes to formula funding to accommodate the NCOP, and a push to support student mental health (2017/05).

There was some good news for government in 2018, with the participation target almost meeting 50%, standing at 49.8% at the end of 2016-17 (source DfE 2018), although it has been reported that this is a misleading figure, since once all modes of study and gender are taken into account, the number of entrants is more than 4,000 lower than in 2011-12 (Kernohan and Coiffait 2018).

There was little in the way of new policy development for research, other than a consolidation of funding, with recurrent funding increasing by £28m in 2017, in order to switch the Global Challenges Research Fund to the recurrent funding methodology (2017/05, 24/2017). Special funding was almost non-existent, with the exception of £220m

of research capability funding for the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund (2017/05). The biggest policy influence from HEFCE in research was an announcement on the framework for REF2012 (33/2017, REF2017/01). Recurrent funding for third stream economy and society funding continued, although new funds were relatively modest, with small increases in HIEF funding to support government initiatives such as the industrial strategy (2017/24).

As a consequence, there were no policy initiatives with sufficiently rich data to be considered as candidates for case studies.

#### *4.9 From buffer to regulator (and a shift in the locus of policy-making)*

For many commentators on HE, the *buffer* role so enjoyed by UGC had diminished with the advent of the Funding Councils. Scott (1995) described the Funding Councils as '*agents of government, not buffer bodies*' (p.27) and Shattock (2012) agrees, describing them as '*essentially an instrument of government*' (p.100). He argues that this agency relationship was further strengthened in 1997 with the installation of the New Labour government, which saw the role of HEFCE as delivering policy, not creating it. For Shattock, the evidence for this lies in examples where HEFCE has been over-ruled by government, such as the occasion when a minister required HEFCE to reduce the number of five star departments identified in the RAE, since he thought there were too many (Shattock 2012 p.100).

However, despite the apparent loss of the buffer role, Shattock acknowledges that HEFCE had a critical role to play as a '*mediator*'. It is noteworthy that, in 2003, Howard Newby, then Chief Executive of HEFCE, also saw the role of HEFCE as a mediator, reporting in the Guardian newspaper that

*'In carrying out our role we act as a mediator between Government and universities and colleges. We robustly represent the needs of higher education to Government, and convey the views of Government to higher education'* (in Taggart 2003 p.10).

Conversely, in the same article he describes how HEFCE had responsibility for implementing policies within the broad policy framework of government, thus suggesting that Scott and Shattock's description of HEFCE as instruments and agents of government was also acknowledged by HEFCE. Equally, Taggart (2003) points to a MORI poll conducted in 2002-03 in which 90% of respondents from HEIs and FECs agreed that HEFCE was an agent of government (p.11). For Taggart (2003), whilst HEFCE did not have the planning powers under the terms of the Act (1992), it was able to '*steer*' policy through regulatory powers

and promoting good practice. I would agree with this view, since there is evidence, as noted by Taggart (2003), that HEFCE was able to influence government, such as with the 2003 White Paper, and the forthcoming case studies demonstrate that HEFCE chief executives in particular had on occasions the opportunity to influence the instigation of particular policy initiatives.

By 2010, HEFCE had seen a further change in focus, as student fees became the dominant funding methodology for the sector, and HEFCE's role became more regulatory than that of a funding body; and this is supported by evidence provided above, for example the creation of the HEFCE register in 2013 as a result of regulatory reform. Thus the focus was on regulating expenditure and monitoring institutions' financial health in order to make them more accountable for spending fee income. Shattock (2012) argues that this represented a further move away from the buffer role for the funding council, as HEFCE was obliged to refine itself:

*'in 2010 HEFCE abandoned the pretence it was a 'buffer' and refined itself as a 'broker' (Shattock 2012 p.101).*

HEFCE acknowledged this change in role itself in its *'memorandum of assurance and accountability between HEFCE and institutions'* in July 2017, in which it described HEFCE's role to *'act as a broker'* (Evans 2018). However, with the demise of HEFCE, the role of the new intermediary body, the OfS, shifted once again to that of solely regulator.

For many commentators and observers of HE, the demise of HEFCE was inevitable once the focus of funding shifted from the state to the individual, and with it came a shift in the locus of policy-making. Whilst HEFCE was able to retain a key role in using funding to *incentivise* (Selby 2018) institutions to engage with certain policies, whether as a buffer, mediator or broker, it retained a role influencing policy at both government and institutional level. However, as its funding power diminished, so did its ability to influence policy. As Mark Leach observed in The Guardian in 2015, HEFCE's position had been under threat since 2011:

*'having taken away most of its carrots as the primary funder of universities, the government gave it no new sticks to compensate' (Leach, 2015).*

David Melville, former Chief Executive of the HEFCE, writing in 2018, takes this further, arguing that the demise of HEFCE firmly removed any bridge between government and the institutions and entirely shifted the locus of policy-making into the heart of government:

*'I would argue that the demise of HEFCE is not just another comma in the last 100-year history of HE. Rather it is a full-stop. HEFCE has been the last bastion of a centuries-old compact between governments and universities to provide the funding whilst leaving the internal operations of the system to the universities..... This parallels what has happened in other areas of the public sector in terms of central control, but universities, once having the clout to resist such moves have fragmented into competing mission groups which make it easier for central government to impose its will. The bypassing of HEFCE on the basis of ministerial anecdote to invent dubious policy initiatives has been progressively more evident' (Melville 2018).*

Kernohan, also writing in 2018, concurs, arguing that HEFCE's policy in interpreting and managing policy was essential for the sector:

*'policy coming from ministerial fiat was thoughtfully translated into interventions that made sense, and either achieved stated goals or were at least not actively harmful. Getting rid of this filter is not good for the sector, for either new market entrants or ancient institutions' (Kernohan 2018).*

So the loss of HEFCE begs the question, where will the locus of policy-making be in the new regulatory world of the OfS? The initial plan for OfS was that it *'would not do policy'* (Kernohan 2018) but would use its regulatory framework to ensure compliance and monitoring of institutions. Policy therefore either has to be determined at institutional level through market forces, which is problematic where HE is not a typical market good, and is subject to intense regulation, or at the level of government department, and therefore the responsibility of the minister. This would leave the OfS in something of a policy vacuum. However, in its short life, OfS has already been asked to take a position on various issues, such as vice chancellors' remuneration and its role in the industrial strategy in assessing the higher level skills gap (Kernohan 2018) and, as such, *'not doing policy'* may not be a sustainable position for OfS.

In articulating the role of the intermediary bodies and the relationship with the locus of policy-making, it is useful to summarise in Table 8 (p.123) that follows.

**Table 8 – THE ROLE OF THE INTERMEDIARY BODY AND THE CHANGING LOCUS OF POLICY-MAKING**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Role of intermediary body</b>	<b>Locus of policy-making</b>
1919-1940s	<b>Buffer</b> – UGC	Inside-out: Universities
1940s to 1970s	<b>Buffer</b> – UGC	Inside-out: Universities
1980s	<b>Buffer/mediator</b> – UGC	Move towards outside-in: Universities but greater state intervention
1998-1992	<b>Mediator</b> – UFC	Move towards outside-in: Universities but greater state intervention
1992-1997	<b>Agent</b> – HEFCE as funder and regulator	Outside-in: Greater state intervention
1997-2008	<b>Agent/Broker</b> - HEFCE	Outside-in: Greater state intervention with increased accountability
2008-2010	<b>Agent/Broker</b> - HEFCE	Outside-in: Greater state intervention with increased accountability
2010-16	<b>Broker/Regulator</b> – HEFCE (becomes chief regulator)	Outside-in
2018 -	<b>Regulator</b> – Office for Students	<i>Outside-in</i>

This section is important to the study since it charts the shift in focus for the HE intermediary body from the buffer of UGC to the regulator of the OfS. This chapter has articulated that there is a strong relationship between the role of the intermediary body and the locus of policy-making, and this will be further explored through the case studies. This is particularly helpful in informing the discussion in Chapter 8 addressing the research questions and articulating a position on what an analysis of HEFCE policy-making can reveal about the locus of power in policy-making in HE, through the evaluation of success and failure in relation to the case studies.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an historical account of the changing role of the intermediary body in policy development, and a summary of policy initiatives from HEFCE, against the backdrop of wider policy reform and other government initiatives and reviews during the period, in order to set the scene for the selection of the case studies. All three of the case studies have been highlighted during this chapter.

The period 2000-2006 saw a plethora of HEFCE special funding policy initiatives, following a significant increase in funding for teaching, research, capital investment and other policy areas under the New Labour government. A key focus of this period was New Labour’s ‘third way’ ideology, which drove much of the rhetoric for increasing participation to 50% by 2010, widening participation, and initiatives to engage HE with investing in the knowledge economy. As part of this ideology there was also a focus on engaging FECs in HE

through qualification and skills reform and a number of initiatives to engage with the local economy through education and research. New Public Management was also a strong feature of the period. All three of the chosen case studies fit well within the 'third way' and they all have some distinctions which are useful in illuminating different aspects of success and failure in relation to the '*process, programme and political dimensions*' (McConnell 2010) of the policy, and the locus of policy-making between HEFCE and government. In this chapter, I have also observed that whilst this particular stage in HEFCE's history provided a large number of potential case studies, subsequent periods provided fewer and fewer helpful case study candidates, as HEFCE had less and less opportunity to influence policy behaviour through special funding initiatives, both as a consequence of the changing nature of its role and significant public funding cuts.

In Chapter 3, I addressed the rationale of the selection of the case studies in terms of methodology, which was determined by their ability to 'fit' well within the McConnell framework for determining success and failure and enabling evaluation criteria for case studies. To summarise, the selected studies needed to be time bound, have clear objectives and proposed outcomes, follow a fairly typical process and implementation approach, whilst having some distinctions, and have sufficient sources of data to meet criteria for replication, validity and evaluation. Section 3.4 (p.67) provides a fuller description for how the case studies meet these criteria.

To summarise, the selected case studies are:

**The e-University (2000 – 2004).**

**Centres for Excellence in Learning & Teaching (2005 – 2010).**

**Lifelong Learning Networks (2004 – 2011).**

The next three chapters form the thick descriptions in relation to each of the case studies.



## Chapter 5: Case Study 1: The e-University

### 5.1 Introduction

The e-University is an ideal case study since it meets all the criteria set out in Table 6 (p.71) in being a time bound episode, having clearly identified proposed outcomes and benefits to the target group, following a typical HEFCE policy process and having sufficient sources of both primary and secondary texts to offer sufficient breadth and depth to develop a thick description of the policy episode. In considering each of the chosen texts, the use of the coding established in Appendix B enables the thick description to be interpreted against the theoretical framework in Chapter 8, to give a nuanced approach in addressing the main research question, articulating the success or failure of the e-University policy episode. This is also used to address the first supplementary research question in establishing commonalities and differences between the chosen case studies. This particular policy episode is also of interest to the thesis in that it addresses the second supplementary research question, considering the locus of power of the policy, since there is some debate about whether the initiative was driven by government or HEFCE in the first instance, and the novel approach to a public private enterprise raises some interesting questions about the power relationships between HEFCE and the private sector enterprise.

This chapter is split into two sections: the first provides an historical narrative of the episode: how it came to fruition, the national and international contexts, the organisations and actors involved, the activities which enabled the implementation of the policy, the outcomes and sequence of events. The second section, drawing on the primary and secondary texts, takes a thematic approach in articulating a critical analysis of particularly important or interesting aspects of the policy, which will enable the interpretation of the policy against the theoretical framework.

#### 5.1.1 Sources of data

The initial sources of data for this episode are the landmark speech given by David Blunkett at Greenwich University prior to the launch of the e-university initiative by HEFCE, the initial HEFCE consultation circular to HEIs, and the subsequent report. The initial Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) business model is also a key document, since this sets out the initial organisational structure, target student numbers and revenue plan. The other main source of data for this episode is the findings and evidence of the Select Committee, as

testimony of the views of the principal actors in the venture. Unlike the other case studies, this episode did not have sufficient longevity to enable HEFCE to commission formative and summative evaluations, but the Select Committee report is comprehensive in its review. The closest HEFCE came to an evaluation was the commissioning of a Review of the UKeU by PA Consulting. Although the review report was made available by HEFCE in 2005, it is no longer available, but Bacsich (2010) usefully summarises its findings.

Considering the controversy surrounding the e-University in the HE world, there is surprisingly little focus on it in the academic literature. However, there are some publications which are widely cited as helpful commentaries and analysis, and I have used them to establish a critical account of the episode. The main contributors are Garrett (2004) who summarised the venture and the reasons for the demise of UKeU, Peters (2011), who considered the partnership relationships in UKeU, and Bacsich (2004, 2005, 2010), who has authored a number of articles on the context of the e-University, accounts of the episode and the lessons to be learned from the UKeU. Bacsich has had unprecedented access to materials related to the e-University and UKeU, and he notes that there are 166 boxes of archive material and nearly 90,000 electronic files, but only a small percentage of them have been made publicly available, mostly to a select number of researchers such as Bacsich. Conole et al undertook an extensive piece of research into the e-University experience (2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), reviewing relevant documentation and interviewing actors from UKeU and HEIs before reaching some conclusions, particularly in relation to the organisation of the venture, and some of their findings are also highlighted here.

There is a considerable amount of literature citing the e-University as an example in relation to its technical platform and the pedagogical aspects of e-learning however; these are not considered as part of this study, since they are more technical considerations, and not related to policy per se.

A search for media interest in the e-University revealed surprisingly few mentions in the THES and only a small number in the Guardian and Observer newspapers, with the main themes reported during the episode being debates on whether the initiative should be an elite or inclusive venture, the lack of branding, potential private venture partners and the delays experienced in meeting objectives. The eventual decision to close UKeU, and the subsequent Select Committee report, received the highest level of reporting in 2004 and

2005. The demise of UKeU did receive some international attention, being reported in The Chronicle of Higher Education in Washington in May 2004.

It is noteworthy that, in an article in the Guardian newspaper on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2004, John Naughton claims that an article by Mark Townsend in the Observer newspaper in Autumn 2003 prompted the demise of UKeU. He suggests that the decision was not entirely that of the HEFCE Board, as HEFCE itself had reported, but driven by government in seeking to divert bad publicity:

*'In fact, my sources tell me that the events which culminated in HEFCE's decision to abort were triggered by a short piece in this newspaper last autumn written by my colleague Mark Townsend in which he reported the e-U's failure to recruit students. The item was read by Charles Clarke, who arrived in his office on Monday morning brandishing The Observer and demanding to know what the hell was going on'* (Naughton 2004).

UKeU is raised as an example of government failure in many subsequent House of Commons enquiries, and on occasion, along with the Poll Tax, as an example of policy failure in tit for tat exchanges between Conservative and Labour party representatives. Indeed, David Cameron used it as an example in a vitriolic speech in a House of Commons debate in November 2006, when he said *"What happened to the Chancellor's e-university, which was meant to link communities together? No one uses it"* (Cameron, Hansard 15.11.2006).

A full list of primary and secondary texts used in this section is included in Appendix A.

## *5.2 An account of the episode*

The e-University was a short-lived policy episode, running from 2001 to 2004, with its initiation declared by Lord David Blunkett in his Greenwich speech in 2000. The aim of the e-University was to provide global e-learning programmes, essentially owned by HEIs but administered through an operating company, UKeU (UK e-University). This was a public-private venture, triangulated between HEFCE, HEIs and private companies and established as a response to a perceived threat from the United States to dominate the market in global HE e-learning. HEFCE withdrew from the venture in 2004, closing down UKeU, when it became clear that both programmes and student numbers fell far short of those proposed in the original business plan. The failure of UKeU, and in particular the waste of substantial public funding, resulted in a House of Commons Education and Skills Committee public inquiry.

### 5.2.1 Origin

Sir Brian Fender, Chief Executive of HEFCE from 1995-2001, took responsibility for the initial idea for the e-University venture and, thus, it could be argued that HEFCE became the policy creator. When asked by the Select Committee review of UKeU if he had been the inspiration for the e-University, he responded:

*'I think a fair amount of responsibility for that falls on my shoulders... what we did was put in a bid in the spending round, and we said this was important, we thought it was an initiative... in the end, the Department did decide to put it on the agenda and the Secretary of State made a statement saying that he personally thought this was a project worth supporting' (SC 2005 p. Ev 90).*

Fender was influenced by a series of meetings that he had with public and private universities in the United States at a conference in Aspen, Colorado, at which discussions centred on the difficulties that universities faced in attracting students, and the role that e-learning could play in addressing future challenges. He concluded that, in the light of what was being achieved in the USA, raising the profile of UK e-learning was a necessity if the UK was not to be left behind in the global knowledge economy. Fender discussed the idea with HEFCE colleagues in 1999, concluding that it was important to send out a strong message to the HE sector about the value of e-learning. HEFCE put forward a proposal for the government spending round and won the support of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, although there was not a round table discussion with ministers (as reported in the Select Committee evidence SC 2005 Q609 p.94).

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 2000, as part of a landmark speech at The University of Greenwich, David Blunkett announced plans for the e-University, with £62 million of public funding to set up a public-private initiative, as an income generating vehicle to deliver HE programmes over the internet. He said:

*'I want today to make a significant statement about the future direction of higher education... Learning has become big business... New Providers are already expanding into the Learning environment to meet this demand, particularly in the USA... We must have big aspirations, even if we are a small country.... The impact of new technologies on learning are well rehearsed... Nonetheless, it is clear that virtual learning is an industry which is striving forward all around us.... But the challenge is also a national one – how can we best, as a country, respond to the wave of change that e-learning is bringing to higher education throughout the globe?... That is why I can announce that HEFCE will bring forward proposals for a new collaborative venture between universities and private sector partners, under the working title of the 'e-Universities'... It will be clearly positioned overseas as a flag-carrier for the best of UK higher education in web based delivery' (Blunkett, 2000).*

### 5.2.2 The English context

The e-University was reflective of government rhetoric at the turn of the century. New Labour's 'Third Way' placed HE as a main driver for enhancing workforce skills and thus advancing the economy, as well as increasing participation to 50%, through higher attainment and widening participation. The e-University was to be the vehicle to offer programmes that reflected market demand for key skills in the knowledge economy, as well as meeting the needs of non-traditional students who did not participate in HE. The e-University also added a further dimension - globalisation; it was seen by government as the answer to recruiting students on a global scale and, as such, being a contributor to the economy.

The 1997 election manifesto from New Labour prominently featured Information Technology and Communication (ICT) as one of the central themes, both in addressing public administration and in education. The turn of the century saw the rise of many '*information age*' policies in the administration of public services and local 'e-government' services. In addition, between 1997 and 2007, more than £5 billion of funding was channelled towards educational ICT, in '*realising the potential of new technology*' policies (Selwyn 2002). There were a number of ICT policies introduced to the schools sector at that time, through three phases of policymaking: '*National Grid for Learning*', '*ICT in Schools*' and '*Harnessing Technology*' (Selwyn 2008). Laurillard (2008) describes New Labour's ICT policies as '*ambitious*', but a success in terms of providing resources for schools.

Policies around ICT in schools were not just about increasing the level of ICT provision. As Selwyn (2002, 2008) and Laurillard (2008) both point out, these were part of a much wider policy agenda in modernising education, in raising attainment and widening participation. This, in turn, was part of the much wider agenda around globalisation and the economy:

*'the New Labour ICT agenda was located firmly within wider prevailing concerns over enhancing competitiveness in a globalised economy and creating a lifelong learning system fit for a successful knowledge economy'* (Selwyn 2008 p.708).

Tony Blair, as Prime Minister, resolutely linked education to the economy when he said '*education is the best economic policy there is*' (Blair 2004). However, Selwyn (2002, 2008) argues that whilst the ICT resourcing of schools was seen as a success, the success in the wider economic policy failed to materialise.

In addition to government's focus on ICT and globalisation, the commercial sector was going through a period of rapid change, with the rise of 'dot-com' companies. Globalisation was fundamental to their success, with rapid growth of businesses using the internet to expand their markets on a global scale. One of the main criticisms of dot-com businesses (Garrett 2004) was that the use of technology to transform aspects of society was hugely overstated. Elements of this criticism are reflected in the development of the e-University, as will be observed later in this chapter.

In March 2000, the dot-com bubble burst. Investors had put a great deal of confidence into technological developments, and both market confidence and share values had risen substantially, with many companies becoming over-valued. This level of confidence could not be sustained and, after a stock market collapse in early 2000, a large number of companies suffered a dramatic drop in share price and were consequently wound up. The timing of the dot-com crash is noteworthy, coming just one month after the announcement of the e-University.

Globalisation and technological developments also began to impact on HE. The 1997 Dearing report specifically recognised technology as being central in advancing HE in the UK and the term *virtual campus* was becoming more prominent. By 2004, and the demise of the e-University, several universities had their own substantial off campus on-line activities, such as Middlesex, Liverpool and Portsmouth, as well as many others as part of wider conglomerates (Bacsich 2004, 2005, 2010). However, the virtual campuses were more frequently separate entities, rather than HEIs expanding their provision from programmes *within* the institutions (Cinar 2012).

In June 1999, the Prime Minister had also announced a five year plan to increase market share of overseas students, from 17% to 25%, with 75,000 extra by 2005 (reported in the Guardian 19<sup>th</sup> June 1999). In this respect, the e-University could have been an initiative which helped to address that aspiration.

### 5.2.3 Some international perspectives

As Bacsich and Frank-Bristow (2004) note, there were, at that time, a large number of countries, across all continents, engaging in some level of e-university activity. Universities in the USA are some of the most notable, where they were developing global enterprises in on-line learning, and by 2000 there were a number of highly organised, well branded, e-learning ventures, such as The University of Phoenix's on-line campus, which had 109,000

students by May 2004 (Bacsich 2005). It was against a perceived threat from the USA in dominating the on-line education global market that the e-University was launched. As Bacsich notes,

*'The UKeU was initiated in response to a perceived need to be a key player in packaging UK HE internationally' (Bacsich 2005).*

The then Minister for Higher Education, Kim Howells, confirmed that this perception also extended to a fear of losing the domestic HE market to the USA, summed up in his evidence to the Select Committee inquiry:

*'It was also informed by a kind of fear that the Americans were going to capture students and that they were actually going to capture students in this country' (SC 2005 p.6).*

Sweden had also embarked on a similar e-university project, investing SEK470 million in the Swedish Net University (SNU), which is still in existence. It acts as an agency, offering a database of publically funded, free courses, run by 35 Swedish universities, mostly taught in Swedish. Christie and Jurado (2007) undertook a comparison of UKeU and SNU and found a number of striking differences. Sweden concentrated on the home market, and in Swedish, whereas UKeU focussed on a perceived international market for courses taught in English. SNU was explicitly seen as a way of increasing Sweden's participation rate to 50%, whereas UKeU was conceived as a commercial venture to combat the perceived threat of competition from the United States, despite the conjecture in the business model that the venture should additionally address social inclusion (HEFCE 00/44 p.8). Whilst UKeU was conceived as a commercial venture, SNU was entirely publicly funded, free to students, and with universities being financially rewarded retrospectively with grant for each successful course completion. Therefore, there was incentive for Swedish universities to put courses online, and although the funding mechanism changed in 2004, they still continue to include their courses online as a successful way of increasing student numbers.

#### *5.2.4 Policy proposal*

The day after the Blunkett speech, Sir Brian Fender (then HEFCE Chief Executive) wrote to all English HEIs and HEFCE funded FECs, announcing the launch of the e-University and seeking consultation, with responses required quickly by April 2000. The circular stated that

*'The HEFCE is concerned that UK higher education (HE) should be able to capitalise on its considerable expertise in new technologies and its reputation for quality to secure a significant share in the markets accessed by these virtual/corporate providers' (HEFCE 04/00).*

The proposed key characteristics of the venture were:

- *'A new vehicle for delivering higher education programmes through virtual distance learning;*
- *Jointly owned, established and operated by a consortium of higher education institutions, working with private sector and overseas partners;*
- *Focussed on meeting expanding demand for HE programmes both in the UK and particularly overseas;*
- *Established on a scale that will enable it to compete internationally;*
- *Established with a central core of founder members;*
- *Identified as a provider of the highest quality, both in its programmes and in the student support structures that underpin them, maintaining and enhancing the international reputation of UK higher education'. (HEFCE 04/00 p.1).*

The revenue structure played a major part in the way the e-University was conceived.

Although it was proposed that there would still be an element of grant from HEFCE through publically funded students, it was envisaged that the e-University would be a commercial venture, financially self-sustaining and profitable within 5-6 years. This would be achieved by charging variable fees to non-publically funded students, businesses, overseas universities or governments. The e-University would meet its operating costs through those fees and private investment from businesses providing expertise in supporting activities such as the technological platform and marketing, and who would ultimately see a share of the profits. It was a condition of grant that UKeU attracted private investment with 50:50 public-private funding. This was the first time that HEFCE had been involved in a public-private venture on this scale.

### *5.2.5 Organisations and actors*

UKeU, as the operating company, was central to the initiative, and the main focus for both the expected success of the venture and its subsequent demise. Its two main actors were Sir Anthony Cleaver as Chairman and John Beaumont as Chief Executive. Both had considerable experience in the private sector; Anthony Cleaver had been Chair of the UK Atomic Authority in the 1990s and also Chairman of AEA Technology plc, and John Beaumont had had a long career in technology-based industries. According to Barry Sheerman MP, Chair to the Select Committee, Anthony Cleaver was

*'a formidable player in the way that he campaigns to make British business more effective and efficient' (SC 2005 Q139).*

Both men had connections to HE, with Cleaver having chaired the Board of Governors of Birkbeck College and the Royal College of Music in London, and Beaumont having been a



professor at Stirling and Bath universities from 1987 to 1992. It is perhaps pertinent that both had been appointed for their private and public sector experience, and yet the public-private sector relationship for UKeU was the most contentious issue identified by the Select Committee, as will be considered below.

HoldCo was the other key organisation in the initiative, as the holding company which licenced UKeU to operate. HoldCo was the major shareholder of UKeU, with all but four HEIs as members. The relationship between HoldCo, UKeU and HEFCE is significant to this study, and will be considered later in the chapter.

A steering group, chaired by Professor Ron Cooke, Vice Chancellor of the University of York, had also been established to work on behalf of HEFC to oversee the implementation of UKeU with institutions. Other members of the Steering Group were three HEFCE staff, including Sir Brian Fender as Chief Executive, and seven senior leaders and managers from HEIs. There were also representatives from the private sector, as special advisers: one from McKinsey Consultants and one from British Aerospace plc Virtual University.

Other key actors, who were ostensibly not involved in the establishment of the policy episode, but came to the fore as witnesses to the Select Committee, were Sir Howard Newby, succeeding Sir Brian Fender as Chief Executive of HEFCE in 2001, who had to drive forward the initiative from his predecessor, David Young as Chairman of HEFCE, and Dr Kim Howells, then Minister of State (Education and Skills, Lifelong Learning, Further and HE). The Select Committee itself was chaired by Mr Barry Sheerman MP, with other MP members being Valerie Davey, Jeff Ennis and Paul Holmes.

### 5.2.6 Activities

In June 2000, HEFCE published the results of the initial consultation with heads of HEFCE-funded HEIs, FECs and Irish-funded HEIs. 74% of heads from those institutions that responded were in favour, although many raised concerns about the high-risk nature of the venture. The consultation concluded that

*'[stakeholders] endorsed the vision of the e-University as a world-class provider of virtual learning which should establish itself as a brand associated with high quality and standards' (HEFCE 00/44a).*

It is noteworthy that the original plan had been for a small number of elite universities to take part but, following arguments in the Steering Group, the original business plan

prepared by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), based on this model, was rejected in favour of a more inclusive approach:

*'Plans for an elite core of institutions to lead the project - unveiled as part of education secretary David Blunkett's speech at the University of Greenwich in February - have been abandoned'* (THES 06.10.2000).

HEIs also questioned the elite approach, and inclusivity of the e-University was raised during the consultation, with HEIs wishing to ensure that the whole sector was engaged with the initiative and that the venture was able to accommodate a wide range of on-line programmes. However, whilst many institutions welcomed the more inclusive approach, it still remained a contested issue, with institutions such as the London School of Economics and Open University expressing concern at having to work with other institutions, which they saw as not sharing their quality brand. Nevertheless, the Steering Group was keen to ensure the inclusive nature of the venture:

*'the Steering Group has been particularly concerned to ensure that the business model maximises the opportunities for universities and colleges to contribute to, and benefit from, the project, while also providing the focus, drive and coherence necessary to make the e-University an effective venture'* (HEFCE EP05/00).

#### 5.2.6.1 Business model and corporate structure

In October 2000, taking heed of the consultation, HEFCE published a revised business model, commissioned from PwC (HEFCE 00/44). The first noteworthy point is in relation to the aims and objectives set out in the business plan, with the primary aim to

*'provide the opportunity for the flagship provision of UK higher education excellence using digital channels, primarily abroad but also at home... the result should be an expansion of the UK's overall share of the global overseas markets for higher education'* (HEFCE 00/44 p.8).

The model also notes a second aim to

*'support and promote the expansion of lifelong learning at higher education levels... it also offers a means to help increase social inclusion'* (HEFCE 00/44 p.8).

Both of these aims were concurrent with New Labour's 'Third Way' ideology. The business model proposed that the UKeU, as the operating company, acted as a facilitator and technological platform for HEIs to make available learning materials and programmes. UKeU would perform a number of corporate functions including developing the brand, marketing, making resources available for the development of materials, providing and supporting the technological platform, overseeing academic quality of provision, providing

a finance function to manage the income, and administering students' registration. The programmes would attract fees for the majority of students and the business model proposed ambitious targets which would make UKeU financially self-sustaining.

The objectives underpinning the aims in the business model summed up UkeU as

- Learner driven (demand led)
- Responsive to change (to meet changes in demand)
- Excellent fit for purpose
- Excellent in use of new technology to enable learning experience to be delivered
- Able to secure economies of scale
- Financially self-sustaining

It is noteworthy that in the business model, the main markets were considered to be

*'in careers-associated areas as some postgraduate and/or post-experience areas, and particularly various forms of continuing professional development, and with a focus on both corporate and government consumers. The model notes the success of corporate provision in the US, short, executive courses, drawn from parts of an award bearing course, are one of the fastest growing and most profitable activities in some US universities... the e-U arrangements must be able to make such provision' (HEFCE 00/44 p.15).*

As such, the e-University was to at least mirror, if not replicate, the models developed in the USA.

The technological underpinning was one of the main features of the business model, since it was fundamental in supporting both the student-facing interface and the learning materials. The business model assumed that this was where the e-University would develop relationships with the private sector, where they may *'become an important strategic partner'* (HEFCE 00/44 p.28).

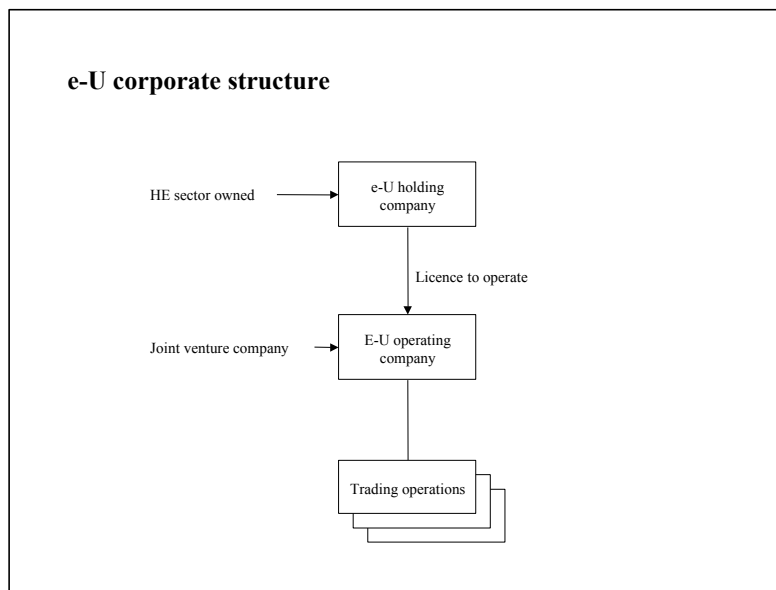
The corporate structure, particularly the relationship between the public and private sector, was very significant to the initiative, and became one of the key issues for the Select Committee inquiry. The business model stated that

*'it must be attractive to the private sector both as investors and partners. The e-U will need private sector investment and private sector commercial expertise to make it work'* (HEFCE 00/44 p.28).

The structure consisted firstly of the holding company (HoldCo) which was owned by the HEIs who had signed up to the e-University. The main purpose was to

*'ensure that the academic principles and integrity of the e-University were safeguarded, by setting the terms on which it would grant the operating company a licence to use the e-University brand'* (HEFCE 00/44).

An Academic Quality Committee would oversee academic quality of the programmes and assessments. The operating company (UKeU) would manage the day to day operation, with a small executive team running the company. It was also proposed in the business model that subsidiary companies under UKeU would undertake more of the risk-taking and investment with the private sector. The PwC Business Model summarises the organisational structure as:



**Figure 9 – e-U CORPORATE STRUCTURE** (HEFCE 00/44 (p.29)) ©HEFCE

Following the publication of the business model, activity began to escalate at a pace and HEFCE published a second consultation to the sector on the model (HEFCE 00/43). Responses suggested that HEIs were broadly happy with the proposals set out in the revised business model. There were still some concerns, however; in particular, institutions were concerned about intellectual property rights in relation to programmes of study, the extent to which the members of the holding company were liable financially, and whether the e-University would be subject to a quality review.

By the end of 2000, potential joint partners from the private sector were invited, via advertisement, to join as shareholders in the operating company, but were given less than one month for expressions of interest. In January 2001, HEFCE began the process of setting up the corporate structure, and sought nominations for directors of HoldCo and UKeU.

Nominations were also sought for members of the Committee for Academic Quality, all drawn from senior leaders and managers of HEIs (HEFCE 02/01). The draft memorandum and articles of association for HoldCo were published alongside the circular, as were the roles and responsibilities of the Committee for Academic Quality.

#### 5.2.6.2 HoldCo

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced the directors of HoldCo in March 2001, consisting of Sir Brian Fender (Chief Executive of HEFCE) as Chairman, and eleven leaders of HEIs in England. In April, all HEIs were invited to become members of HoldCo, limited by guarantee, with £1 securing membership and being the total extent of the liability (HEFCE 07/01). All but four HEIs signed up to HoldCo. The intention was that HoldCo would hold 50% of the shares in UKeU, (the public sector share), with its purpose being to licence UKeU, appoint the Board and hold it to account. The establishment of HoldCo was to act as a gateway between HEFCE and UKeU, in order to avoid any direct management relationship between the two organisations. This was significant, since HEFCE could not directly give public funding to UKeU as a private company. However, HoldCo was granted authority by HEFCE to invest funds in UKeU.

#### 5.2.6.3 UKeU

In September 2001, UKeU was launched and, two months later, Sir Anthony Cleaver was appointed Chairman. By February 2002, John Beaumont had been appointed as Chief Executive. Just one month after the launch, UKeU signed a Framework Agreement with Sun Microsystems, as the first private investor, to develop the on-line technical platform. It is significant to the ultimate demise of UKeU that, despite a call for private investors, Sun Microsystems was the only major private investor in UKeU. There was one other smaller investor, *'Fortis Lease UK, who provided lease funding in August 2003 to finance IT testing equipment'* (noted in SC 2005 p.10 footnote 15). By April 2002, UKeU had produced its first business plan and it was expected that the organisation would launch its pilot programmes by October 2002.

UKeU had around 50 members of staff focussed on developing the technological platform, quality assurance and marketing programmes. The main target audiences for UKeU at that time were overseas students and private sector companies wanting CPD programmes. UKeU had a number of business managers in 16 countries who were employed to help market the courses and provide support for students.

#### 5.2.6.4 Programmes and students

The short timescale for developing and launching new programmes meant that within six weeks of advertising for members of HoldCo and directors of UKeU, HEFCE had announced that they were launching the venture and appointed an interim management team and a group of consultants, headed up by Professor Keith Baker from Open Courseware Factory (OCF). OCF began looking at the distribution of e-learning programmes and concluded that, at that stage, there were insufficient on-line programmes available in the sector to launch to potential students. HEFCE noted that

*'a major conclusion from the OCF study is that currently there is not a sufficient volume and range of learning programmes, fully developed to the quality and standards we envisage for the e-University' (HEFCE 06/01).*

With a proposed launch date for October 2002, there was now some urgency in setting up programmes, as well as marketing them and registering students. Consequently, in March 2001, HEFCE invited HEIs *'to express interest in'* developing five pilot programmes:

*'Those invited to participate in the pilots will need to work closely with the e-University operating company and its partners, contributing insights and experience that will ensure that the venture is robust and effective for the delivery of e-learning programmes from a broader range of institutions beyond the pilot phase. This role may be most suited to institutions that envisage global e-learning programmes as a significant part of their offerings in the future, and hence are prepared to put in the commitment as early adopters. There will be subsequent and regular opportunities for all institutions to participate in the e-University's commissioning and delivery activities' (HEFCE 06/01).*

With work underway to develop programmes, HEFCE launched an invitation to institutions in March 2002 to bid for 3000 publicly funded additional student places in the first year, to meet public services objectives through UKeU that would *'widen participation through increasing the number of students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds'* (HEFCE 08/02). This is perhaps the only evidence that the e-University policy was serious about meeting its aim for social inclusion, and this is explored further in Section 5.3 (p.143). In June 2002, HEFCE also invited interest in a similar organisation to develop on-line teacher training programmes in China (HEFCE 14/02), in collaboration with Chinese universities and the Chinese government, and this organisation was incorporated into the portfolio of UKeU. Although e-China cost £3m in UK public funds, its costs were seen as being equitable to its value (see Table 9, p.141), and so with the demise of UKeU, e-China was the only element that was retained, with project management being transferred to the University of Cambridge.

### 5.2.7 Targets and outcomes

The original October 2002 launch date was missed and only three pilot programmes had been launched by March 2003, from four institutions: The Open University and the universities of Cambridge, Sheffield Hallam and York. These programmes resulted in just 78 student registrations, thus missing an initial target of 340. The original business plan targets were ambitious, with 5,600 forecast by 2003-04, 110,000 students by 2007-08 and growing to 250,000 by 2012-13.

As a result of the delay in launching programmes, and failure to meet the initial student number target, in May 2003 HEFCE announced that a review of UKeU was to be conducted by PA Consulting. Alongside the review, UKeU continued to work with HEIs on new programmes and to recruit new students and, by October 2003, one year after the original proposed launch date, 17 courses had been launched with 898 student registrations. However, by November 2003, it became clear that student target numbers were not going to be met, and so UKeU revised its business plan, significantly reducing the student target numbers to just 45,000 students by 2009-10. In a further attempt to address the poor performance by UkeU, HEFCE launched a new research body, the E-learning Research Centre, based at Manchester and Southampton universities, which was expected to work alongside UKeU in realising the e-university ambition.

However, the revision to target student numbers, the lack of private investment and no likelihood of new private sector companies coming on board, put considerable pressure on UKeU in its quest to become financially self-sustaining. By 2004, HoldCo was the major shareholder in UKeU, with the only other shareholders being Guillemont Trust and Croft Nominees. These latter two organisations operated on behalf of Sun Microsystems Ltd to hold shares on its behalf, since the company had chosen not to directly hold shares in UKeU. Consequently, UKeU required more public funding and the expected 50:50 public-private funding condition of grant failed to be achieved. It is also worthy of note that by 2004, a number of universities had withdrawn from their partnership with UKeU.

PA Consulting completed its review in January 2004 and it was considered, along with UKeU's revised business plan, by the HEFCE Board in February. The review identified six challenges for UkeU:

*'end to end integration of the whole e-learning value train, the lack of a documented business strategy, the feasibility of the marketing strategy, the financial and revenue*

*model, a technical platform unsuitable for the business needs [and, finally] the investment challenge given the high level of need for capital' (as summarised in Bacsich 2010).*

It was at that Board meeting that the decision was taken to withdraw from the initiative and re-structure UKeU, such that the commercial aspects would be closed down, leaving the organisation to concentrate on those elements that supported the 'public good'. RSM Robson Rhodes LLP, a firm of accountants, was appointed to oversee the wind-down of the company. In HEFCE's memorandum to the Select Committee, they state the reasoning for withdrawing funding was that

*'The Board concluded that the venture was in breach of the condition of grant that HEFCE would only fund against a robust business proposition. They were also of the view that the venture had breached the condition of grant on achieving private matched funding' (memorandum to the Select Committee 21.06.2004).*

In his evidence to the Select Committee, Sir Howard Newby explained that he had advised the HEFCE Board that this was the best course of action, not just because UKeU was in breach of the conditions of grant, but due to the poor recruitment and financial risks:

*'in the light of the... disappointing recruitment, and in the light of what was going on in financial markets, the risk... had tilted the other way. This was an unacceptable risk for us... our recommendation to the Board was that the business plan was not sufficiently robust on which to base further investment. The Board took the view to restructure the company in light of that' (SC 2005 p.10).*

As a result, the activities and services of UKeU were re-structured and some of the remainder of the funding (£12m) was used by HEFCE to support individual e-learning programmes at UK universities, with an emphasis on blended learning and on *'the public good rather than commercial objectives'* (HEFCE 2009/12). On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2004, Donald MacLeod reported in The Guardian that HEFCE had *'pulled the plug'* on UK e-University and, by July 2004, UKeU had ceased trading, having spent £30-£31 million of public funding. The £30-31m represented the difference between the public expenditure on UKeU and the residual value of its assets.



**Table 9 – EXPENDITURE AND RESIDUAL VALUE OF PROJECT**

	<i>Funding (£m)</i>	<i>Value (£m)</i>
<b>Public good</b>		
e-China	3	3
e-learning research centre	1	1
Research studies and other publicly disseminated outputs to inform development of eLearning	2	2
Advisers (legal and business)	1	–
<b>Commercial</b>		
Technology platform development	14.5	
Learning programme development	10.9	1.4
Sales and Marketing (includes overseas)	4.2	11
UKeU operating costs	12.9	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>18.8</b>

Adapted from SC 2005 p.22

The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee launched an inquiry into UKeU in June 2004. The results of that inquiry will be explored in detail in Section 5.3 (p.143), but in summary, the Committee found that UKeU:

- *‘took a supply-led rather than demand led approach*
- *had an inability to work in effective partnership with the private sector*
- *failed to attract significant private investment*
- *failed to conduct sufficient market research*
- *focused too much on providing an integrated e-learning platform*
- *had systems and structures inappropriate for a venture that was almost entirely publicly funded’ [taken from SC 2005 summary report p3-4].*

The report of the Select Committee was published in March 2005 and, in a press release, Chairman, Barry Sheerman, said that *‘UKeU was a terrible waste of public money’*. It is noteworthy that the Select Committee report itself comes in for some criticism. Bacsich (2010) observed that the Committee only interviewed a select number of senior staff and as such the review was flawed.

By the time the Select Committee had reported, HEFCE had in place a new policy statement, ‘HEFCE strategy for e-learning’ (HEFCE 2005/12) which was also published in March 2005. HEFCE had transferred the majority of the activities to support e-learning to the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and to focus the strategy on *‘support for the chosen missions and partnerships of individual institutions’* (p.3).

## 5.2.8 Timeline of events

**Table 10 – TIMELINE OF EVENTS FOR THE E-UNIVERSITY**

1999	E-University proposal included in HEFCE spending review bid by Sir Brian Fender
February 2000	David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced e-University initiative in Greenwich speech HEFCE seeks consultation on initiative with the sector HEFCE set up Steering Committee chaired by Ron Cooke
March 2000	DOT COM crash
April 2000	HEIs report on consultation
May 2000	Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) develop business model CHEMS undertake initial market research
June 2000	HEFCE publishes results of initial consultation
October 2000	PwC report on proposed business model
November 2000	HEFCE consults sector on business model HEFCE advertise for joint venture partners from the private sector Grant letter to HEFCE announces £62m for e-University venture
December 2000	Interim management team appointed with Nick Winton as interim CEO to establish new company structure for UKeU Joint venture partners to have made expressions of interest
January 2001	Draft business plan for UKeU produced with PwC HEFCE begins process of setting up corporate structure and seeks nominations for holding company, operating company and Academic Quality Committee
February 2001	HEFCE announces conclusions on business model consultation Nominations for directors of holding company, operating company and Academic Quality Committee to be received
March 2001	HEFCE establishes holding company e-learning Holding Company Ltd to oversee work of operating company HEIs invited to express interest in pilot programmes Secretary of State announces directors of holding company
April 2001	HEFCE invites HEIs to become members of HoldCo
May 2001	Nominations for interest in pilot programmes to be received by HEFCE Deadline for holding company membership forms
September 2001	Operating company UKeU established
October 2001	Strategic alliance with Sun Microsystems Limited agreed Sir Howard Newby replaces Sir Brian Fender as CEO of HEFCE
November 2001	Sir Anthony Cleaver appointed Chairman of UKeU
February 2002	John Beaumont appointed Chief Executive of UKeU and senior management put in place
March 2002	Framework agreement signed with Sun Microsystems Ltd HEFCE invites bids for public sector student places
April 2002	UKeU produces new business plan
October 2002	UKeU issues assurance on use of technical platform Original date for launch of courses (not met)
February/March 2003	2 pilot courses launched on version 0 of technical platform 78 students registered ( <i>target was 340 by this point</i> )
May 2003	HEFCE informs UKeU that review will be conducted
July 2003	<i>Technical platform due to be ready (£10m spent)</i>

October 2003	Main launch with 17 courses 898 students registered
November 2003	PA Consulting Ltd begin review UKeU produces revised business plan with significantly reduced target student numbers of 1,225
December 2003	HEFCE reviews draft PA Consulting review report and sends to UKeU and HoldCo UKeU joined by a research body, the E-learning Research Centre, based at Manchester and Southampton universities
January 2004	PA Consulting submits final report to HEFCE HoldCo responds to draft report 25 courses now on-line <i>Original target was 5,638 by this point</i>
February 2004	HEFCE withdraws UKeU funding and announces re-structure of UKeU Robson Rhodes appointed to oversee wind down of UKeU UKeU Board resign HEFCE decides to invest remaining initiative funding in development of e-learning in HEIs
April 2004	HEFCE moves public good projects, such as e-China, out of UKeU
June 2004	Almost complete version of technical platform delivered Select Committee inquiry announced
July 2004	UKeU stops trading
March 2005	Select Committee publishes report HEFCE publishes a new statement of policy – HEFCE strategy for e-learning

### 5.3 A critical review of the evidence and findings

#### 5.3.1 Process: Governance and organisation: HEFCE's role

The organisation and governance of the e-University is regarded by many contributors as a central reason for the failure of the policy episode, and the organisation of HoldCo and UKeU, and their relationship with HEFCE, came in for considerable criticism. It was acknowledged in the Select Committee, by both HEFCE and government that the nature of the governance structure, with public and private elements in a triangulation between HEFCE, HEIs and the private sector, was something entirely new to HEFCE, and they lacked experience of joint public/private ventures. The Select Committee concluded that this was a highly ambitious project, and that

*'at the heart of the failure of UKeU was that systems and structures that may have been considered appropriate when set up against the original plan became inappropriate for a venture that was almost entirely publicly funded'* (SC 2005 p.12).

Conole (2007), in a review of lessons to be learned from e-learning organisational cultures, agreed, arguing that *'the UKeU was set up with an ambitious set of aspirations, which with hindsight might be considered somewhat naïve'*.

HEFCE's remoteness from UKeU via HoldCo meant that HEFCE did not have any direct control over the day to day operation, or decision-making, within UKeU, despite the organisation remaining very reliant on public funds. This was deliberate, since HEFCE had to maintain distance from UKeU as it could not invest public funds in a private company. Critically, this distance also had to be maintained since there was potential for conflict between the shadow directorship and the accounting officer role for the chief executive of HEFCE. This distance meant UKeU had considerable freedom and was easily able to shift from the PwC business model, without any need for HEFCE approval. This approach was highly criticised by the Select Committee:

*'The running of the venture was handed over to UKeU with limited restrictions. The management were able to take their own approach, and that, based on limited information and no further market research, they made strategic decisions about the target markets, courses, pricing strategies, and other major operating decisions' (SC 2005 para 76 p.23).*

In the business model, and as a condition of grant, the ownership of UKeU should have equally included public and private investors, without reliance on public funding. The tension between the private and public responsibilities of HoldCo and UKeU became particularly problematic once it was clear that there would not be any matched private investment and that the whole venture would be publically funded. As private investment failed to materialise, HoldCo became the dominant shareholder in UKeU, essentially becoming the parent company. HoldCo advised HEFCE in autumn 2003 that the Board had concerns that HoldCo had become the primary accountability agent, and it was at that point that HEFCE asked PA Consulting Ltd to review UKeU.

Since the Board of HoldCo was mostly configured from voluntary and unpaid members, unable to provide a full time commitment to the key monitoring role, its influence over UKeU was limited, and thus there was greater distance between the funding and the operation of UKeU. Sir Brian Fender, in his role as former Chairman of HoldCo, stated in his evidence to the Select Committee that although it had always been understood that HoldCo would be expected to ensure that public funds were invested with value for money in mind, in practice this role was limited due to the voluntary nature of members of the Board (SC 2005 para 85 p.25). Bascish (2010) is particularly critical of this voluntary approach, arguing that there was no reason for members to be unpaid.

The Select Committee formed the view that UKeU was not entirely to blame for that situation, and despite Kim Howell's assertion in his statement to the Committee that '*I do*

*not think HEFCE can be blamed for that and I do not think the department can be blamed for it'* (SC 2005 para 77 p.24), HEFCE was too far removed from the operation of UKeU, gave the company too much of a free rein and did not require UkeU to provide a strategy or business objectives. Consequently, UKeU were not directly accountable for the spending of HEFCE funds. The Select Committee were particularly critical of UKeU's lack of accountability:

*'a key lesson to be learnt is that, in high risk ventures such as UKeU, a great deal more needs to be done to support the accounting officer to enable him to act effectively in his role.... A group of advisors to HEFCE..... could have been put together to keep UKeU in much closer account in terms of the decisions they made. This would have enabled much closer accountability from the start of the project'* (SC 2005 para 98/99 p.28).

The Select Committee was clear in its recommendations that there needed to be greater accountability in the use of public funds:

*'an important lesson to be learnt is that senior management should have had either very clear accountability for the expenditure of public money, or risk from market pressures to succeed through private investment in the project'* (SC 2005 para 82 p.25).

HEFCE itself was defensive of its lack of engagement with UKeU, citing as justification its lack of experience with private sector practices and a desire to remain at a distance, so as to encourage novel approaches. Liz Beaty, Director of Learning and Teaching at HEFCE summed this up in a quote to the THES, defending HEFCE's 'hands off' approach:

*'We were funders, not directors. If you tie everything down and take no risks, it might stop you coming up with innovative things'* (Wainwright 2005).

A further example which demonstrated the distance between HEFCE and UKeU, criticised by the Select Committee, were the private sector-like bonuses paid to the company directors, of which HEFCE had been apparently unaware. One of the key characteristics of the business plan was that the venture was expected to operate in a *business-like* manner, and indeed a condition of grant was that UKeU operated consistently '*with best practice in the commercial sector*' (HEFCE 00/44a). One of the ways in which this business-like approach manifested itself was the rewarding of senior UKeU staff with performance related bonuses. Sir Anthony Cleaver argued in his evidence to the Select Committee that this was considered best practice in the commercial sector, where there was considerable market risk:

*'All the bonuses were awarded against defined criteria which were set in advance and people's performance was assessed against them... I have absolutely no qualms about either the process or the outcomes of the bonuses'* (SC 2005 p.11).

The Select Committee strongly reproached the practice of bonuses, given the clear failure of UKeU to meet its financial and student targets, but more critically, it questioned the extent to which there was any market risk in this venture, since the company was essentially being funded with public money:

*'We consider that for either the private sector or the public sector the bonuses paid to senior staff were wholly unacceptable and morally indefensible. The argument that they reflect private sector practice does not stand up to scrutiny... We are also unable to accept the view of the Chairman and Chief Executive that they were involved in a risk business which made such bonuses appropriate. The company was involved in a new and relatively untried sector, but it carried no market risk. It was backed with £50 million of public money; the risk was to that public investment, not to the company'* (SC 2005 para 33/34 p.12).

The award of bonuses was also picked up by the press, with Naughton, writing in the Guardian, scathing in his criticism:

*'The holding company duly set up an 'operating' company, which recruited a raft of business types who knew little or nothing about education. (The finance director came from Camelot!) They did, however, know about burning money and remunerating themselves nicely. The company accounts reveal that part-time chairman Sir Anthony Cleaver, for example, got £70,000 in 2002-03, plus a £12,236 'performance bonus'. Chief executive John Beaumont took home £180,000 plus a bonus (also for 'performance') of £44,914'* (Naughton 2004).

Other commentators agreed that the combination of poor governance and a flawed business plan were the essential ingredients for failure. Peters uses UKeU as an example of why partnerships go wrong, and argues that in this case *'unclear or incomplete accountability links... [where] the level of delegated authority over resources and decision making powers was unclear'* (Peters 2011). Steve Molyneux, Director of the Learning Lab, concurs with this view, and was quoted in The Chronicle of Higher Education as saying

*'It [UKeU] was down to bad management, bad implementation, a flawed business plan, and not listening to experts in the field'* (Carnevale 2004).

### **5.3.2. Process: Private sector engagement**

A major part of the e-University concept was private sector involvement. HEFCE considered that developing such a venture required external investment, partly because HEFCE did not have the level of funding to fully support the development of the platform and infrastructure required, but also because it expected the business model to closely follow those being successfully developed in the USA. Private sector involvement was clear from the outset:

*'the operating company would also involve joint venture partners from the private sector or non-HE bodies' (HEFCE 00/43).*

In Sir Howard Newby's evidence to the Select Committee, he commented on the general feeling towards the involvement of the private sector in the venture:

*'I think there was also recognition [by HEFCE and the sector] that to be a major global player in a global market there had to be a substantial private sector involvement, because the necessary funding could not come realistically from the public sector alone. Government would not wish to earmark sufficient sums of money to be a heavy hitter in the global market without significant private sector involvement and certainly there were no spare funds in the Funding Council' (SC 2005 Q18 p.8).*

However, in the event, Sun Microsystems Ltd was the only significant private investor to come on board, and although it was reported in the press that Pearson Education (publishers) and the commercial arm of the BBC were expected to invest in UKeU, neither did. Following HEFCE's invitation to private investors to join the venture, they were only given one month for expressions of interest, and thus it could be concluded that there was simply insufficient time for investors to come on board in the initial stages. Carnevale, however, writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, believes that the reasoning was more fundamental, reporting that

*'Observers say that companies did not want any part of the virtual university because they saw that the project was flawed from the outset' (Carnevale 2004).*

This view may have been recognised by UKeU itself, since when the Board revised the business plan in November 2003, it did not provide for any *'private sector investment within at least the next six years'* (as noted by Business Review of the UKeU conducted by PA Consulting 2003).

HEFCE's view of why the private sector did not engage was not that the project was flawed (and indeed they continued to claim that a number of companies were interested in joining) but that

*'None of the proposals seemed likely to be compatible with the interests and concerns of the HE sector' (HEFCE memorandum to the Select Committee 21.06.2004).*

Even the relationship between UKeU and Sun Microsystems was not truly a partnership. Sun Microsystems chose not to hold any shares in UKeU or have any representation on the Board, and so essentially the relationship was that of a supplier rather than partner, as confirmed by Leslie Stretch, Vice President of Sun Microsystems Ltd, in his evidence to the Select Committee:

*'It became a supplier/customer relationship. At the outset the intention was more strategic but once we got into developing the system, the day-to-day focus was delivering that system'* (SC 2005 Q 531 p.83),

For the Select Committee, the failure to secure partnerships with the private sector was a further major reason for the failure of UKeU:

*'UKeU's attempt to form genuine partnerships with the private sector, though unsuccessful, was commendable and could have helped UKeU to stay competitive and market orientated. Instead, UKeU became another example of how difficult the public sector finds it to form successful partnerships with the private sector. The failure to find private sector partners or investors should, however, have caused the holding company, HEFCE and the DfES to have concerns sooner rather than later about the validity of the project'* (SC 2005 para 63 p.19).

This perception was not wholly a difficulty with the HE sector, and rhetoric around public-private sector engagements was prevalent within government at that time. Younie (2006) notes that this was a policy problem more generally, and although the DfEE (as it was in 1997) also had ambitions for joint public and private collaboration to *'bring together the best of private sector creativity and the highest standards of public service'* (DfEE 1997 p3), much of this was not delivered, and was particularly noticeable in relation to delivering ICT in schools policies. As O'Reilly (2007) concludes,

*'for an administration keen on the involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services, ICT has not seen the sustained involvement of private concerns'* (quoted in Selwyn 2008).

### **5.3.3 Process: Academic engagement - conflicting cultures**

The nature of partnership and conflicting cultures in the public-private sectors also contributed to the difficulties in forming a coherent approach that was both business like and met the expectations of the HE sector. The work of Conole, Carusi, de Latt & Wilcox (2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) has examined reasons for UKeU's failure and they concluded that the organisational structure, the processes and, critically, the cultural relationships between the various actors and organisations were significant in its failure to achieve its desired outcomes. One of their key findings was that academic organisations have different cultural influences, practices and expectations to corporate ones:

*'one of the most important findings of the research is the mismatch between those with more of a business-orientated vision for UKeU and those more interested in the academic aspects and the potential educational innovation'* (Conole et al 2006 p.136).



Their research concludes that the organisation between the HEIs and the operating company did not seek to address these cultural differences, and that there was a belief that business-focussed approaches were more optimal, at the expense of the academic. As a result, the organisation and approach was fragmented. For them, the very business model developed by PwC was questionable in allowing for the different cultural approaches:

*'The lack of 'joined-up' or more holistic thinking may reflect the immaturity of the UKeU organisation at this stage; alternatively, or in addition, it may be a feature of such models that they do not capture the complexity and evolving nature of the institutional and interpersonal relationships... That there was a rift between the corporate and academic cultures in the UKeU has been remarked upon by all interviewees' (Conole et al 2006 p.143 & p.147).*

Conole et al (2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) also note there is often a mismatch between the corporate sector, and its focus on private goods, and the academic, with its focus on public goods. Whilst this was acknowledged in PwC's business model, *'wider intentions to increase social inclusion and to disseminate good practice do not sit comfortably with a focus on profit maximisation'*; this mismatch was not explicitly addressed, and as such *'there appear to have been no steps taken to try to smooth the way for cross-sector and cross-cultural relationships'* (Conole et al 2006a p.8).

The findings of the research by Conole (2007) concluded that this mismatch was significant in the failure of the e-University.

*'There was a gradual further accentuation of the business or corporate nature of the organisation at the expense of its academic aspect and an increasing corporate/academic rift. The most significant point to emerge from our analysis is the importance of means whereby institutions could address these differences' (p.141).*

There was equally a concern that universities themselves were not wholly committed to the project, particularly at senior levels. Although all but four institutions signed up to the project, in reality there was little institutional commitment and the development of programmes was, for the most part, left down to individuals with an enthusiasm for e-learning. The research by Conole et al (2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) also found evidence that the internal workings and level of commitment of individual HEIs had a significant impact on how they engaged with UKeU:

*'Circumstances often included the organisation processes within the HEIs themselves and, in particular, the way in which the decision had come about to work with the UKeU in the first place and by what internal structures the decision was being enforced' (Conole, 2006, p.144).*

John Beaumont also questioned the commitment of universities to the project in his witness statement to the Select Committee:

*'They were asked to put a pound in and I think all but four did, and I am not sure that shows real commitment of an institution. What we did find... was in many institutions there were a lot of very enthusiastic academics, but to get e-learning of quality and scale you need the whole institution to support it' (SC 2005 para 64 p.20).*

By October 2003, just 17 courses had been launched, and by 2004 a number of HEIs had withdrawn from HoldCo, thus further reducing the commitment of the organisation to hold UKeU to account for its actions. The lack of engagement led the Select Committee to conclude that

*'it appears to us that the wave of enthusiasm which caused all but a handful of higher education institutions to sign up to the UKeU's project receded very rapidly, leaving it without private sector investment or active higher education sector engagement' (SC 2005 para 65 p.20).*

#### *5.3.4 Process: A lack of focus on the learner and a supply-driven approach*

Another main finding of the Select Committee was that UKeU *'took a supply-driven, rather than demand-led, approach'* (SC 2005) to its business. The main focus initially for UKeU was to get content onto the learning platform in order to meet the ambitious October 2002 launch date, and for this they needed the support of HEIs in providing programmes. As such, the focus was on programmes, not on learners. This led the Select Committee to conclude that

*'a supply-driven approach, combined with the very ambitious nature of the venture in an emerging market that did not sustain the high expectations of demand...led to the failure of UKeU to meet its targets, aims and objectives... The problem for UKeU was a combination of the ambitious nature of the original idea, and an over-confidence about the level of demand for e-learning which led to an approach which was insufficiently focussed on research and marketing and which was not learner centered. To be successful, the project's main focus should have been on clearly identifying its market and knowing the demands of its customers' (SC 2005 p.13, para 108 p.30).*

Peters (2011) also cites the supply driven approach as one of reasons for the demise of UKeU:

*'The lessons from this example [UKeU] are many but they include the initiative being top down rather than arising either from demand from international students or a gap perceived by universities' (Peters 2011 p.29).*

In the business model, following initial market research by PwC, it had been proposed that UKeU would concentrate its efforts initially on some low-risk markets such as UK-based postgraduate and CPD programmes, 'corporate' universities, workplace learning and

selected overseas markets. However, UKeU chose to go global right from the beginning, perhaps because the organisation saw this as a quick win in generating substantial student numbers, and they were heavily criticised for this approach by the Select Committee. UKeU had made an assumption that the market in the United States mirrored market sectors in other parts of the globe, and they were influenced by government's original assertion that there was a significant threat from the USA. In his evidence, Sir Howard Newby concluded that UKeU had moved away from the original business plan:

*'I think there was shift of emphasis, yes...Once the e-University Opco [operating company] board had been set up, they certainly felt that there was a major opportunity here, if you like, for UK export earnings. A great deal of emphasis was placed on international recruitment.... Opco board took the view that the major growth market was overseas, especially in Asia' (SC 2005 Q23 p.9).*

However, there was no evidence that the global market existed. In 2003, some two years after the start of UKeU, the PA Consulting Group review into UKeU concluded that *'UKeU has yet to demonstrate that there is a sustainable and accessible global market'* (SC 2005 Q63 p.14).

There was apparent confusion around the target market between HEFCE and UKeU. Whilst UKeU was seeking proposals from HEIs to meet demands in the international market, Sir Howard Newby was writing to English Vice Chancellors with a different message concerning the e-University's role in supporting social inclusion:

*'This invitation [to bid for additional student numbers] is not about commercial programmes but about programmes to be offered as part of the public service of higher education in England, particularly to meet objectives of widening participation'* (THES 12.04.2002).

For some observers, a focus on the public good was as questionable as the international market and, as early as 2001, commentators were questioning whether the development of e-education was suitable as a public service, given the tendency for there to be both an absence of public funding for e-education and increased financial burden on students, which is reflected in the business model of UKeU. As Rumble 2001 noted:

*'given the unwillingness or inability of governments to meet the additional costs involved, the tendency is either to forego the expenditure, or to pass these costs on to the students. Both these strategies are evidenced strongly in the Business Model for the [UK] e-University'* (Rumble 2001 p.226).

Rumble (2001) and Greener and Perriton (2005) warned that globalisation of e-education meant that attention would always be focused on those elements of the market that could

afford to pay, and thus ignoring sectors unable to afford the cost, including the local market. This is very much reflected in the global approach taken by UKeU and, as such, it failed to meet one of the other main objectives:

*'ensuring that the social inclusion agenda remains a priority, primarily through the development of undergraduate courses to reach those in this country who find it difficult to access the more traditional campus-based university'* (HEFCE 04/00).

The local and the social good were ignored by UKeU but, in Rumble's view, this is not surprising since the original business model failed to give credence to this aspect of the vision in focussing on the financial sustainability of UKeU.

The lack of a demand-led approach impeded UKeU in meeting another of its objectives: to be learner-driven. UKeU looked first to what courses could be supplied by HEIs, rather than focussing on the requirements of the learner. In the original business model (HEFCE 00/43) it was stipulated that the organisation must be *'learner-centered'*. However, the Select Committee found that UKeU had done little to research what learners wanted and, had they done so, they would have concluded that there was greater demand for a 'blended learning' approach. This was acknowledged in the PwC business model, where it suggested that *'we think that this prospect of combining e-U with local provision may offer a particularly attractive market opportunity'* (HEFCE 00/44a p.13). Demand for a solely e-learning approach represented a very small segment of the market. Nor had UKeU looked at what was being offered elsewhere, which might have better informed their decisions, such as the Open University or the University of Phoenix, both of which offered blended approaches to learning. As Usoro and Abid (2008) noted,

*'In the UK, most of the successful e-learning programmes are the blended rather than the pure (no face-to-face contact) approach'* (p.79).

It is noteworthy that in July 2003 HEFCE consulted the sector on a *'strategy for promoting e-learning'* (HEFCE 2003/35) and the vast majority of responses supported a blended approach, with e-learning providing a supporting role. This seems to be at odds with the consultation on the e-University, where 74% of respondents supported the initiative. For the Select Committee, this learner centered approach was entirely absent from UKeU's methodology:

*'we have found that UKeU inherited a narrowly focussed definition of e-learning and chose to pursue that approach without questioning it at any stage. It did not focus on research and development concerning the definition of e-learning, and it did not have a 'learner-centred approach'* (SC 2005 para 43 p.14-15).

### 5.3.5 Programme: Branding and marketing: a failure of engagement

UKeU required a strong brand in order to market itself alongside its American competitors, which was acknowledged in the PwC business model (HEFCE 00/44a p.46). However, in the event, very little of the expenditure - just £4.2 million - was spent on branding and marketing. The Select Committee report noted that a lack of appropriate branding and marketing was another key reason for UKeU's failure. This view was also supported by The Minister for Education, Dr Howells. For Dr Howells, UKeU's name itself represented a significant barrier to the success of the venture:

*'I have no doubt whatsoever that if there was a clearer brand – I get tangled up just trying to say UKeU anyway. I do not know who dreamt that one up but it was not a great title. It is typical of the sort of rubbish that was around at that time'* (SC 2005 p.36).

Confusion was a characteristic of many of the themes identified in relation to UKeU, and branding was no exception. E-learning ventures in the United States tended to project a strong brand, explicitly linked to an already well established and respected institution, such as University of Phoenix On-line. UKeU did not have a strong brand from the outset since it was essentially an umbrella for a conglomerate of institutions. Neither did it have an established reputation for quality, unlike many of its HEI members. As a result, potential students could not make an immediate link between the strong brand of an institution and the on-line learning, and thus the brand was confused. As Garrett (2004) noted,

*'Confusion existed between the mainstream UK education brand emphasising the three elements of tradition, place and quality and marketing by UKeU that promised 'the best of UK higher education with online convenience' without being able to utilize these elements... convenience is not a strong part of the image of UK higher education abroad'* (p.4).

Branding of the e-University was picked up by the media before UKeU had been established. The THES quoted Neil Gregory, head of the research and contracts division at the London School of Economics, as saying,

*'It might be an unpalatable truth but the e-university will be all about brand. Unless those with international reputations are included, and I am not convinced they are, it will have difficulty in getting off the ground in any real sense'* (THES 16.06.2000).

It has been observed in Section 5.2 (p.127) that one of the most contested issues arising from the initial consultation was the tension between an organisation that included all types of HEI and the desire by some elite institutions to protect their reputations. The THES

observed in 2000 that the inclusive nature of the e-University would lead to challenges in branding:

*'Problems also remain with the image of the e-university. If it is to attract overseas students, it must have a strong brand image. But elite institutions are unlikely to lend their names to an inclusive e-university' (Goddard 2000).*

Greener and Perriton later concluded that the lack of a strong brand contributed to UKeU's collapse because there was a reliance on the reputations of certain institutions to carry the brand.

*'UKeU lacked a recognisable brand – so in an internationally competitive market place they relied upon the more 'marketable' UK universities to supply legitimacy and a recognised produce profile' (2005 p.68).*

The Select Committee also criticised UKeU for failing to *'undertake any market research or put sufficient emphasis on marketing'* (SC 2005 para 44 p.15), and was critical of the small amount of marketing expenditure, which only accounted for 8.4% of the total expenditure (£4.2m of £49.5m). UKeU had been offered the opportunity to purchase a marketing company, Scottish Knowledge, for £12m, but had rejected the offer as being too expensive. In addition, there was a lack of any marketing expertise at senior management level (SC 2005 para 47, 48 p.15-16).

A lack of systematic analysis and a reliance on anecdotal evidence from individual contacts was also considered by the Committee as further evidence of failure in market research. Many examples of occasions when UKeU senior management's approach was to *'draw on their contacts'* (SC 2005 para 53 p.17), mainly overseas, were given to the Committee (SC 2005 para 53-55 p.17), rather than conducting rigorous and informed research. For example, Sir Anthony Cleaver said in his statement to the Select Committee,

*'Fortuitously, I was also Chairman of the Asia Pacific Advisers for Trade Partners UK and was able to draw on their contacts in that part of the world' (SC 2005 para Q161, ev27).*

UKeU was also criticised for failing to see the potential for partnerships, such as with the British Council (SC 2005 para 52,48 p.16-17), which would have helped UKeU to benefit from their extensive knowledge of overseas markets. Overall, the Select Committee concluded that lack of marketing and research contributed significantly to the failure of UKeU:

*'Evidence to this inquiry suggests that UKeU's understanding of their markets came from anecdotal evidence from individual discussions rather than from systematic analysis. There was no formal market research undertaken to assess either the level of*

*demand or the nature of the demand and the type of e-learning required. There was no systematic evaluation of the markets, no thorough and robust market research, and no understanding of consumer demand. This was atypical of UKeU's supply-driven rather than demand-led approach' (SC 2005 para 55 p.17).*

The press also picked up on the lack of market research, with Naughton being particularly scathing of the lack of it:

*'It was pure dotcommery. Nobody had done any market research. With the exception of the Open University, there wasn't an HE institution in Britain that knew the first thing about e-learning. But Blunkett put aside £62m for his fantasy and set the disaster in motion. First, there was the obligatory consultant's report, which spent 55 pages avoiding the really central questions. Was there a market for British web-based learning materials? And could UK universities deliver anything that people might actually buy?' (Naughton 2004).*

Conversely, though, Bacsich (2005) points out that there is evidence of market research from UKeU, with a number of market and competitor research studies carried out:

*'[from] the market research now published in the e-University Compendium and the UKeU Reports, it appears to the author to be the most comprehensive recent market research on e-university e-learning done in recent years' (Bacsich 2004 p.5).*

The problem, for Bacsich, was not a lack of market research, but one of timing in the long delays between market research in a rapidly changing world and the use made of it by senior managers in UKeU. He also cites a lack of knowledge of the market research, due to poor organisation and communication within the organisation itself, as a failure to use the available research effectively.

### **5.3.6 Programme: The technical platform**

The vast majority of UKeU's expenditure was on the development of the technical platform (£14.5m). However, UKeU was heavily criticised for putting far too much emphasis on developing a *bespoke* on-line platform from which to deliver courses. Although the PwC business model acknowledged that some bespoke technological development would be required, and also acknowledged the advantage of having a technology partner in the business model, there was an expectation that UKeU would look to existing technology providers in the first instance:

*'The first step in procuring such a complex technology platform would be to establish the more detailed operations of the e-U to define the functionality required... The second step would be to conduct a market evaluation of suitable technology providers, which would include assessing possible commercial off-the-shelf products as well as systems integrators who could develop or package a bespoke system – and who may become an*

*important strategic technology partner. It is likely that the procurement strategy will result in a combination of bespoke and off-the-shelf solutions' (HEFCE 00/44a 2000, p.28).*

Contrary to the business model, UKeU perceived that existing platforms, such as Blackboard and WebCT, were insufficient to deliver the scale of the activity, although they failed to consult with e-learning experts, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) or the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN). As a result of UKeU's decision, Sun Microsystems were charged with developing a new platform. Significantly, developing a bespoke platform delayed the launch of courses, with the first programmes not being introduced until 2003. Garrett (2004) argued that this was a crucial mistake and,

*'in retrospect, the company might have saved significant funds by using an existing platform, getting programs up and running more quickly, and leaving more funds for marketing. This would also have permitted the venture to grow more slowly' (p.5).*

Almost 30% of UKeU's £49.5m total expenditure had been spent on the technology platform development alone, and the Select Committee were highly critical of this approach:

*'UKeU allowed the development of the technology platform to drive its strategy and the development of programmes. It had a skewed focus on the platform, based on the assumption that once this was right, the original projections of very high student numbers would be easy to realise. Unfortunately this assumption was not based on research evidence, but in an over confident presumption about the scale of the demand for wholly internet based e-learning' (SC 2005 para 60 p.18).*

Bascish observed that the technical platform took up most of the management time and proved to be a most contentious issue between managers, the technical team and universities. He notes that the platform would have caused far fewer management difficulties had an existing commercial platform been brought in (Bascish (2010 p.28).

Janice Smith, in her 2005 review of 40 years of on-line learning, suggests that the development of '*big systems*' such as the UKeU technological platform is an approach that had been adopted by government since the 1997 Dearing report, and their generic nature typically leads to failure. She argues that government needs to learn from the failure of UKeU and that technological innovation that match '*tools and resources closely to the student learning need*' (Smith 2005 p.106) is more appropriate. The research by Conole (2007) also concluded that e-learning is '*complex and multi-faceted*' (p.149) and, as such, a narrow on-line approach is insufficient. This lesson appears to have been later understood by HEFCE in 2005, in the development of a much broader and institutionally focussed e-learning policy, funded from what was left of the e-University money:



*'Our strategy [for e-learning] should not focus solely or even primarily on the use of technologies in distance learning... New technologies clearly provide opportunities for enhancement and innovation in learning opportunities on the campus, or within the workplace or home. The definition of e-learning should be sufficiently broad to encompass the many uses of ICT that individual universities and colleges decide to adopt in their learning and teaching missions. Our strategy should promote and support that diversity' (HEFCE 2005/12 2005, p.5).*

### 5.3.7 Programme: A reliance on the English language

Although the original HEFCE circular asserted that *'English is the preferred international medium of instruction in HE'* (HEFCE 04/00 Annex A point 6), UKeU was criticised for not taking into account the PwC business model's warning that *'it will be important for the e-U provision to be sensitive to local cultures and language'* (HEFCE 00/44a p.15), since UKeU proposed to provide all of its programmes in English. As with many aspects of UKeU's approach, the rationale for providing programmes only in English was based on hearsay rather than evidenced research. Sir Anthony Cleaver reported to the Select Committee that his visits to the Far East were influential in determining the focus on courses in English:

*'Korea is probably the best example. On my first visit to Korea I met the Minister of Education. He said 'well of course we need English. We as a country are not strong in English and internationally that is financially detrimental to us'' (SC 2005 para 54 p.17).*

This assumption that there was an international market for courses taught in English was at odds with evidence of success in other countries. For example, the successful SNU, which focusses on the home Swedish market, has courses entirely in Swedish (Christie and Jurado (2007).

### 5.3.8 Process: Timescales

The account of the episode, and the timeline above (Table 10, p.142), outline just how quickly HEFCE launched the initiative, with short deadlines for HEIs and private investors to react to consultations and invitations to engage, and HoldCo and UKeU equally quickly established. The speed of the initiative was, for many commentators, put down to the need to react quickly to compete in the global market and avoid being taken over by the USA. However, the necessity for such speed was questioned. Garrett notes that

*'there was concern that if the UK did not "do something" its international student market would be overrun by aggressive online universities from the United states and elsewhere was based on fear rather than fact' (Garrett 2004 p.4).*

Equally, despite HEFCE's conjecture that the USA offered successful models of e-learning that should be emulated, Hedberg (2006) observes that the USA also experienced similar failures:

*'The closure of UK e-Universities Worldwide (UKeU) follows the earlier failure of such schemes in the USA, where the low numbers of enrolled students indicate that this is not always what the majority of students seek for their university education' (p.174).*

The Select Committee also questioned the speed at which events took place, and indeed Dr Kim Howells reports in his evidence that

*'we probably could have done with more time in terms of looking around the world, perhaps not reacting as quickly as we did to what we perceived to be great threats coming from America of our own students being captured to do degrees by universities like Phoenix and so on' (SC 2005 para 106 p.30).*

Equally, the speed with which the initiative was shut down has been criticised. Bacsich (2004) asserted that *'2 years is not long enough to judge a dot com'*, as did Michael Driscoll, then Vice Chancellor of Middlesex University, writing in the Guardian in 2004, who said that the venture had not been given long enough. The Select Committee also noted that several witnesses had also suggested that the final close down of UKeU was too hurried and *'did not allow enough time to make the most of existing assets and to discuss the lessons learnt and ideas for the future'* (SC 2005 para 130 p.35). Sir Anthony Cleaver, in response to the Select Committee's questioning on whether the venture was doomed to failure, said that *'I do not think it failed; it just did not have the time to succeed'* (SC 2005 Q323 p.46). Garrett, too, conjectured that the plug may have been pulled too quickly and more time might have delivered a different outcome:

*'Take short-term funding – and impatience for results – out of the equation, however, and the venture would likely have covered its costs in another five years or so and become a major online brand' (Garrett 2004 p.6).*

Despite the closure of UKeU, it is noteworthy that, as a policy, e-learning did not entirely disappear from HEFCE's agenda, and the organisation learnt from the mistakes of the e-university, revising its strategy to support e-learning in individual institutions (HEFCE 2005/12), and through the HEA. Writing for the Guardian newspaper at the time, Stephen Hoare observed:

*'In its dying days in 2003, UkeU was joined by a research body, the E-learning Research Centre, which is based at both Manchester and Southampton universities. It was an attempt by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) to rein in UkeU's ambitions and keep it in line with market demand. The E-learning Research Centre now forms a powerful alliance with UkeU's de facto replacement, the HE Academy. Grainne*

*Conole, professor of educational innovation at Southampton University and co-director of the centre, says: "Rather than throw the baby away with the bath water, Hefce has taken up the challenge and said 'Oh well, what can we learn from this?'" (Hoare 2005).*

## 5.4 Conclusion

The e-University was perceived by many to have been an example of complete policy failure, with UKeU failing to meet the student number targets set out in the business plan and failing to meet the conditions of grant in terms of public and private financial engagement. My evaluation of the episode, driven by the evidence and findings from the texts, shows that one of the key reasons for the failure were difficulties of governance between HEFCE and UKeU, due to the novel public-private nexus, and the inability to align the differing organisations, practices and cultures of the commercial and academic sectors. In addition, UKeU also failed to understand its market, focussed on supply - not learner - demand, and invested too heavily in the development of a bespoke technical platform.

The narrative and evidence in this chapter is used in Chapter 8 to interpret the policy episode against McConnell's framework to assess success or failure in terms of the '*process, programme and political dimensions*' (McConnell 2010) of the episode. The charting of the episode against the framework helps to address the main research question in examining elements of success and failure in relation to the e-university, and to seek to identify commonalities and differences between this and the remaining two case studies. The second case study is discussed in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6: Case study 2: Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

### 6.1 Introduction

The Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CETL) is an ideal case study since it meets all the criteria set out in Table 6 (p.71) in being a time bound episode, with clearly identified proposed outcomes and benefits to the target group, following a typical HEFCE policy process and there are sufficient sources of both primary and secondary texts to offer sufficient breadth and depth to develop a thick description of the policy episode. In considering each of the chosen texts, the use of the coding established in Appendix B enables the thick description to be interpreted against the theoretical framework in Chapter 8, to give a nuanced approach in addressing the main research question, articulating the success or failure of the CETL policy episode. This is also used to address the first supplementary research question in establishing commonalities and differences between the chosen case studies.

This particular policy episode is of interest since the initiative aimed to raise the quality of learning and teaching, and enhance and celebrate the professionalisation of teaching (HEFCE 2003/36). The emphasis on learning and teaching had become a priority for both government and HEFCE as a result of the introduction of fees in the late 1990s, with students expecting greater value for money, and consequently a number of learning and teaching funded programmes were put in place by HEFCE and other organisations such as the HEA. Teaching quality policies were perceived to be less developed than that of research, which already had in place the established RAE for funding quality research, with recurrent funding related to research performance. Initiatives such as the CETLs were thought to be '*one way to redress the balance*' (Smith 2006 p.50).

The CETL initiative followed a typical HEFCE project funded approach in requiring institutions to bid for capital and operating funding to fund activities such as reward and recognition for staff, facilities for students and pedagogical research. In total, £335m was provided to support the initiative between 2005 and 2010. Unlike research quality funding, this initiative was envisioned to be time-limited project funding '*over the five-year period from 2004-05 to 2008-09*' (HEFCE 2004/05 p.1), rather than recurrent. Whilst funding was provided for individual centres, it was anticipated that they would work together with other CETLs and sector agencies to disseminate good practice across the sector, thus creating a

long term legacy beyond the funding period. One of the key characteristics of the policy approach was that it was a bottom-up, hands-off approach from HEFCE, in which the definition of *excellence* was deliberately loose:

*'we hope that institutions will think flexibly and creatively about how they define their excellent practice'* (HEFCE 2003/36 p.2).

The chapter is split into two sections: the first provides an historical narrative of the episode, how it came to fruition, the national and international contexts, the organisations and actors involved, the activities which enable the implementation of the policy, the outcomes and sequence of events. The second section, drawing on the primary and secondary texts, takes a thematic approach in articulating a critical analysis of particularly important or interesting aspects of the policy, which will enable its interpretation against the theoretical framework.

### 6.1.1 Sources of data

The main evidence and findings for this case study come from the formative (Saunders et al 2008) and summative (SQW 2011) evaluations of the CETLs, which reported in 2008 and 2011 respectively, and reported evidence of activity from the CETLs and interviews with the CETLs and institutions. Other scholarly works have contributed to a commentary on the CETLs: Gosling, Hannan and Turner have, at various stages, conducted longitudinal studies into aspects such as the bidding process through to using CETLs as an example of contestation in teaching and learning. Their work, and that of Trowler and Bamber (2005), Clouder et al (2008) and Sabri (2011), have provided useful insights into CETLs.

The idea of excellence in learning and teaching in HE has been a much debated and contested issue for many years and this chapter draws on the work of some of those commentators, many of whom use the CETLs as examples, Barnett (2000), Skelton (2005), Allan (2007) Little et al (2007), Nixon (2007), Taylor (2007), Mieg (2014), Lemmens-Krug (2015).

A review of media sources reveals surprisingly few mentions (57), with the THES being the main stage for commentators' views. Many of the early media reports were from leaders of individual CETL promoting their work. Parliamentary references are few, with only twenty-seven during the whole policy period, and most serving to use CETLs as an example to the

Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee of a policy successful in raising student and employer engagement. A full list of primary and secondary texts is included in Appendix A.

## 6.2 An account of the episode

### 6.2.1 Origin

The CETL initiative was initially envisioned in the 2003 White Paper, *'The Future of Higher Education'* and its conception was already well developed, with aspirations for the Centres articulated in the paper:

*'4.28 We should also celebrate excellent practice in teaching departments. The very best will be designated as Centres of Excellence, and given funding of £500,000 a year for five years to reward academics and to fund extra staff to help promote and spread their good pedagogical practice. These Centres will be identified through a process of peer review managed by HEFCE and drawing wherever possible on existing information. Their status will help to raise the profile of excellent teaching, as well as helping them to attract students. 70 Centres will be identified by 2006 and, depending on successful evaluation of the programme, we hope to expand it in the future.'*

*4.29 In order to recognise the good work of those departments that come close to, but do not quite meet, the standard to become a Centre of Excellence, HEFCE will also offer a 'commended' status. This will recognise those departments' achievement, and make it clear to prospective students that they can expect a particularly high standard of teaching on their courses.'*

*4.30 Centres of Excellence will be able to bid for capital funding of up to £2m each, for improving their teaching infrastructure and estates. Capital funding for teaching will help to make sure that the learning environment and equipment gives a better experience to students, keeps pace with the skill of the lecturers, and plays its part in raising the status of learning at an institutional level.'* (DfES 2003).

HEFCE also drew attention to CETLs in its 2003 strategic plan, announcing that *'we will fund a number of Centres of Excellence in teaching, as set out in the higher education White Paper'* (HEFCE 2003/12 p.18). As noted in Chapter 4, there has been some speculation as to the extent to which the 2003 White Paper was the creation of government, or was drawn directly from the HEFCE 2003 strategic plan, although the White Paper was published first. It is the view of Taggart (2003) that it was the strategic plan that drove the content of the White Paper, and hence the original articulation of the CETLs could have been driven by HEFCE.

### 6.2.2 English context

Quality assurance in HE had been embedded within government priorities since 1992, with the creation of the Funding Councils and, in 1997, the QAA. Since its inception, HEFCE engaged in the development of funding initiatives to steer teaching and learning, with the 1992 Teaching and Learning Technology Programme and, in 1995, the establishment of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning, the first to explicitly address excellence. The report from the National Committee of Enquiry into HE in 1997 (NCIHE 1997) reasoned that the profile of learning and teaching needed to be raised, particularly because it was recognised that the proposed introduction of student fees meant institutions would have to demonstrate value for money and, consequently, they would need to consider teaching and learning at a more strategic level. The Dearing report recommended that

*‘with immediate effect, all institutions of higher education give high priority to developing and implementing learning and teaching strategies, which focus on the promotion of students’ learning’ (NCIHE 1997 p.116).*

The Dearing report recognised that learning to teach effectively went beyond the discipline and wanted to professionalise teaching, particularly through technology, which was developing at a considerable rate. Key to the Dearing report was the focus on three areas: national policy, institutional strategies and individuals’ teaching professionalism. These key concepts are recognisable in the CETL initiative as explored below.

In the same year that Dearing was seeking to raise the profile of learning and teaching, the New Labour government was focussing schools policy on excellence, with the 1997 White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DES 1997). In 1998, the government announced the establishment of ‘beacon schools’, which proposed that schools worked together in partnership to disseminate good practice from schools considered to be excellent: *‘the beacon schools initiative is designed to raise standards through the dissemination of good practice’* (DfES 2001). By 2001, 1000 beacon schools had been established (source BBC News 21.06.2001). It is noteworthy that this policy’s principles of sharing excellent practice in partnership across the schools sector are reflected in the CETLs in the HE sector, and indeed ‘beacon’ is explicit in the original CETL objectives (see Section 6.2.5, p.169).

In response to Dearing, and the introduction of student fees, demonstrating a commitment to learning and teaching quality became a key focus for HEFCE, as can be observed from its high profile in successive strategic plans and annual reviews. HEFCE consulted the sector on

a strategy for learning and teaching in 1998 (HEFCE 98/40), publishing the final version in 1999 (HEFCE 99/26). Reflecting typical HEFCE practice, the sector was consulted on the learning and teaching strategy, with 138 responses to the consultation (HEFCE 99/26). Many of the positive responses for proposals are reflected in the subsequent CETL initiative; for example, there was considerable support for proposals which recognised and rewarded individual academics. Like Dearing, respondents also recognised a key role for institutions in raising the quality of teaching and were critical that HEFCE had apparently not given the institutional role sufficient priority: *'the importance of the institution's role in developing and supporting excellence was not appropriately recognised in [HEFCE's] proposals'* (HEFCE 99/26). Consequently, HEFCE proposed to strengthen the role that institutional strategies played within learning and teaching. One of the key messages to emerge from the consultation was a desire to ensure that institutions were able to use funding for *improving* excellence, not exclusively rewarding existing excellence, in contrast to the funding methodology for research quality. HEFCE acknowledged

*'the need to prioritise the enhancement and improvement of learning and teaching as the principle funding aim – rewarding established excellence should be secondary to this'* (HEFCE 99/26).

This is a significant point in relation to CETLs. As observed in the 2003 White Paper, CETLs were originally conceived as Centres of Excellence, like beacon schools, but in the event they became Centres for Excellence; a subtle difference in wording, but significant in shifting the rewarding of existing excellence to rewarding the enhancement of excellence.

The five main themes to emerge from the strategy are consistent with the key characteristics of the CETL initiative, which was to follow almost half a decade later:

- *'Encouragement and reward*
- *Co-ordination and collaboration*
- *Dissemination and embedding good practice*
- *Research and innovation'* (HEFCE 98/40).

One observation from the consultation was that the sector recognised that there might be tension between funding the *enhancement* of learning and teaching and *rewarding* high quality learning and teaching, and thus linking quality and funding. HEFCE recognised this concern in their response to the consultation:

*'Although there is wide support for our learning and teaching strategy, there is a perceived tension between encouraging the sector as a whole to enhance learning and teaching - which is widely supported - and the selective approach of rewarding those institutions which can demonstrate high quality. **While our funding mechanisms will***



*ensure a link between high quality and funding, we will place greater emphasis on the development and enhancement of learning and teaching. Further, to increase the profile and status of learning and teaching across the sector as a whole, we will introduce approaches to funding which will include all institutions' (HEFCE 99/26).*

It is notable that this tension between funding enhancement and funding quality would continue throughout HEFCE's history and, in 2016, government explicitly linked teaching quality measures, through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), to increased funding, albeit through allowing increases in student fees:

*'Under the proposals set out in the Green Paper, in year one of the TEF, providers who have successfully completed a quality assessment review will be awarded the first level of TEF and will be able to raise their fees in line with inflation, up to a maximum fee cap' (HoC 2016 p.12).*

In line with the strategy, in 1998 HEFCE developed the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) (HEFC E 99/48), which included a number of funding schemes aimed at institutions, subject disciplines and individual academics and, in 2000, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) was launched. The NTFS is remarkable in its longevity; it is still in existence, albeit now funded by the HEA, now part of Advance HE.

As a result, there was increased engagement by the sector in the late 1990s in prioritising learning and teaching. In 1995, David Gosling undertook a survey of educational development units, dedicated to improving teaching and learning activities and professionalism across an institution, and received 23 responses. When he conducted the same survey five years later in 2000, he received 53 responses. Gosling concludes that this increase in activity partly reflects the extent to which institutions, and particularly the older institutions, wished to be seen to be taking teaching and learning development seriously, which he puts down to HEFCE's focus on policy and funding, as well as the introduction of fees (Gosling 2001). Mills and Huber (2005) also noted the rapid rise of '*educational development*' with government funded reforms and policies '*to promote the professional status of teaching and learning*'.

In 2000, HEFCE and other sector agencies set up a number of national organisations aimed at supporting the sector in professionalising learning and teaching, with The Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE, Learning and Teaching Support Network and Teaching and Learning Research Programme (under ESRC). In 2003, HEFCE, Universities UK and The Standing Conference of Principals formed a national committee to consider the enhancement of learning and teaching in HE, and they recommended that one body be

formed to continue this work. By 2004, the Higher Education Academy had been established, as an amalgamation of The Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE, the Learning and Teaching Support Network and the National Coordination Team for the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. Its mission was to

*'use our expertise and resources to support individual staff, disciplinary and interdisciplinary teams and higher education communities and institutions in general to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching'* (HEA 2011, p.6).

It is noteworthy that the new HEA was expected to be a key player in ensuring that best practice of CETLs, where best practice in an educational context is defined as *'existing practices that already possess a high level of widely-agreed effectiveness'* (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), were disseminated throughout the sector.

Despite the rising interest in supporting learning and teaching initiatives, via national organisations and funding through the TQEF, there was recognition that teaching still had low status in comparison to research. The White Paper of 2003 stated that *'teaching has for too long been the poor relation in higher education'* (DfES 2003) and noted that promotion for academic staff had been largely based on their research. Consequently, the White Paper proposed CETLs as a large scale funding initiative to redress this imbalance.

For some commentators, the development of the CETLs was also congruent with New Labour's approach to New Public Management. Allan (2007) and Lemmens-Krug (2015) both argue that 'Centres of Excellence' is a concept borrowed from the private sector and has strong links with managerialism and quality control practices:

*'It can be argued that CETLs inherit several features of managerialism, and therefore can be best understood as a managerialist technology in governing teaching and learning at universities'* (Lemmens-Krug 2015 p.13-14).

One of the key characteristics of managerialism is that quality assurance is used both as a mechanism for control and as an agent of change (Lemmens-Krug 2015), and these two features can be observed in the CETL initiative, as will be considered below.

### **6.2.3 Some international perspectives**

There are many examples of learning and teaching enhancement policies and funding schemes in other countries, some of which follow similar formats to those in England. Scotland is the closest in having a similar policy with the National Quality Enhancement Framework, introduced in 2003 as collaboration between The Quality Assurance Agency

Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland and the National Union of Students Scotland. The themes of this scheme were very similar to the CETLs in seeking to be enhancement-led. However, in contrast to the CETLs, this was not a competitive funding scheme, as *all* universities were eligible to receive funding.

The Modernisation Agenda of Higher Education features prominently in EU policy with the goal of improving teaching and learning quality, and the Bologna agreement sought to ensure that learning standards of HE qualifications were comparable across Europe. In Germany, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the federal states run a joint programme, the 'Quality Pact for Teaching', which provides funds to improve conditions for teaching and mentoring, where 186 institutions receive funding (Lemmens-Krug 2015). Like the CETL initiative before it, institutions compete for significant levels of funding, with 2 billion euros to be spent between 2011 and 2020.

Further afield, New Zealand has the 'Ako Aotearoa', the Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence, established in 2008, providing NZ\$2.5m to support projects at the individual level, and is also a competitive funding scheme. The Carrick Institute in Australia was established in 2004, which awarded teaching and learning grants through a fellowship scheme, and morphed in 2008 to become the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). This is similar in ethos to the HEA, following the same model in providing awards, fellowships and grant funding schemes. Australia also has substantial central government funding, with the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, established in 2009 to provide A\$83m to 21 universities. Unlike the UK, Australia's funding model is much more performance-led (Brawley et al, 2009). Aligned to the recent discussions in the UK on teaching performance being linked to funding through the TEF, Australia has also recently seen a return to discussions more generally around the value of performance based funding and the value of linking funding to quality criteria (Hare 2019).

The American HE system is highly de-centralised, with each state running its own system, with more than 50% of students studying at community and technical colleges (Brawley et al, 2009). As such, there is a greater emphasis on scholarship within these institutions, with less focus on research, meaning that teaching quality already has a significantly high profile. There are some national organisations: the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), conducted by the American Association of Higher Education, which takes a leading role in supporting scholarship, and The Association for the Study of Higher Education. However, the national schemes do not provide substantial and

reliable sources of external funding: *'Carnegie just lives grant to grant with no guaranteed future, and thus are 'trapped in the margins'* (Brawley et al 2009 p.24). This is a noteworthy point in relation to the funding of learning and teaching enhancement policies in the UK at the time of the CETLs, with the vast majority receiving project-based, rather than recurrent, funding.

Brawley et al (2009) give a very useful account of the different systems in the USA, Australia and the UK in relation to teaching and learning enhancement. They conclude that the de-centralised nature of the USA, the sheer scale of the country, and the fact that so many students are taught in institutions without a research focus, has produced different effects on teaching and learning enhancement. The scholarship approach in the USA is much less theoretical, and more a *'social movement'*, there is far less emphasis on professionalising teaching and learning through pedagogic research, and there is much less of a discipline-based approach. Mills and Huber (2005) support the view that the de-centralised organisation in the USA means that enhancement is *'less robust'* than in the UK and Australia, *'because the accreditation, governance and funding of US colleges and universities are less determined by central government policy than their counterparts in the UK'* (Mills & Huber 2005 p.18). It is of significance that in relation to the CETLs, there was a strong focus on both disciplines and pedagogic research, in contrast to the USA.

#### 6.2.4 Organisations and actors

Whilst HEFCE drove the initiative at one level, it was also keen to ensure that the selection of the CETLs was as a result of peer review, rather than a top down approach, very much reflecting the philosophy of the whole initiative. A selection panel to review competitive bids consisted of 25 members from HEFCE and HEIs, chaired by Madeleine Atkins, then Vice-Chancellor of Coventry University. HEFCE stated that

*'CETLs will be chosen by assessment undertaken by peers. We received a good response to our invitation to institutions to nominate experienced senior staff to assist with the assessment of CETL bids. An assessment panel comprising members of HEFCE's Quality Assessment Learning and Teaching Committee and individuals nominated by institutions - chosen to represent a spread of institutional, subject, thematic and practitioner expertise - will advise the HEFCE Board on the selection of CETLs'* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.18).

One of the characteristics of the CETLs was the anticipated engagement of other agencies, and in particular the HEA and its subject centres, for their role in enabling the dissemination of practice across the sector. For HEFCE, this relationship was key, although the organisations were not represented on the selection panel.

*'Key to the success of CETLs will be the relationship they forge with the HE Academy and its Subject Centres. We will make it a condition of CETL funding that each CETL must work closely with the HE Academy and the Subject Centres to develop effective and well-informed dissemination strategies that build on the practical experience of CETLs and the sector-wide, professional network experience of the HE Academy..... [they] will form a powerful alliance to raise and sustain the profile of effective teaching and learning throughout the sector' (HEFCE 2004/05 p.5).*

The other main actors were those HEIs awarded CETLs, and to some extent those that were not successful in being awarded a CETL. The CETLs, the senior management of the HEI, professional service departments and key individuals who led on CETL activities, and the dynamics of the relationship between those actors, were critical to the success of the CETLs, as will be explored in this chapter.

### 6.2.5 Activities

In July 2003, HEFCE consulted institutions on the proposed CETLs (HEFCE 2003/36). As noted in 6.2.2, the 2003 White Paper had originally conceived of the programme as 'Centres **of** Excellence in Teaching and Learning' but, following HEFCE's discussions with the sector, there was a change in approach to '**for** excellence', with a shift in focus from rewarding existing excellence to one of incentivising enhancement, in contrast to research excellence funding approaches. HEFCE declared that

*'The titling of the centres as 'centres **for** Excellence in Teaching and Learning' is intended to capture the essence of their role and influence as forward-looking and dynamic proponents on excellence' (HEFCE 2004/05 p.4).*

There were 5 original objectives:

- *to reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students;*
- *to identify beacons of good teaching practice and encourage development of this practice so that the benefits are delivered more widely;*
- *to enable institutions to develop approaches to teaching and learning that encourage a deeper understanding within the sector of methods of addressing student learning needs;*
- *to encourage collaboration and sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching throughout the sector;*
- *to contribute to the information available to inform student choice (HEFCE 2004/05 p.4).*

More than 140 responses to the consultation were received and 75% broadly supported the proposals (HEFCE 2004/05). It is significant to note that HEFCE deliberately did not attempt to define excellence for CETLs, arguing that they did not want to constrain institutions, and many respondents welcomed the flexibility to define excellence for themselves:

*'We do not attempt to define excellence in absolute or 'gold standard' terms. This is not only difficult in itself but is more likely to constrain than encourage institutions to select excellent practice in a local context that has had a demonstrably positive impact on student learning. It is more instructive to ask how excellence is recognised by the sector, what makes it distinctive, where and how it shows itself and whose judgements are pertinent in relation to successful learning' (HEFCE 2004/05 p.13).*

Despite this loose approach, HEFCE sought to establish some characteristics of excellence in Annex B of the invitation to bid, mostly outlining the types of activities in which excellence might be recognised in qualitative and quantitative terms, such as evidence of *'standing amongst peers and professional recognition, innovative curriculum design and development, understanding and addressing diversity of learning needs, active use of student feedback, active dissemination and take-up by others, responsive to employers' needs and requirements'*, to name just a few (HEFCE 2004/05, p.28).

One area of contestation arose from a widespread opposition to badging as 'commended' those bids that succeeded at the first stage but failed at the second, originally proposed in the 2003 White Paper, in case observers, and future applicants to HE, saw this as tantamount to a second class rating. This proposal was abandoned by HEFCE and there was no formal recognition of institutional bids that failed at the first stage. Some respondents also feared that funding a small number of institutions could have unintended consequences for those institutions failing to be awarded a CETL, particularly in terms of reputation:

*'Many institutions were concerned that the creation of a fixed number of CETLs might weaken rather than strengthen the promotion of excellence across the whole HE sector. They felt that there might be unintended consequences for those who fail to secure a CETL. There was widespread opposition to the proposal to badge bids successful at the first but not the second stage as 'commended for excellence' (HEFCE 2004/05 p.3).*

It is striking that both the formative and summative evaluations of the CETLs observed that many HEIs would have preferred for funds to be distributed to all HEIs, rather than a competitive process, although this was not highlighted in the outcome of the consultation process and contradicts the general view of the sector in 1998, when institutions expressed a preference for competitive, rather than formula, funding in excellence strategies. A further area of concern for many respondents was the extent to which the policy approach would enable CETLs to embed their good practice across the sector.

#### 6.2.5.1 Bids

In January 2004, HEFCE invited institutions to bid for CETL funds, with an April deadline (HEFCE 2004/05). HEIs and FECs with more than 500 FTE directly funded HE students were eligible for recurrent and capital funding, which was identified for five years in the first instance. There was a restriction on the number of bids per institution, dependent upon the size of the student population. Bids could be from a single institution or partnerships although, like excellence, the organisational form of partnership was not defined by HEFCE. It is noteworthy that, at that stage, there was some suggestion that funding might continue beyond 2010, but in the event this was not achieved, partly due to the 2008 recession and significant government cuts to HE funding.

There was a two stage bidding process, the first requiring a rationale for the proposed CETL and the case for excellence. Those successful at stage one would go through to stage two, which would focus on '*the business case for developing excellence and impact on teaching and learning*' (HEFCE 2004/05). The invitation to bid defined the purpose as being

*'to reward excellent teaching practice and to invest in that practice further in order to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community..... to strengthen the strategic focus on teaching and learning by directing funds to centres that reward high teaching standards, promote a scholarly-based and forward-looking approach to teaching and learning, and where significant investment will lead to further benefits for students, teachers and beyond'* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.1/3).

As well as recognising institutional and sectoral impact, funds for CETLs were expected to reward excellence at the level of the individual and would

*'recognise, celebrate and promote excellence by rewarding teachers who have made a demonstrable impact on students learning and who enthuse, motivate and influence others to do the same. We envisage that CETLs will sustain and stimulate further excellent practice through teaching that is informed by scholarly reflection, developed through innovative and adventurous thinking, extended through tested knowledge to learning in new contexts, and multiplied by active engagement in dissemination of good practice'* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.4).

In comparing the original objectives from the consultation (HEFCE 2003/36) with those in the invitation to bid (HEFCE 2004/05), it is noteworthy that there were some subtle changes to the rhetoric; the *encouragement* that was implicit in the consultation was much more direct in the invitation to bid, with a focus on action: leading, embedding, supporting, influencing and demonstrating. The language for student engagement was much more rigorous than just *understanding* student needs and *contributing* to information, with more

emphasis on effectivity and maximising learning performance. The notion of CETLs as a 'beacon' had been dropped from the objectives by the time of the invitation to bid.

**Table 11 – COMPARISON OF LANGUAGE CHANGES IN OBJECTIVES FROM CONSULTATION TO INVITATION TO BID**

Consultation	Invitation to bid for funds
To reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students.	To reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students.
To identify <b>beacons</b> of good teaching practice and <b>encourage</b> development of this practice so that the benefits are delivered more widely.	To <b>enable</b> practitioners to <b>lead and embed</b> change by implementing approaches that address the diversity of learners' needs, the requirements of different learning contexts, the possibilities for <b>innovation</b> and the expectations of employers and others concerned with the quality of student learning.
To enable institutions to develop <b>approaches</b> to teaching and learning that encourage a deeper understanding within the sector of methods of addressing student learning <b>needs</b> .	To enable institutions to <b>support</b> and develop <b>practice</b> that encourages deeper understanding across the sector of ways of addressing students' learning <b>effectively</b> .
To <b>encourage collaboration</b> and sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching throughout the sector.	To <b>recognise and give greater prominence</b> to clusters of excellence that are capable of <b>influencing</b> practice and raising the profile of teaching excellence within and beyond their institutions.
To <b>contribute to the information available</b> to inform student choice.	To <b>demonstrate collaboration</b> and sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching <b>and effective learning</b> throughout the sector.
	To <b>raise student awareness</b> of effectiveness in teaching and learning in order to inform student choice <b>and maximise student performance</b> .

Key: yellow denotes subtle changes in phrasing, red denotes abandonment of concept  
 Adapted from HEFCE 1994/05 and HEFCE 2003/36 (*Differences highlighted, my emphasis*).

**6.2.5.2 Funding**

The CETL initiative was the biggest ever single funded programme from HEFCE to enhance the status of teaching and learning, with £335m over 5 years, equal to the whole of all other HEFCE teaching enhancement initiatives from 1999 to 2009 combined. £315m was initially made available, including £140m for capital which had to be spent within the first two years, with an additional £20m made available to CETLs during the course of the programme. There were three levels of funding, awarded depending upon the anticipated



reach of the CETL, notionally determined as £1,000 of funding to a minimum ratio of one student to benefit:

1: '£200,000 per year for 5 years and up to £800,000 for capital

2: £350,000 per year for 5 years and up to £1,400,000 for capital

3: £500,000 per year for 5 years and up to £2,000,000 for capital' (HEFCE 2004/05)

Use of the funding was not prescribed, although HEFCE provided some examples for guidance, such as: rewarding excellent practitioners, refurbishing buildings for teaching, enhancing IT and other resources, buying staff time, bought in external expertise and strengthening the research and administrative infrastructure. There was an expectation that strategies and practice would be embedded institutionally and continue beyond the funding period. As such it was expected that there would be legacy from the initiative (HEFCE 2004/05, p.10).

#### 6.2.5.3 Successful bids

To be granted funding, a proposed CETL had to have its own identity within the institution, provide evidence of existing excellence and demonstrate an ability to serve as a catalyst for change. Use of new technology was also one of the favoured components. Initially, the 2003 White Paper proposed to focus specifically on subject disciplines, but by the invitation to bid, HEFCE had included '*distinctive practices*' (Gosling & Hannan 2007a), which meant that CETLs with a pedagogic theme also stood a chance of success. Successful bids would also need to demonstrate ways in which they would engage with sector organisations to disseminate best practice.

126 institutions submitted 259 proposals and these were judged by the independent panel, with 106 (including 24 collaborative bids) considered for stage two. Of those, 74 CETLs were approved across 73 HEIs, including 19 collaborative centres and 16 institutions hosting more than one CETL. 59 proposals did not get CETL funding (13 from pre-92, 18 post-92, and 28 small/specialist institutions) and no further education colleges hosted a CETL. The outcomes were reported in April 2005 (HEFCE 2005/17).

Some CETLs were stand-alone units, whilst others were linked closely to central institutional support units, such as educational development units or the careers service,

and some were based in a single subject discipline departments or faculty. Those that were based in central services units tended to have an institutional remit for a particular area of pedagogy.

The successful bids were across a range of disciplines and cross discipline, represented in 19 subject categories and 17 pedagogic themes. Although the bids were judged on their ability to meet the funding criteria and objectives, there was also an element of positive diversity, as HEFCE sought to avoid an imbalance in *‘geographical distribution, subject coverage, thematic spread and pedagogic focus’* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.18). The range of disciplines and pedagogic capacities covered by CETLs is represented below.

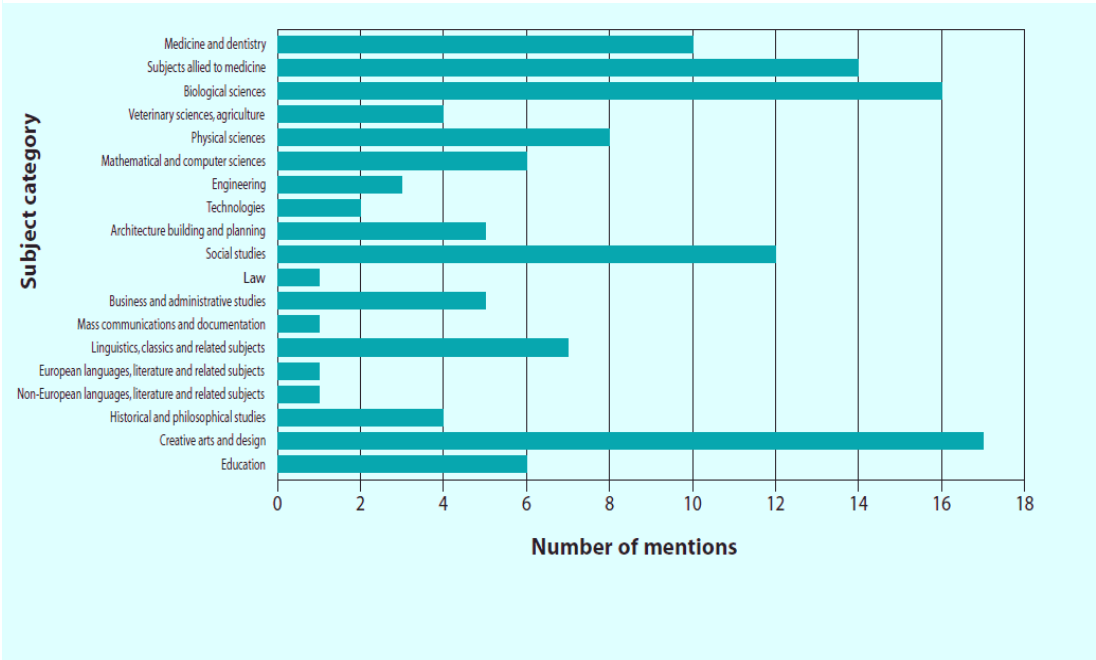


Figure 10 – SUBJECT SPREAD ACROSS FUNDED CETLs IN ENGLAND (Figure 2-1 (SQW 2011 p.9))

©HEFCE

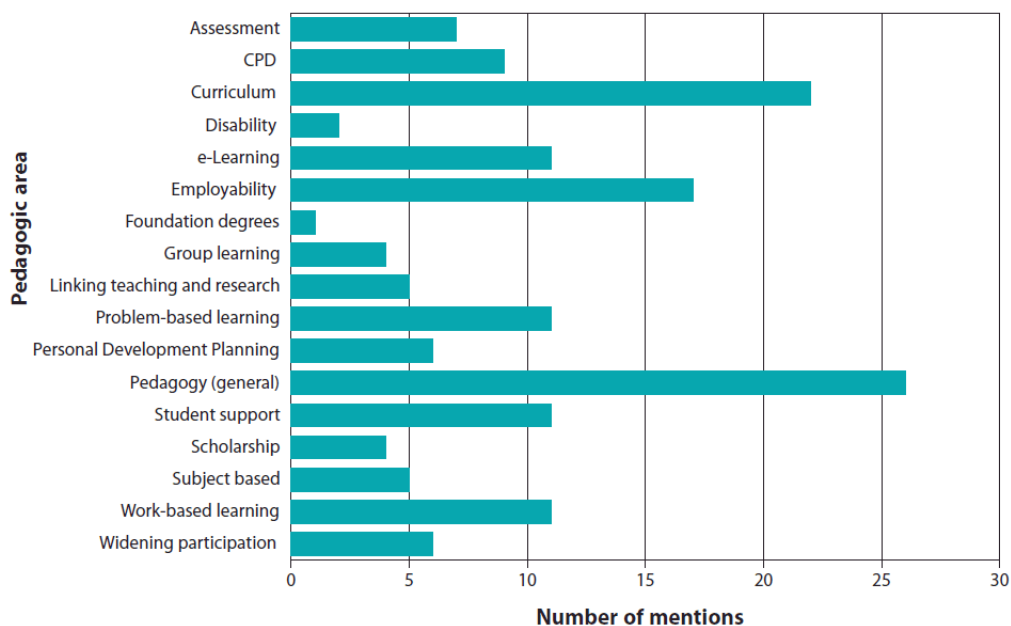


Figure 11 – PEDAGOGIC SPREAD OF FUNDED CETLS IN ENGLAND (Figure 2-2 (SQW 2011, p.8)) ©HEFCE

#### 6.2.5.4 Monitoring and accountability

It has been noted that HEFCE did not wish to constrain institutions by defining excellence or restricting activities in pursuit of excellence (HEFCE 2004/05). Equally, HEFCE were unwilling to impose strict accountability demands on institutions, which is in contrast to many other HEFCE policy initiatives, where institutions were expected to provide rigorous, regular and evidence-based justification that funding was being well spent. HEFCE also did not propose to audit institutions except in exceptional circumstances. As such, accountability was relaxed:

*‘We do not wish to impose significant accountability demands on successful bidders. We do expect that those granted funds periodically apprise us of progress, advise us if significant problems arise, only use the funds for the purposes intended and disseminate the results of CETL activity. To this end, we propose to request limited monitoring data’* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.20).

#### 6.2.5.5 Outcomes

Since there was little requirement for formal accountability, much of the evidence for the activity of CETLs comes from the formative and summative evaluations conducted in 2008 and 2011. The formative evaluation was conducted half way through the funding period from March 2007 to January 2008 and was undertaken through interviews with senior institutional managers and CETL partners, with 36 visits to CETLs, a directors’ survey and

self-evaluations submitted by CETLs in July 2007. It was commissioned by HEFCE and conducted by the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET) and the Institute of Educational Technology. The formative evaluation found that there was an

*'overall positive narrative for the development of CETLs as 'nodes' of teaching and learning-focused activities... the data points to a range of positive effects the existence of the CETL programme had enabled....these effects tend to be circulating around the direct beneficiaries of CETL resources but there is growing evidence that effects are beginning to move out from the enclaves of practice within CETLs and, in some cases, are being used to strategic effect within institutions'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.4).

The report found that the narrative from the CETLs themselves was very positive and that they had been engaged in a range of activities that benefited students and staff, as well as disseminating good practice, with 99% of CETLs claiming to have worked well so far and 97% saying that they were meeting their aims. 89% said access to additional resources (through funding) was advantageous in changing practice, with 88% positively influencing teaching and students' learning. The most common achievements were in developing partnerships and networks, innovative teaching practices, provision of new facilities, and staff development. All CETLs had provided rewards for individual staff, for example through teaching award and fellowship schemes, small financial rewards and prizes and promotion opportunities.

All CETLs agreed that a key advantage was that funding had enabled them to be innovative, creative and take risks. In some cases, deepening of practice was evident across the institution, but most stated that these gains were seen in modest terms. Overall, the interviewees who contributed to the evaluation found that *'the existence of a CETL in an institution and its associated injection of resources have enabled good practice to develop further'* (Saunders et al 2008, p.5).

However, despite an overall positive narrative, the formative evaluation did question the extent to which the programme overall would enable deepening effects, particularly across the sector:

*'As an embedded theory of change, the idea of a CETL programme does have its critics... The critique points to the sub-aim of the programme to 'deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community' [and] pointed to the difficulties of using the CETL experience to deepen its effects within institutions and across the sector'* (Saunders et al 2008, p.5).

The summative evaluation was commissioned in December 2010, by HEFCE and the Department for Education and Learning in Northern Ireland, and conducted in 2011 by SQW

Consulting Ltd. It was primarily based on self-evaluations submitted by CETLs in May 2010 with some supplementary research in two e-surveys of practitioners (114 responses), Pro Vice Chancellors for teaching and learning (32 responses) and some consultations with other stakeholders. A summary of the responses from the surveys and consultations is collated from the SQW 2001 report in provided in Appendix D and referenced throughout Section 6.3 (p.179) below.

This report concluded that CETLs had been involved in a variety of activities and produced a range of outputs such as curriculum content, diagnostic toolkits, support materials and e-learning systems. There had been much innovation in piloting new approaches to learning and research projects and 2,679 spin-out projects, secondments, fellowships and awards had been achieved through the allocation of small research grants. There had been 3,435 peer-reviewed outputs and 5,594 development and dissemination events (SQW 2011p.12). Many CETLs saw their main contribution as *'influencing underlying attitudes towards teaching and learning and, in rather fewer cases, those of students too'* (p.12).

The number of English HEIs claiming to have met the targets and objectives set out in their business plans are summarised in Table 12 below (p.177), suggesting that the majority of CETLs had achieved what they set out to do. However, what is striking about the summative evaluation report is that, as already highlighted by the formative evaluation, whilst there was considerable evidence of activity at individual and institutional level, the engagement of sector agencies and dissemination of best practice across the sector, and to those institutions without a CETL, was less evident:

*'Wider impact on the HE sector is a challenging area to unpack... the extent to which CETLs have directly contributed to sector-wide changes in behaviour and culture is impossible to quantify'* (SQW 2011, p.iv).

This criticism will be explored further in Section 6.3 (p.179).

**Table 12 – SUMMARY OF TARGETS AND OUTCOMES STATED AS A RESULT OF SELF-EVALUATION**

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Not achieved targets	11	9	4	4
Achieved targets	47	47	52	53
TOTAL RESPONSES	58	56	56	57

(SQW 2011 p.11).

## 6.2.6 Timeline

Table 13 below summarises the key dates of the CETL initiative and other related policy initiatives.

**Table 13 – TIMELINE OF THE RELATED POLICY ENVIRONMENT AND CETL INITIATIVE**

	<b>CETLs</b>	<b>Other related policy initiatives</b>
1987		Enterprise in Higher Education programme (EHE)
1989		Computers in Teaching Initiative (CTI)
1992		Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP)
1995		Fund for the Development of Learning and Teaching [1 <sup>st</sup> to explicitly fund excellence]
1997		Quality Assurance Agency created
1998		HEFCE consultation on Dearing recommendations in relation to learning and teaching Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding (TQEF)
1999		HEFCE L&T strategy – HEFCE takes steps to promote quality in L&T
2000		National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE Learning and Teaching Support Network Teaching and Learning Research Programme (under ESRC)
2003	Consultation on CETLs initiated and concluded	
2004	Invitation to bid for CETLs Submission of bids for first stage Assessment of CETL bids Submission of bids for second stage	Higher Education Academy established as an amalgamation of Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE, Learning and Teaching Support Network, TQEF National Co-ordination Team Creation of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (iSSoTL)
2005	Outcome of CETL bids announced CETL contracts signed	NSS launched
2006	An additional £20.86m of capital funding was made available to CETLs	Research Informed Teaching Fund launched
2007	Each CETL submits self-evaluation to HEFCE	
2008	Formative evaluation ‘an overall positive narrative’	
2010	CETLs funding stream wound up	TQEF funding stream wound up
2011	Summative evaluation notes some good examples and evidence of impact institutionally but a lack of enhancement across the sector	Teaching and Learning Research Programme wound up

## 6.3 A critical review of the evidence and findings

### 6.3.1 Process: Bottom-up approach

The policy approach was different to many HEFCE policy initiatives, being bottom-up, where HEFCE only loosely defined excellence, there were few constraints on spending and activities and minimal monitoring and accountability. HEFCE's rationale was that such an approach would better allow the sector the freedom to concentrate on embedding and disseminating excellence. However, like many other project funding initiatives, funding was competitive, and there were mixed views from the sector on whether a competitive initiative was preferable to one which distributed funds to all institutions. Trowler et al (2013) suggest that the bottom-up approach was one of the strengths of such HEFCE policy initiatives in that they let '1000 flowers blossom' (p.19) through allowing institutional autonomy. However, this view was not shared by all in the sector, and the formative evaluation observed some disquiet with this approach, with one interviewee commenting that

*'The price of letting 'a thousand flowers bloom' is the possibility that a lot of resource is spent reinventing the wheel - if you allow it to be bottom-up for too long you waste a lot of impact on individual projects - there is value to pulling people together and establishing a common framework' (Saunders et al 2008 p.22).*

Whilst this bottom-up approach resulted in a rich diversity of individual approaches and examples of good practice within CETLs, for many, across institutions, one consequence was that it was difficult to identify *how* good practice had been consistently disseminated and embedded throughout the sector, particularly for those institutions that had not been successful in their bid for a CETL. The likelihood of this concern was raised by respondents to the initial consultation, and whilst it was acknowledged by HEFCE in the invitation to bid, it did not result in any major changes to the initiative. These concerns were still being contested in both the formative and summative evaluations, and whilst it was acknowledged that there was widespread good practice amongst institutions, it was generally agreed that there was a lack of sector-wide impact and consequently a concern that as a policy approach, the initiative had failed to achieve one of its main objectives.

*'whether CETLs are the best policy instrument to stimulate systemic change in the quality of learning, teaching and curriculum... Some people felt that the CETL programme represented weak policy making and that the money would have been better spent as part of the block grant to universities' (Saunders et al 2008 p.21/ 26).*

*'The CETLs were extraordinarily and intentionally diverse. While they represented a programme in the sense of common overall aims, specific aims and detailed activities*

*varied widely.....It is difficult to trace impact at sector level, especially for those HEIs which did not receive funding' (SQW 2011 p.vi).*

Gosling and Hannan's (2007b) research questioned whether there was a more fundamental methodological weakness beyond the CETLs and, as such, whether bottom-up approaches for enriching and embedding learning and teaching excellence across the sector were the most appropriate, since they were somewhat piecemeal and needed more coherence than a range of initiatives:

*'Many of those we spoke to found it hard to see how the CETL initiative was part of an overall strategy for enhancing teaching and learning in higher education' (p.645).*

Gosling and Turner (2015), writing after CETL funded ended, also observed that HEFCE had failed to understand the complex nature of the sector and that there was a need for a more hands-on approach by the funding agency if true sector-wide change was to be achieved:

*'Government-funded teaching and learning projects have emerged as a favoured tool of policymakers to motivate change in teaching and learning. This strategy pays limited heed to the complexity of higher education and the contradictions, tensions and conflicts that need to be negotiated to change practice' (2015 p.1573).*

Trowler and Bamber (2005) also questioned the policy approach and its likely long term legacy, likening it to a

*"'Christmas Tree" model of policy development, plenty of pretty lights and shiny baubles, but they don't last long, have little relationship to each other and don't have any lasting effect on normal everyday life' (p.81).*

In 2013, The HEA commissioned The Centre for Higher Education Research and Evaluation to review HEFCE teaching and learning enhancement initiatives. Their findings are noteworthy in relation to what they categorise as *'pilot-based beacon project approaches, (such as CETLs)'*, which they criticise for being too short term, under-evaluated and insufficiently able to instigate change through lack of engagement (Trowler et al 2013 p.12).

David Kernohan, writing more recently as Associate Editor of WONKHE, reflected on the legacy of the initiative and, in particular, what tangible evidence there was for its success. He questioned how HEFCE could determine which of the proposals were *'better teaching'* and whether it was only the large sums of money involved that had attracted institutions to engage with the initiative:

*'The pitch was to grab the attention of institutional leaders where it was most easily attracted: the institutional bank account. A reality-shifting £315 million pounds seemed*



*to bend light around it, the closer we looked the harder it was to pick out details'* (Kernohan 2015).

It is the lack of tangible detail that lead Kernohan in the same article to question whether CETLs were a policy at all: *'a policy is more than details and the CETLs never truly become a policy'*. Whilst the evidence from the CETLs clearly demonstrated a good deal of positive activity, there has been a general consensus that the approach was insufficient to enable a consistent approach and embedding of activity at sector level.

### *6.3.2 Process: Competitive bidding*

The competitive nature of the initiative was an area of contestation, raised at the consultation stage and, subsequently, by many commentators. Concerns were not only raised by some institutions, who feared that there would be negative reputational issues for those HEIs not awarded a CETL, but also by other sector organisations and in the press. Leon, reporting in THES in December 2003, suggested that

*'A bidding war among universities seeking to host one of more than 70 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning will begin in the new year amid claims that the policy is dangerously divisive. Experts, agencies and unions, while welcoming the money, have criticised this competitive approach. They claim the policy threatens the culture of collaboration and support that has grown through agencies such as the Learning and Teaching Support Network, the Institute for Learning and Teaching and the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, since the 1997 Dearing report'* (Leon 2003).

The bidding process, and particularly its relationship to excellence, was viewed with some disquiet. Gosling and Hannan (2007b) undertook a study of the bidding process prior to the launch of the CETLs, interviewing participants from 25 proposed CETLs, 12 of which failed to receive funding. They found that the process itself was flawed by the lack of clarification and uncertainty over the defining of excellence. Although HEFCE had overtly refrained from defining excellence, the reviewing panel made value judgements on what they considered to be excellent and hence worthy of funding. Their research suggests that selected bids were chosen on development plans that were on themes preferred by HEFCE, such as technology and employability, rather than on judgements of teaching excellence. They concluded that the

*'bidding process discouraged claims for excellence based on a pervasive culture of excellence in teaching, which might incorporate a variety of pedagogical approaches, and favoured those taking a specific innovative approach that could become a 'project'* (p.637).

Questions around the bidding process also reached the House of Commons, with Chris Grayling MP asking one of the very few questions raised in the House, in which he asked the Secretary of State *'what estimate he has made of the cost to higher education institutions of bidding to become a Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching'*. Alan Johnson replied,

*'Neither I nor the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have made any estimates of this nature as the costs will be variable. However, the bidding process for Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been designed by HEFCE to keep additional costs to a minimum, while ensuring a rigorous selection process'* (Johnson, Hansard 05.02.2004).

The result of a judgmental approach to selecting favoured bids also led to an extensive range of subject disciplines and pedagogic areas being covered by CETLs. Whilst such diversity was acclaimed in the summative evaluation, this too led to criticism: *'CETL appears to be more a postmodern celebration of difference'* (Skelton 2005 p.68). Equally, whilst there was much diversity, Gosling and Turner (2015) also observed that the competitive nature of the process *'discouraged sharing of good practice outside the CETL itself'*, which conflicted with HEFCE's objective to disseminate practice across the sector. In a similar vein, Sabri (2011) suggested that the fragmentary approach in selection of CETLs is reflected in the way in which the funding was distributed to support such a diverse range of activities at institutional, discipline and individual level. Since this distribution itself was piecemeal and supported such a diversity of small scale projects, it resulted in modest impact at institutional level that could not be replicated at sector level:

*'The way in which funds are shared out – first among institutions, then amongst various staff groups within institutions, and finally amongst individuals – results in a panoply of small-scale projects with limited meaning beyond their local environment and little capacity to question the terms of reference under which funds are granted. The headline figures, in the hundreds of thousands or millions, belie the small-scale disparate nature of the work that is made possible under their auspices'* (Sabri 2011 p.662).

The summative evaluation also came to the conclusion that the competitive nature of the bidding process and fragmented implementation of the funding had been detrimental to the initiative in having sufficient influence at sectoral level:

*'we would question whether the competitive and selective bidding approach used in England, and which included a significant amount of capital funding, was the most effective way to enhance and reward excellence in teaching and learning across the sector'* (SQW 2011 p.52).

Gosling and Hannan's (2007a) research also concluded that the bid writing process in HEIs was equally unsound, where bid writers tended to use tactical judgements and concentrate

on what they thought the panel would accept as evidence of excellence, and those that 'played the game' were more likely to be successful:

*'The explanation for some institutions being awarded multiple CETLs may not be that those institutions had more excellent teaching, but rather that they had managed the bid-writing process exceptionally successfully' (p.157).*

This correlates with the findings of the formative evaluation (Saunders et al 2008), which also suggested that it was the expertise in bid writing that was rewarded rather than the excellence.

One of the main issues to arise in relation to the competitive bidding approach was the difference in that taken to reward research. Although CETLs were an attempt to bring teaching excellence on a par with research excellence, the two funding approaches were contradictory, with research excellence funding based on retrospective data and metrics for individuals as well as disciplines, and CETL's based on the *promise* of excellence. The RAE approach rewarded *all* institutions that demonstrated research excellence but the competitive and selective nature of the CETLs meant that not all excellence was rewarded. As Gosling and Hannan (2007a) point out,

*'The nature of the selection process means that it is not possible to conclude from the award of a CETL that the individuals involved, singly or collectively, are the highest performing teachers, or that bidders are 'the most excellent' (p.154).*

### 6.3.3 Process: Excellence – a contested issue

It has been observed that HEFCE chose not to define excellence. Whilst this was ostensibly in order to allow CETLs the freedom to define their own version of excellence, 'excellence' itself is a contested issue within HE more widely, and became an issue for the CETLs, although it is noteworthy that neither the formative nor summative evaluations raised this as a matter of concern. Some scholars assert that the notion of excellence is without foundation at all, such as Barnett who argues that *'the idea of excellence has no content, it is neither true nor false, ignorant nor self-conscious... as a carrier of a state driven ideology, it should be put aside'* (2000 p.2). Conversely, some scholars argue that the idea of excellence can be interpreted as creating space for innovation and creativity, as *'important sources of value creation'* (Ensign 2002 p.997) and *'therefore, the political optimisation of any framework of embedding excellence has dimensions of both randomness and creativity'* (Mieg (2014 p.78).

Others more specifically debate what is meant by 'excellence' in the context of teaching and learning:

*'Claims to excellence in teaching are particularly prone to be contentious, partly because of their close relationship with neo-liberal ideological assumptions about teaching performativity...Judgements of excellence necessarily involve contested values'* (Gosling and Turner 2015 p.1575).

Nixon (2007) also equates the contested nature of excellence in education with neoliberal narratives on the marketisation of HE, suggesting that 'excellence' has become synonymous with choice. For Nixon, achieving excellence in this respect is difficult in what has become a highly divided, diverse system of HE. Nixon also describes excellence as *'a process of growth, development, and flourishing; it is not just an endpoint'* (2007, p.8). This view is particularly pertinent to this study, since much of the evidence of the CETLs' success presented in the evaluations refer to *products* (for example, the number of teaching developments, rewards or publications), but the *process* of excellence is less well articulated and is perhaps one of the reasons why evidence of deepening across the sector has been less well developed.

Skelton (2005) also defines excellence as a process rather than a product, articulating four ideal-type understandings of teaching excellence in order to *'demonstrate that understandings of teaching excellence can differ fundamentally in terms of underlying assumptions and purposes'* (p.25). He argues that his third type, *'psychologised'*, currently dominates and influences policy making in education and *'is to ensure that the teacher-student encounter is productive, leading to individual growth and development'* (p.36). He argues that the *'professionalisation'* of teaching has arisen from this understanding. For Skelton, what is meant by excellence in policy development is often unclear, *'as terms like 'excellent', 'good', 'outstanding', 'competent' and 'best' [practice] are often used interchangeably by practitioners and educational policy makers'* (p.19). These explanations can be observed in the contested nature of excellence in the CETLs.

Little et al (2007) undertook a literature review of excellence in teaching and learning for the HEA and concluded that there are different understandings of excellence in the sector, especially at policy level, with a focus on process rather than content. They also conclude that some policy

*'takes 'excellent teaching' to be synonymous with 'effective' teaching', and 'in several policy documents there is an implicit acknowledgement that excellence in student*

*learning may not require excellent teaching, and that the former can be managed' (p.2-3).*

They criticise policies for failing to take account of students' perceptions of excellence and it is noteworthy that, as Sabri (2011) points out, *'the phrase 'the student experience' is used just once in the 2003 White Paper' (p.659).*

Little et al also contend that notions of excellence can be discipline specific:

*'in certain disciplines, the usage of the term 'excellence' does vary in some fundamental ways, rather than being used to identify "distinguishing features such that those exhibiting excellence stand out from the rest", the term is used to imply a baseline competence' (2007 p.42).*

With such wide ranging debate on the meaning of excellence in learning and teaching, it is inevitable that these issues would be contested in relation to CETLs. Gosling and Hannan's research discovered that

*'There was an acute awareness that the concept of excellence was relative to the beliefs and values about pedagogy of the person making the judgement' (2007b p.636).*

*'Some bid writers assumed that excellence meant exceptional, due to the competitive nature of the process, which is backed up by HEFCE's feedback from stage one of the bidding process that commonplace practice was not rewarded as it did not support the claim for excellence' (2007b p.637).*

They also assert that *'the articulation of the CETL's claim to 'excellence' [in the bid] was framed within a discourse that had little or no credibility with colleagues' (Gosling & Turner 2015 p.1582).*

#### **6.3.4 Process: Accountability and evaluation**

In common with defining excellence, the requirements for accountability were very loosely defined by HEFCE: *'a novel feature of the initiative was the absence of strong accountability requirements' (Gosling & Turner 2015 p.1575).* Institutions had only to report under the institutional Annual Monitoring Statements in relation to the extent to which they had met their CETL targets, with a focus on capital spend. Although not a formal HEFCE requirement, self-evaluations were produced by CETLs for the formative and summative evaluations and although these had to be evidence based, the length, format and content could be adapted to suit each CETL and, as such, varied considerably. Mark Fenton-O'Creavy, Former Director of the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL, quotes HEFCE sources as saying *'no one at*

*Hefce will read your self-evaluation reports'* and indeed the formative evaluation noted that HEFCE failed to comment on the interim reports. Fenton-O'Creevy concluded that

*'The evaluation process was poorly resourced and designed, and relied on reports compiled while the Cetls were still active: hardly the best way to assess lasting impact'* (Fenton-O'Creevy 2012).

This lack of formal structure led to much criticism of the self-evaluations. The formative evaluation found that the interim reports took an entirely positive stance, there was a huge variety in the quality of the reporting of data and the majority lacked robust and theorised evaluation strategies. The authors noted that CETLs tended to focus on activity rather than evidence-led conclusions:

*'In the majority of cases, the fact that activities had occurred was the main evidence of effect within the report'* (Saunders et al 2008p.9).

*'What is important to note is that many of the CETL reports did not refer to evidence collected systematically which could act as a resource for a judgement of the effectiveness of an activity as a change mechanism whatever its subtlety or timeframe'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.115).

They concluded that, of the 1181 instances of activity, 72% did not provide evidence of the impact of those activities (p.9). The summative evaluation also criticised the self-evaluations, noting that using them for the summative report was *'challenging'* (SQW 2001 p.2). They concluded that they were useful in providing a good deal of quantitative feedback on the impact on individuals and institutions and some evidence of impact on students, but *'it is difficult, however, to quantify these impacts in a rigorous way'* (SQW 2011 p.iii).

In 2010, as CETLs were preparing their final self-evaluations, Virginia King, from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, published an article, *'Evidencing impact of educational developments: the 'influence wheel' and its use in a CETL context'*, having concluded that the interim self-evaluations *'revealed some excellent practice but no major impact'* (King 2010 p.35). The 'influence wheel' was held up as a tool which could help CETLs to evidence impact, but there is no evidence that such an approach was systematically taken up by institutions in their 2010 self-evaluations.

HEFCE came in for much criticism for its hands-off approach to accountability and evaluation, and not just from the resulting evaluations but from other agencies, commentators and the press. Turner (2007) observed that *'CETLs were the apotheosis of*

*the strategy of steering at a distance*' (p.58). The summative evaluation criticised HEFCE for failing to put in place any formal monitoring and evaluation structure:

*'An evaluation framework should have been designed and developed with the CETLs from the start of the programme. CETLs should also have been asked to provide more detailed monitoring feedback on the use of the funds against an agreed template'* (SQW 2011 p.vii).

The HEA were particularly critical of the policy approach, especially since it was observed that the lack of clarification made any formal connections between CETLs and the HEA problematic, leading to less engagement, with former Chief Executive Paul Ramsden arguing that

*'Hefce made little attempt to coordinate this expensive initiative or to support and instruct Cetls and the HEA to enable them to work in harmony. Instead, it pushed the responsibility for its own unwillingness to provide guidance over to the Cetls and the HEA - a classic case of weak management that magnified the flaws in policy...Hefce should have found a way to make institutions accountable, not just to take the money and run'* (Ramsden 2012).

John Gill, Editor of the THES, was equally critical of the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation, and suggests that there was a relationship between the lack of monitoring and the ability of the CETLs to successfully address excellence across the sector: *'The idea of £315 million being put up with relatively little monitoring or oversight to raise the status and standard of teaching in higher education seems fanciful'* (Gill, THES 2012).

For Gosling, HEFCE's hands-off approach demonstrated that the organisation was overly reliant on HEIs being committed to the CETL initiative at a senior level that wasn't necessarily demonstrable at institutional level, and that this reliance assumed that a high level of monitoring was not required.

*'There was an over-confidence in rationalist managerial approaches involving plans, targets, rewards and superficial monitoring'* (Gosling 2013 p.19).

### **6.3.5 Programme: Embeddedness of the CETL in the institution**

CETL objectives required HEIs to embed the work of CETLs more widely within the institution. The extent to which this was achieved was a concern of both the formative and summative evaluations, as well as other commentators. Concerns raised in the evaluations centered on the ability for discipline-specific approaches to learning and teaching to be more generically embedded, and the extent to which the position of a CETL within an institution gave it sufficient influence to embed more widely. The formative evaluation

concluded that, although the majority of interviewees said that they saw the CETLs as having a strategic purpose and a wider institutional role, only a minority of CETLs had had an effect on institutional policy and practice, and many had little effect outside the CETL. Only 33% believed that the CETL was fully embedded in institutional learning and teaching strategies and 48% thought it was partly embedded:

*'Interviews with senior managers of institutions that host CETLs suggest a mixed, although overall optimistic, picture of CETLs' propensity to 'deepen' the effects of excellent practice. It is justifiable to say, on the basis of the evidence collected during this evaluation that only a relatively small proportion of senior managers were able to point to their CETLs as embedded in or providing leadership to the strategic direction of the institution's teaching and learning strategy. Most commented on its relatively 'enclaved' state at present and saw a need for a more integrative approach going forward'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.6).

An independent evaluation of the engineering CETL at Loughborough University (Tolley 2008) reached the same conclusions. Crawford and Dickens (2008) considered the findings of Tolley's evaluation, concluding that *'there has been some success in moving beyond academics who are very enthusiastic teachers, but there are still only a limited number with a high level engagement'* (p.10). Tolley's evaluation recommended that the project *'get beyond the converted 'few' to the 'many' in order to increase the pool of staff who are sufficiently motivated'* (p.5).

Despite these early concerns, the summative evaluation observed that by the time funding was coming to an end in 2010, there was more of a deepening effect, concluding that:

*'Many of the CETLs contributed to increases in cross-disciplinary and wider institutional working. In many instances they fostered a sense of collegiality that spread beyond the traditional boundaries of academic disciplines. Staff were able to network and collaborate with people outside their area of expertise, which in many cases, would not have happened without the CETL'* (SQW 2011 p.22).

However, they also cautioned that whilst there were examples in which CETLs were able to describe their work as embedded and had influenced wider institutional strategies, *'it is difficult to assess the actual extent of their influence'* (SQW 2011 p.23).

For Gosling and Turner (2015), the difficulties in embedding the work of CETLs across an institution was one of influence and the need for the support of senior leadership. They observed that CETL directors often didn't have the power, or occupy the right space in the organisation, to influence other disciplines. They concluded that without good senior management support, CETL directors could not influence change. They also concluded that CETLs were more likely to be able to disseminate their activities more widely, and engage



more fully across an institution, where the CETL was aligned to institutional goals and where it was not challenging to the prevailing culture of the organisation:

*'CETLs were least likely to recount experiences of contestation where the aspirations for the CETL exhibited continuity with existing culture of the institution or the subsection in which the CETL operated'* (Gosling and Hannan 2015. p.1583).

However, others within CETLs expressed an alternative view. Margaret Price, then Director of the ASKe CETL at Oxford Brookes University, was quoted in the THES as saying,

*'Because Cetls sit slightly outside university systems, they have freedom to explore new directions. Cetls are making a tangible difference to students' learning experiences in many ways'* (Attwood 2008).

However, she also added that *'the proportion of centre directors who did not feel supported by senior managers was shockingly high'*. (Attwood 2008).

The formative evaluation observed that the relationship between the CETL and institutional management was critical in engaging the whole institution in the work of the CETL and effecting institutional change. In their survey, 58% reported that the CETL was fully supported by senior management, 34% felt there was some support and 8% thought there was no support. Although 61% said of CETL directors that they had worked with their senior management to disseminate the work of the CETL across the institution, 39% said that they had no, or only some, support from senior managers (figures taken from Saunders et al 2008). The summative report also noted that a key issue for institutions in their self-evaluation reports was *'the importance of securing senior management engagement, especially where aims were institution wide'* (SQW 2011 p.10). The conclusion of both evaluations was that senior management commitment was crucial if the work of the CETL was to be embedded across the institution.

A review of the London Met RLO-CETL Reusable Learning Objects CETL (Cook et al 2007) concluded that there was a significant gap between top management's commitment to the CETL and the ability for change at the grass roots end of the institution. Equally, a report into the CIPel and SCERTrE CETLs (Clouder et al 2008) noted similar findings, and

*'tensions between the managerialist discourse promoting accountability and performativity evident in higher education and the potential for creativity promoted by strategies adopted in the context of the two CETLs'* (p.642).

The locus of the CETL within an institution often played a part in how successful it was in meeting the objectives for disseminating practice. HEFCE did not dictate an organisational

structure and encouraged diversity of approaches and, as such, some were based in departments or disciplines and others were more centrally located in an institution. Those that were discipline based had the most difficulty in disseminating their practice across the institution, in part because their activity was often seen as discipline specific by other parts of the organisation, as opposed to CETLs that were based in a central service or had an institution-wide pedagogic focus. As such, the summative evaluation concluded that whilst the CETLs were highly successful at a local level, wider dissemination across the institution was not always as evident:

*'Whilst some CETL staff and participants have benefitted from enhanced recognition and reward, this has not always had a wider institutional impact in relation to the recognition of teaching and learning excellence more generally'* (SQW 2011 p.iv).

Those that were stand-alone units often had more difficulty in engaging with central service departments, and the formative evaluation observed how challenging it was for many such CETLs to deal with some of the bureaucratic processes, especially in HR and financial reporting, as these did not sit well with the semi-autonomous nature of CETLs. Many considered that they hampered initial progress. This experience was also reflected in the summative evaluation, where it was concluded that

*'some of the newly established centres were outside the pre-existing academic structure and some found it a challenge initially to establish working relationships and connections to senior management. In a few cases, they also underestimated the management time which would need to be devoted to tasks such as finance and HR'* (SQW 2011 p.A-2).

The summative report observed that evidence for dissemination across the institutions was sporadic, and concluded that *'CETL communications can be complicated by the position of the centre within its institution'* (SQW 2011 p.23). Clouder et al (2008) noted that CETLs were often *'context bound'* (p.636) and Gosling and Turner (2015) concluded that

*'HEFCE's assumption that CETLs would be spreading 'good practice' took no account of intra-departmental rivalries and deeply felt differences of academic values or of principled indifference to the goals of the initiative'* (p.1582).

Gosling (2013) observed that the issue of embeddedness across the institution was not just limited to CETLs, but that many of the HEFCE policy initiatives aimed at enhancement have been *'based on the theoretically naïve assumption that teaching and learning practices developed in the context of one academic department can be 'transferred' to others'* (p.7).

### 6.3.6 Programme: Reward and recognition

Providing incentives and rewards at individual level for staff engaged in teaching was a central part of the CETL initiative. HEFCE suggested in its invitation to bid *'that CETL funds might be used to reward excellent practitioners through financial or promotional schemes or in other ways'* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.10), and its first key objective was *'to reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students'*. Both evaluations reported considerable activity and success in relation to meeting this objective, with many examples of fellowships (the most common), secondments and provision of resources for conferences and other activities. 52% of practitioners responding to the e-survey said that they had more time to reflect on their teaching having been a part of a CETL and 79% felt that their overall learning and teaching practice had improved as a result (SQW 2011 p.19).

The self-evaluation reports from May 2010 included many examples where CETL and other staff in an institution had benefited from recognition and reward, but the practitioner survey suggested that only 46% of respondents agreed that their work had been recognised via promotion or other reward (SQW 2011 p.25). Whilst most rewards involved a financial element, the majority of recipients perceived that the recognition was much more important than financial gain. The summative evaluation also noted that it was difficult to quantify the impact of these rewards in a rigorous way as they could be the result of other mechanisms, and not the direct influence of the CETL.

One of the most common issues reported in the self-evaluations was the difficulty in freeing up time for staff to work with their CETL, as in many cases they were expected to continue with their existing workload alongside. The summative evaluation concluded that one of the main challenges had been competing demands on time and concerns over the management of workload.

There were a number of case studies reported in relation to reward and recognition, more than any other area of activity. Turner et al (2008) undertook a small study to examine the impact of awards to lecturers received from the HELP CETL, which worked with Plymouth University Partner Colleges Faculty to enhance the student experience for those studying within the partner colleges' network. The Award Holder Scheme was developed to reward lecturers' contributions, ranging from £500 to £10,000 to support their professional development. Their findings showed that the recipients valued the rewards and the opportunities that the funding provided, and raised levels of confidence. However, in

researching the impact of the awards, the findings were less positive, with recipients reporting that they did not perceive that the awards had recognition and value, particularly from colleagues and managers. Indeed, the research found that managers considered the awards to be detrimental to other operations, with the award holder having to be brought out of teaching or being absent. Recipients also noted that buy-out was sometimes not forthcoming and so their CETL activities needed to be completed on top of their existing workload. The authors concluded that at a local level award and recognition had been beneficial, but it had not sufficiently addressed the objective to raise the profile of teaching in line with research:

*'our findings do not question the value of the awards and the benefits to recipients but pose a bigger question about the ability of an initiative, like the CETL's, to address the wider issue of the status of teaching'* (Turner et al 2008 p.447).

The Centre for Interprofessional e-Learning (CIPeL), a joint CETL between Coventry and Sheffield Hallam universities, created *'innovative e-resources to support interprofessional and interdisciplinary learning'*. As with the HELP CETL, a survey of the CIPeL staff indicated that individuals were not interested in financial returns: *'There was a general consensus that recognition was in fact more important than financial gain'* (Bluteau and Krumins 2008 p.421). They, too, reported that secondees were often not released from their everyday duties and so had to undertake additional workload.

One of the main difficulties raised was in embedding reward and recognition beyond the CETL, aligned with institutions' HR strategies and policies. Many CETLs found that they needed to align their work within existing institutional policies, if they were to be seen as integrated. Crawford and Dickens (2008) examined the impact of the engineering CETL at Loughborough University and observed the importance of integration with university systems:

*'This reward mechanism is run centrally by the University. To ensure that we became integrated into the University reward system, the engCETL became involved in discussions about the awards from the outset in 2005'* (p.4).

However, Turner & Gosling (2012) observed that CETLs had little impact on reward systems at an institutional level, which were still grounded in research recognition. Evidence from their research suggests that little progress was made in terms of embedding reward and recognition across those institutions where long standing cultures and reward systems were already firmly established.

*'In translating the reward agenda, the bid writers concentrated upon what was achievable, reducing the ambition to achieve change from the institutional to the local. This had consequences for the longer-term sustainability of the CETL reward and recognition strategies, since CETLs' own local practices could run counter to, or alongside, institutional reward systems' (p.420).*

They concluded that HEFCE's failure to fully define reward and recognition meant that the perception that it was a central strand in enhancing the work of the CETL was overstated (p.427). Paul Orsmond, writing in the THES, also observed the silo nature of CETLs in relation to reward and recognition:

*'They mostly provide opportunities for teaching staff who already have an interest in learning and teaching to shift into a bigger ghetto and talk to like-minded individuals. But they pass by most of teaching staff because they do not impinge on their private world and their discipline' (Orsmond 2003).*

### 6.3.7 Programme: Engagement of students

Although four of the six objectives of CETLs were explicit in their requirement for impact on students, very little space is actually dedicated to students in the formative and summative evaluations. The formative evaluation interviewed students as part of its case study visits but only dedicated three pages to students out of a 126 page report. The summative report only dedicates a total of three paragraphs to the impact on students. Indeed, students are only referred to once in the executive summary, and that is in relation to student fees.

Despite the limited attention given to students in the evaluations, the reports do draw some conclusions. The formative evaluation reported that 92% of stakeholders concluded that CETLs had a positive effect for students in supporting their learning. Although the evaluation concludes that it was *'too early to draw conclusions'* about the impact on students, they did note that, in a number of CETLs, *'there is a greater emphasis on involving students in planning and designing learning activities'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.51) and students had been involved in a number of projects and placements.

The summative report concluded that the vast majority of CETLs claimed to have student engagement at the heart of their work, and there was substantial evidence in the self-evaluation reports of provision of resources, innovation and practical support for students. However, the evaluation found little evidence of *how* this had a positive impact on the experience of students. The report notes that *'in some cases the number of students affected by these changes is estimated in the thousands, although there is seldom any information to contextualise these numbers'* (SQW 2011 p.11). Many of the CETLs proposed

to develop technology-enhanced learning to support students; however, the evaluation concludes that it was impossible to adequately assess the impact:

*'It is difficult to assess the specific impact that technology-enhanced learning had had on students. The availability of, and access to, new resources, facilities, and teaching methods is just one of several factors that could influence student motivation and attainment levels. Few CETLs have directly attributed the development of learners' skills to the presence of technology-enhanced learning although there was a general acknowledgement in many self-evaluation reports that the two are in some way related' (SQW 2011 p.39-40).*

### 6.3.8 Programme: Impact across the sector

Three of the CETL objectives were concerned with embedding good practice across the sector, but this was one of the most contested themes. In the formative evaluation, the authors noted that in the initial case study interviews, *'the aspect of impact within and outside the sector elicited far less information than other issues we explored'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.58). However, in later interviews they reported that *'many more of the CETLs were now turning their attention to disseminating their activities, and building up links, more widely and systematically across the sector'* (p.59). The report observed that involvement of CETLs with other HEIs varied considerably, but concluded that the formative evaluation may have been too early to accurately assess the impact across the sector.

The summative evaluation is more conclusive. 73% of pro-vice chancellors for teaching and learning and 61% of CETL based staff suggested that *'good practice and innovation in learning and teaching have been shared between CETLs and non-CETL institutions'*, and the 2010 self-evaluations reported much external activity, with over 3,000 publications and more than 5,500 dissemination events. However, the authors do not conclude that the *impact* on the sector had been evident and indeed suggest that only a handful of the reported publications and dissemination events indicate any impact externally:

*'It is difficult to gauge the extent to which this may have led to other institutions actively adopting the approaches and materials developed by the CETLs' .... specific evidence of the adoption of CETL approaches in non-funded HEIs is much scarcer... the extent to which CETLs have directly contributed to sector-wide changes in behaviour and culture is impossible to quantify' (SQW 2011 p.iv/ 32).*

*'the legacy of the programme rests largely in individual staff and in those institutions which have embedded CETL developments... rather than in a general enhancement of teaching and learning across the sector... we do not believe that the CETL programme itself has led to material changes in non-participating HEIs and across the sector as a whole' (SQW 2011 p.vi).*

Taylor (2007) notes that the notion of the transferability of *'excellent practice'* is explicit within the CETLs, but queries whether it could be transferrable across the sector, and Skelton (2005) also notes the difficulties of transferring and embedding practice across different discipline contexts.

The difficulty of creating a legacy of CETL impact attracted media interest. Writing in the THES in 2007, HEFCE Director Liz Beaty was acclaiming in CETLs' role, describing them as *'the envy of the world'*. She said,

*'The CETLs are just two years into their five years of funding, but hugely impressive outcomes are already visible. They all have well-equipped learning spaces built with capital funding as part of the CETL package, and growing communities of practice are providing scholarly evidence for effective approaches to teaching'* (Beaty 2007).

It is noteworthy that, just one week earlier, in response to a draft of the formative evaluation, journalist Melanie Newman, also writing in the THES, reported that *'There is little evidence that a multimillion-pound scheme designed to "celebrate and reward excellence in teaching" has had much impact'* (Newman 2007). Following the publication of the summative evaluation report in 2012, views in the media were mixed. Craig Mahoney, then Chief Executive of the HEA, but previously a CETL director, was reported as saying,

*'It was unfair to judge the programme on its legacy as this was not its primary purpose. There is a huge amount of evidence to suggest that this was an effective use of money - there were hugely positive impacts'* (Gove 2012).

However, much of the reporting at that time was not positive. Jack Gove, reporting in the same article under the headline *'Cetls impact assessed: the sector hardly felt a thing'* was of the opinion that

*'As an example of the failure of public policy in higher education, the [CETL] programme would be hard to beat... The report leaves no room for doubt that the programme as a whole failed in its primary purpose of enhancing teaching and learning in higher education'* (Gove 2012).

John Gill, also writing in the same edition under the headline *'they never came to boil'* argued that,

*'The dearth of funds to invest in teaching today makes the Cetls' meagre legacy all the more disappointing. When the funding came to an end two years ago, there was a widespread feeling that the programme had gone out with a whimper'* (Gill 2012).

At the end of CETL funding in 2010, The HEA was commissioned to undertake a review of all HEFCE learning and teaching initiatives, which included a review of CETLs, and particularly their impact on the sector. The report concluded that

*'there is no evidence that HEFCE's enhancement initiatives have led to sustained sector-wide cultural changes in teaching and learning in universities....it has been far less successful in promoting the strategic development of quality enhancement across the sector as a whole' (Trowler et al 2013 p.17).*

One of the main issues highlighted in the formative evaluation was the difficulty faced by CETLs in engaging with sector agencies, particularly the HEA and subject centres. The authors suggest this is due in part to agencies not being generously funded and thus not having the capacity for engagement. The formative report also notes the absence of collaboration with the HEA:

*'There was some disappointment evident in many of the self-evaluation reports about the role of the HE Academy, which was initially viewed as having the potential to enable broader engagement between CETLs' (Saunders 2008 p.32).*

The formative evaluation concluded that there was unevenness and incoherence of engagement in different disciplines with HEA subject centres, which also impeded cross-CETL connections. As such, dissemination of practice between HEIs was compromised. The summative evaluation, however, found that engagement through the Subject Centres, was fairly widespread. Indeed it was noted that

*'some stakeholders commented that some subject centres made a significant contribution to the impact of the CETL activity, by taking a highly focussed approach to coordinating and streamlining all the experience in a given field' (SQW 2011 p.28).*

The same cannot be said for the CETL network itself, where there was very little evidence of CETLs working together outside discipline networks. Although 60% of pro-vice chancellors and 56% of CETL staff reported effective working across the CETLs, the summative evaluation concluded that there was no evidence to that effect. There was

*'No real sense of a national CETL network and many CETLs have not necessarily seen other centres as important nodes in their networks' (SQW 2011 p.iii).*

Overall, the summative evaluation concluded that the lack of coherent and systematic engagement within the CETL network meant that the ability for institutions to disseminate their work more widely was compromised, and the programme would have benefitted from some national coordination, noting that

*'HEFCE did not take a more strategic co-ordinating role'... and as a result of the light touch approach, an opportunity to raise the status and profile of teaching and learning across the sector, and to disseminate results more effectively, had been missed' (SQW 2011 p.vi).*



### 6.3.9 Programme: Funding and future sustainability

The provision of capital funding to establish new teaching infrastructure and acquire new technology was considered one of the successes of the CETL programme, as observed by Turner and Gosling (2012 p.427). By the time of the formative evaluation, '78% had invested in equipment and facilities' for students' and '58% felt the capital spend had been essential to the CETL' (Saunders et al 2008). Crawford and Dickens (2008) concluded in relation to the Engineering CETL that

*'there is no doubt that the capital funds, in creating a high quality presence for the CETL, have made a significant contribution to raising the profile of teaching, thus achieving one of the original aims of the CETL programme' (p.8).*

The summative evaluation concurred, concluding that

*'The capital funding element of the CETL programme in England has enabled participating HEIs to build state-of-the-art learning spaces and to upgrade resources significantly. Several self-evaluation reports drew attention to the impact, on staff and students, of the new build enabled by the capital grant' (SQW 2011 p.24-25).*

However, timing of the capital funding presented difficulties for many CETLs. Capital spend needed to be concluded within the first two years, and the formative evaluation observed that, as a result, there was less long-term strategic thinking for the use of capital funds. The summative report concurred that the requirement to focus on capital spending in the initial stages impacted on the future development activities of CETLs.

Although it was not explicitly stated that CETLs needed to create a legacy, there was an expectation that CETLs would continue beyond the funding period. Indeed, it was initially thought that there would be some continued funding, but this did not come to fruition. Achieving such a legacy without continued funding beyond 2010 was a concern for institutions, and is highlighted in the evaluations. As early as 2008, HEIs were questioning the approach to funding and how sustainability would be possible beyond 2010 without additional money. The formative evaluation reported that long-term planning for sustainability varied considerably across the CETLs, with 42% having nothing agreed, 14% concluding that there would be no institutional funding beyond 2010 (and therefore no continued activity), 14% having some funding agreed by their institutions and only 6% reporting that funding would be guaranteed by the institution. The independent evaluation of the engineering CETL (Tolley 2008, Crawford and Dickens 2008) noted as a key recommendation that the CETL was well embedded within its institution to ensure sustainability beyond the funding period. The formative evaluation summarised that there

was very little evidence that the sector saw the continuation of CETLs as an institutional priority.

By the summative evaluation, the continuation of CETLs was still not resolved for a large number, and the authors noted that *'our impression is that none would continue with the same level of resources and activities as during the programme'* (SQW 2011 p.44). A minority of CETLs (17) reported that they would continue beyond the funding, although with reduced resources, and a number of those reported that there would be greater emphasis on self-funding. The evaluation also noted that, in some cases, the CETLs would be incorporated into learning and teaching development units (p.44) as a mechanism for embedding the CETL more firmly within the organisational structure:

*'The data indicate that staff from a high proportion of CETLs will remain in the host institution and their expertise will therefore be available for the HEI to draw upon in the future'* (SQW 2011 p.45).

The summative report also observed that where CETLs had been able to engage more widely beyond their discipline or institution, there was more likelihood of a legacy:

*'It is worth noting that where strong external networks had been established, often involving practitioners and employers as well as academics, there was a high level of confidence that these would continue and be a valued vehicle for exchanging information and good practice'* (SQW 2011 p45).

Many commentators questioned HEFCE's short term funding approach as being suitable for embedding CETL activity beyond 2010. Gosling and Turner (2015) argue that there is relative powerlessness in funded short-term projects to act as agents for changing institutional culture. Julie Hall, co-Chair of the Staff and Educational Development Association, quoted in the THES, also called into question the short term nature of the funding, suggesting that this made the initiative:

*'Inherently flawed. The idea that ... significant, time-limited funding for Cetls would impact more widely on curricula, university processes, student experience and pedagogic practice across the sector was misguided, naïve and rather a waste'* (Gove 2012).

Although, at £335m, the funding for the CETL programme was equal to the whole of all other HEFCE teaching enhancement initiatives from 1999 to 2009 combined, it is perhaps surprising that there was not greater interest from the press, or in parliament, when the legacy for the programme failed to materialise. The lack of attention may reflect the fact that views on the success or failure of the CETL programme were mixed across the sector itself. Paul Ramsden, then Chief Executive of the HEA, stated that CETLs were *'a poor policy*

*poorly managed that leaves little to show for £315 million [sic]* (Ramsden 2012), but others, such as Mark Fenton-O'Creevy, Former director of Practice-based Professional Learning CETL, challenged this view, claiming sour grapes on Ramsden's part for HEAs failure to engage with CETLs, and pointing to individual examples of success in his article, *'Do the maths: Cetls' contributions add up'* (Fenton-O'Creevy 2012).

There was little comment from government, despite the large sums involved. Indeed, no questions raised in parliament were in relation to either the high level of funding or lack of legacy. Kernohan, writing more recently (2015), questions why, with hindsight, there was not a select committee enquiry, when there had been an enquiry in to the e-University's relatively modest £50 million.

### *6.3.10 Programme: Pedagogic research*

Although a requirement for pedagogic research was not explicit in the CETL objectives, it was implied and was seen as a mechanism for putting learning and teaching on a par with research. HEFCE saw pedagogic research as a means to

*'enable institutions to support and develop practice that encourages deeper understanding across the sector of ways of addressing students' learning effectively... [and] deepen staff involvement in critical scholarly reflection... by strengthening the CETLs research'* (HEFCE 2004/05 p.10).

The formative evaluation concluded that pedagogic research had been sporadic in the first half of the programme and, although 83% engaged in the activity, there were not many examples of the research feeding into teaching practice. However, they noted,

*'indications that in a number of CETLs pedagogic research is helping to develop a culture where pedagogy is being given far more prominence than had been the case pre-CETL'* (Saunders et al 2008p.74).

By the time of the summative evaluation, pedagogic research had become more embedded and was one of the areas of the CETLs considered to be the most effective. The vast majority saw research as a significant aim, and indeed *'examples of CETLs which did not undertake primary research were relatively rare'* (SQW 2011 p.37). Most CETLs generated high levels of research outputs such as peer-reviewed journals, book chapters and case studies. The development of pedagogic research networks were highlighted in the report, and it was noted that

*'Internal networks were sometimes crucial in the first few years of the CETL, with larger, external networks growing in prominence as centres became more established'* (SQW 2011 p.37).

The evaluation does highlight a concern that CETLs were disjointed from other policy initiatives in this regard, with very few examples of engagement with the ESRC and HEFCE Teaching and Learning Research Programme, although it also questions whether that was simply because the self-evaluation structure did not give prominence to highlighting such links.

## 6.4 Conclusion

HEFCE took a bottom-up approach with the CETL initiative, giving institutions the freedom to define excellence for themselves, proposing their own organisational structures and requiring little in the way of accountability for the funding. Whilst some in the sector welcomed such an approach, others criticised HEFCE for being too 'hands-off' and for failing to coordinate the programme to ensure that there was a legacy of good practice across the sector. There is substantial evidence that a good deal of CETL activity took place and that there were particular successes in relation to capital spend for teaching resources and on students, and that the profile of pedagogic research had been raised by the work of the CETLs. At the level of the individual and within CETLs, there was also much evidence that the funding had led to improved teaching and learning and professional development. However, the evidence for impact at institutional level was sporadic and very difficult to evidence at sector level. As such, one of the key conclusions from this analysis is that the initiative did not succeed in its primary objective to raise the profile of teaching in line with that of research.

Gosling concludes of the initiative as a whole that

*'If the aim was to transform the attitude of the sector towards teaching, then this expensive initiative must be judged a failure...it is clear from the evaluation that co-ordination of the CETLs activities and their outputs has been weak'* (Gosling 2013 p.14).

As with the previous case study, the work of this chapter is used in Chapter 8 to interpret the policy episode against McConnell's framework. Chapter 7 addresses the final case study.

## Chapter 7: Case study 3: Lifelong Learning Networks

### 7.1 Introduction

The Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) is an ideal case study since it meets all the criteria set out in Table 6 (p.71) in being a time bound episode, with clearly identified proposed outcomes and benefits to the target group, and there are sufficient sources of both primary and secondary texts to offer adequate breadth and depth to develop a thick description of the policy episode. In considering each of the chosen texts, the use of the coding established in Appendix B enables the thick description to be interpreted against the theoretical framework in Chapter 8, to give a nuanced approach in addressing the main research question, articulating the success or failure of the LLN policy episode. This is also used to address the first supplementary research question in establishing commonalities and differences between the chosen case studies.

The LLN initiative was a policy to bring HEIs and FECs into local regional partnerships in order to guarantee vocational progression pathways to higher education through collaboration between the two sectors. What was distinctive about this policy episode was that LLNs were, at least formally, a joint policy initiative with another sector funding body, the Learning Skills Council (LSC), and the DfES, as part of a joint progression strategy. Another feature of the initiative was an expectation that LLNs would collaborate with regional agencies such as Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and regional branches of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), as well as local employers. Like CETLs, this was a bottom-up policy, where HEFCE sought to allow the initiative to develop within the LLNs, with loose objectives and structures, rather than top-down and imposed. It is distinctive from the other case studies in that the consultation, a typical feature of HEFCE policy episodes, was conducted 'on the ground' through conversations between HEFCE regional operatives and institutions. Whilst funding was limited to the life of the policy (2005 – 2011), it was expected that the work of the LLNs would be embedded and thus continue beyond the funding period.

#### 7.1.1 Sources of data

The evidence for the LLNs is fertile, with both interim and summative evaluations, regular HEFCE reports arising from analysis of the LLN's own monitoring reports, and analysis of LLN learner attributes, as evidence of LLN's influence on learners. The LLN National Forum

was also a good source of reports, for example having conducted an analysis of LLN research, as was the Centre for Recording Achievement, which conducted research on behalf of HEFCE into the personalised learning plans in LLNs. In the secondary literature, there is some academic focus on LLNs, with the main contributors being: Betts and Burrell (2011), Leahy (2013), Little & Williams (2009), May et al (2012), Newby (2005), Ward et al (2012), Watson (2005), Wise and Shaw (2011), and Woodfield et al (2013). These are outlined more fully in Appendix A. There were surprisingly few mentions in the media, with the majority of articles in the THES being written by the directors of LLNs showcasing their work, and any criticism of the LLNs did not come until later, when Ward (2011) recognised that the lack of continuation funding would impact on LLN's survival. In the House of Commons, although few questions were raised in regards to LLNs, with only 33 spoken references, the responses were positive. For example, Mark Williams (Ceredigion LD) paid tribute to LLNs on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2007, when he said,

*'I also want to pay tribute to the work in South Yorkshire of Higher Futures, the lifelong learning network, which seeks to combat the malaise of different learning providers and bring them together under one umbrella to provide fresh opportunities for the progression of vocational work-based learning'* (Hansard 2007).

A review of the literature reveals a general consensus of support for the activity of the LLNs, both during the life of the initiative and since termination of the funding, and considers that they made some impact on vocational entry into higher education. Most of the deliberation concerns wider debates in terms of the policy approach, whether LLNs succeeded in raising vocational parity in line with academic entry qualifications and whether they contributed to social mobility. LLNs were frequently highlighted as evidence of good practice on vocational skills in a range of subsequent government reports, particularly in evidence to the 2006-07 Further Education and Training Bill, the 2008-09 *'Re-skilling for recovery: after Leitch, implementing skills and training policies'* for the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee, and the 2011 *'Government Reform of Higher Education'* for the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee.

## 7.2 An account of the episode

### 7.2.1 Origin

In 2001, HEFCE and the LSC proposed a new joint initiative, Partnerships for Progression (PfP), to widen and increase participation in higher education, in order to address the government's ambition of 50% participation in higher education by 2010 (HEFCE 01/73).

£60m was provided for three years, between April 2003 and March 2006, to fund FE and HE partnerships with staff working with schools, colleges and training providers on regionally co-ordinated activities, such as summer schools. One of the criticisms of this initiative was that it was driven at the discretion of the HE sector, and the role for FE, particularly at a strategic level for delivering vocational training, was less coherent (response to the PfP from the Learning and Skills Development Agency 2002). LLNs, introduced towards the end of the PfP initiative, were an attempt to address some of its shortcomings in relation to the inclusion of FE, and to develop a nationally coherent policy.

The HEFCE Board had endorsed proposals for the development of LLNs in late 2003, and the first public reference was made by the then Chief Executive of HEFCE, Sir Howard Newby, in the 2004 Colin Bell Memorial Lecture, *'Doing Widening Participation: Social inequality and access to higher education'*. Newby acknowledged that, despite progress in widening participation in the English sector, whilst 90% of students taking 'A' levels progressed into higher education, only 40-50% of students undertaking vocational qualifications at Level 3 progressed (Newby 2005a). Data showed that the vast majority of students taking vocational qualifications were from under-represented and poorer backgrounds (Ward et al 2012) and thus, if the sector was to be successful in widening participation, there was a need to ensure greater opportunity for access to HE for vocational students. Newby argued that this approach was imperative if the government was to meet the 50% target. He concluded that in the English context, there was confusion at the post 16 level for entry into HE for those wanting to take a more vocational route, and progression routes were not nationally and consistently applied. In order to combat this problem, he suggests that there was a

*'need to ensure that higher education accommodates the 'vocational' as well as the 'academic'... 'the academic and the vocational are not a distinction, but a spectrum'* (Newby 2005a p.13).

Howard Newby had first-hand experience of the American system, as he had been a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the early 1980s. In the Wisconsin model, all citizens in the state have access to HE opportunities through the sharing of pathways and resources, and there are clearer pathways for progression. In his 2004 speech, he noted of the USA that

*'institutions with distinctly different missions have a common interest in ensuring such opportunities are available, and in putting arrangements in place to facilitate it'* (Newby 2005a p.14).

As such, he saw the potential for policy borrowing from the US. Newby's solution was to develop a network of partners, typically at a regional level, headed by an organisation that had a distinctiveness with which potential learners could identify and would provide the structure and cohesion required to guide students through progression routes. He proposed that these would be called Lifelong Learning Networks and

*'LLNs would therefore offer a wide-ranging curriculum, combining the strengths of further and higher education' ... 'At the heart of every Network will be arrangements to facilitate progression' (Newby 2005a p.16/17).*

Networks, for the most part, would focus on maximising opportunities in the local and regional context, through links to the Sector Skills Councils and relevant employers. The link to employers had been less coherent in the PfP initiative, but formed a key element for LLNs. In a journal article a year after the Colin Bell lecture, Newby emphasised the importance of the employer link to the HE curriculum:

*'HE needs to engage more closely with employers, think more systematically about employability in a changing society and economy, and be prepared to make the necessary changes to the existing curriculum and the ways in which it is developed... [LLNs will] make the whole HE offer available to learners over a lifetime of work and study, allowing people to build on their earlier learning without being confined by it' (Newby 2005a p179-180).*

At a speech at the LLN National Forum in 2009, Newby revealed that LLNs had not been the first choice in HEFCE's vision for tackling vocational progression. Preferred solutions were to firstly follow the American Community College model much more closely, with institutions sharing progression and resources through the levels of education, and the second was a proposal to merge FE and HE to ensure continuous progression (reported in Betts & Burrell 2011, p.2). However, HEFCE had observed that both approaches might be more contentious (Newby 2005b).

### **7.2.2 English context**

The post-compulsory education policy context in England since the 1950s had seen several decades of government trying to improve vocational pathways to HE, but 'A' levels continued to remain the dominant route for progression. The 1980s and 1990s saw the development of vocational qualifications such as BTEC National Diplomas and access to HE diplomas, but there was little which clarified their currency for, or routes into, HE, resulting in what Little & Connor referred to as the '*crazy paving*' of vocational progression (2005). Dearing, in the 1997 National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, recommended



that HEIs work with FECs to develop curricula and access routes, in an attempt to streamline progression through bridging courses and make HE more accessible to vocational learners, but in the event little had changed by the turn of the century.

In the context of HE in the early 2000s, the dominant rhetoric at that time was New Labour's commitment to increasing participation in higher education to 50% by 2010 (Blair 2004), but in addition, New Labour focussed attention on proposals to widen participation to under-represented groups:

*'The concept of widening participation in higher education as distinct from increasing or expanding participation is a relatively recent addition to the policy discourse' (CHERI 2008 p.13).*

In particular, there was a focus on ensuring greater inclusion from lower socio-economic backgrounds, where the young were more likely to undertake vocational qualifications. The attention on widening as well as increasing participation was necessary if the 50% target was to be met, as Newby pointed out in his 2004 lecture:

*'It is statistically highly unlikely that we could achieve a 50 per cent participation rate in higher education without simultaneously widening it' (Newby 2005a p.4).*

The focus on increasing and widening participation also resulted in reforms in the 14-19 sector, with the 2004 Tomlinson Review and the development of the 14-19 qualifications framework, which also sought to clarify and streamline educational progression for younger learners, again in the context of academic and vocational learning. Related to the widening participation agenda, the government commissioned Professor Stephen Schwarz to undertake a review of fair admissions to universities, resulting in the 2004 report, *'Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice'*, to demonstrate that the admission of students undertaking non-traditional entrance courses was as fair, transparent and principled as that for 'A' level entrants. Following recommendations in the 2004 Higher Education Act, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was established, with a remit to

*'increase the proportion of learners from under-represented and disadvantaged groups who enter, succeed in and are well prepared to progress from higher education to employment or postgraduate study' (OFFA 2015/02).*

Also as a result of the 2004 Higher Education Act, the HE sector saw the introduction of variable fees and a shift in the principal funding of higher education from the state to the student. Some HE scholars observed that the introduction of higher fees might cause HE institutions to re-evaluate their priorities *away* from non-traditional entry and

qualifications, thus putting greater pressure on maintaining partnerships for progression to HE (Woodfield et al 2013). Newby himself observed that there was potential for greater fragmentation of FE-HE collaboration as a result of fees, but contended that LLNs might be positioned to

*'reconnect a sector that might otherwise be pulled apart to a greater degree by the introduction of variable fees'* (Newby 2005b p.183).

Indeed, some academic commentators on HE policy have suggested that the development of LLNs was an attempt to protect vocational opportunities ahead of the introduction of fees (Parry 2006).

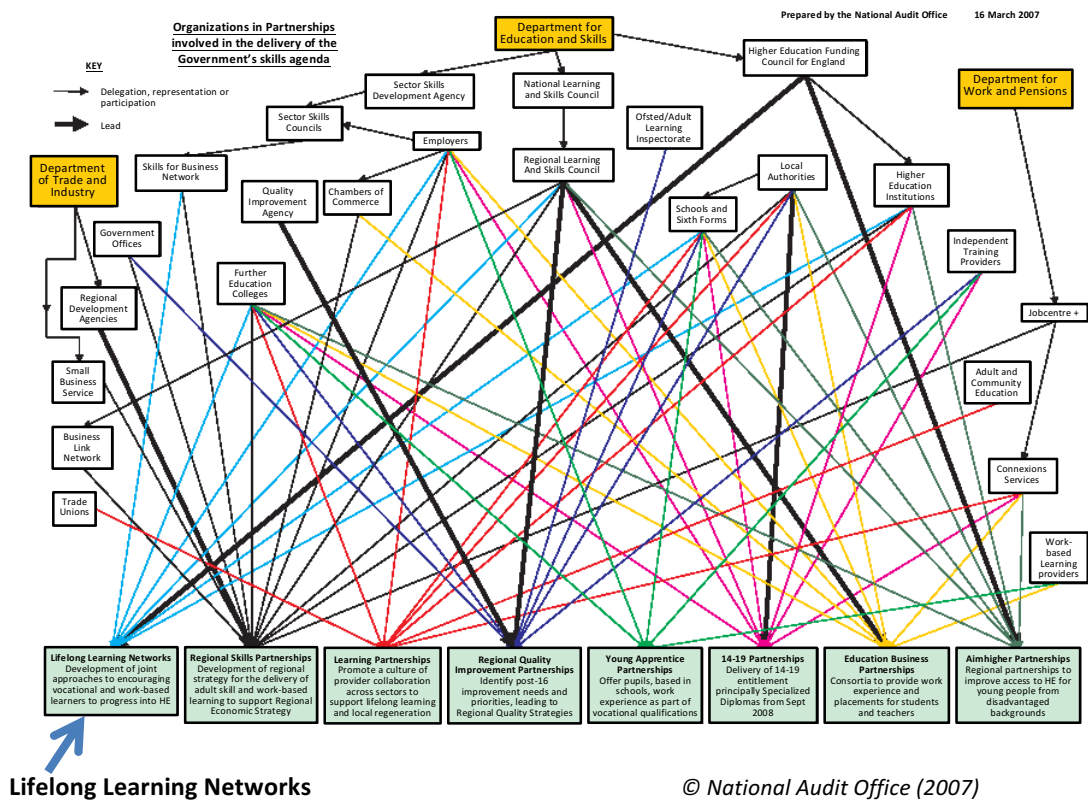
One of the other main policy drivers for the New Labour government at that time was a focus on the development of *skills* to meet the conditions of a more globalised and knowledge-based economy, resulting in the Leitch Review of Skills in 2004. The report, published in 2006, recommended a considerable degree of 'up-skilling' of the workforce, with greater percentages of students being expected to progress. In addition, the establishment of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in 1998 and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in 2002 contributed significantly to the skills agenda and a greater focus on regional economic development. Following the Leitch Review, which emphasised the involvement of employers in skills education, the government had begun to re-focus policy more strongly in favour of employer engagement, particularly at regional level.

These policies, and others more specifically in higher education, such as the development of Foundation Degrees, were, in principle at least, aimed at counteracting the 'deficit' view of under-participation in HE, favoured by Dearing (NCIHE 1997) which suggests that participation can be addressed by increasing the supply of HE. Instead, these policies favoured a more *demand-led* approach, where the needs of both students and employers were met, thus increasing participation. It is within these policy contexts of progression, vocational skills development and meeting the demands for local economies that LLNs were expected to operate.

A key characteristic of LLNs was their engagement with a wealth of other agencies and policy initiatives across many public sectors. There were many other organisations and initiatives in place at the start of, and developed during, the LLN initiative, many of which crossed policy boundaries and the focus of their work, such as:

- Centres of Vocational Excellence
- New Technology Institutes
- Knowledge Exchanges
- Aimhigher
- Higher Level Skills Pathfinders
- Train to Gain
- Economic Challenge Investment Fund
- 14 – 19 Qualifications Framework
- Advanced Apprenticeships

In 2007, the National Audit Office attempted to pictorially sum up the partnership relationships of organisations which helped to deliver the skills agenda, which included FECs, HEIs and LLNs. This diagram is illustrative in contextualising LLNs alongside other policy initiatives as well as showing the complexity of the policy landscape at that time:



**Figure 12 – ORGANISATIONS IN PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVED IN THE DELIVERY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SKILLS AGENDA**

### 7.2.3 Some international perspectives

It has already been noted above that the Wisconsin model in the USA advocates clearer pathways and sharing of resources for progression to the public universities, and Watson (2005) observes that many other (non-European) countries, such as Singapore, Australia

and New Zealand have progression to HE systems that are 'culturally embedded' (Watson 2005 p.193), such that progression behaviours are the expectation. Similarly, since the 1990s, access to HE has been a policy goal in the European Union, and it has been EU policy since 2002 to support Lifelong Learning (Nemeth 2010). However, much of the focus has been aspirational rather than effectual, and Muller et al (2015) found in a recent study that, for many countries, the transition between vocational and academic still needs to be simplified. Muller et al (2015) suggest that the models adopted by Nordic countries demonstrate greater participation rates, such as in Finland, where lifelong learning is a key principle of education policy, and an act of parliament harmonised all entry level qualifications. Denmark undertook a major reform of its vocational and continuing training system in 2000, and although secondary education is split into the academic and vocational, all students have the opportunity to progress to HE through clear pathways. Hungary is perhaps the only other European country to have Lifelong Learning Networks as a means to enhancing progression from vocational qualifications to HE (Nemeth 2010).

#### *7.2.4 Organisations and actors*

LLNs were unusual in engaging with such a wide range of both participating and influencing organisations, as Figure 12 (p.207) demonstrates. Although initiated by the HEFCE Board, and Sir Howard Newby in particular, LLNs were part of the wider Joint Progression Strategy with the LSC and the DfES, and it was envisaged that the LSC would be an equal partner in funding and driving the LLN policy. However, in the event, the LSC did not contribute financially.

The regional dimension added a further layer of complexity to the policy episode. Universities and colleges were expected to play a key role in the LLNs, but it was intended that HEFCE's own regional consultants and LSC regional directors would be the driving force in developing proposals and business plans for LLNs, and such proposals would be influenced by the agendas of the RDAs and regional SSCs. The initial joint circular and briefing paper to heads of HEFCE funded institutions, and LSC funded FECs, reveals expectations that LLNs would engage at regional level with at least seven other organisations: Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), CETLs, New Technology Institutes and Knowledge Exchanges (which were in development), Aimhigher networks and steering groups, local employers and other regional agencies (HEFCE 12/2004 p.6).

The relationship between HEIs and FECs in LLNs was critical to success in developing a progression strategy and vocational pathways, but relationships were often complex. This was particularly highlighted in relation to the distribution of Additional Student Numbers which, whilst a key element of the funding, also introduced an element of competition between the FECs and HEIs (Parry 2006). It is noteworthy that in the original briefing (HEFCE 12/2004), it was a condition of grant that LLNs had a research intensive university as part of the network, although in practice this did not come to fruition for all networks.

The role of learners in LLNs was complex, as students were expected to engage with the LLNs as entities in their own right, as they were intended to have a sufficiently strong brand to be meaningful to learners, as well as engaging with individual institutions. However, this relationship also proved difficult, as will be explored later in this chapter.

This wide range of actors and organisations connected to LLNs afforded plenty of scope for challenging relationships and contested topics, which are explored in 7.3 below.

### 7.2.5 Activities

#### 7.2.5.1 A bottom-up approach

Following Newby's speech, a proposal for LLNs was launched by HEFCE, DfES and LSC to the sector in June 2004. As part of the Joint Progression Strategy, LLNs were expected to provide

*'the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education'* (HEFCE 12/2004).

Unusually for a HEFCE funding initiative, the proposal for LLNs set out in the letter and briefing did not constitute a consultation, and the sector was not invited to comment beyond a promise from HEFCE to answer any questions. In this policy episode, consultation took place on the ground, through HEFCE regional consultants, LSC regional directors and The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), who would

*'be discussing these proposals with HEIs, FECs and other interested parties... with a view to developing initial proposals for at least one LLN in each region'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.2).

Initially, the expectation from HEFCE was that through regional consultations, 'demonstrator' or pilot LLNs would be developed, building on existing progression arrangements and partnerships between institutions, and that different LLNs would take different approaches to their organisational structures and in supporting learners.

Promoted in the circular to institutions as a '*step change in vocational progression*' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.1), LLNs were expected to offer a range of curricula and pathways pertinent to their local labour market needs, in order to:

- *'Combine the strengths of a number of diverse institutions*
- *Provide support for learners on vocational pathways*
- *Bring greater clarity, coherence and certainty to progression opportunities*
- *Develop the curriculum as appropriate to facilitate progression*
- *Value vocational learning outcomes and provide opportunities for vocational learners to build on earlier learning*
- *Locate the progression strategy within a commitment to lifelong learning, ensuring that learners have access to a range of progression opportunities so that they can move between different kinds of vocational and academic programmes as their interest, needs and abilities develop'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.4).

It was expected that each network would have certain essential key characteristics, upon which funding would be dependent:

- *'LLNs must centre around Progression Agreements (PAs)*
- *Will involve FECs and HEIs with at least one research-intensive institution in partnership*
- *Will have consulted with SSCs and other stakeholders'* (HEFCE 12/2004).

Each network would facilitate activities in Curriculum Development, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to students and development of PAs. Provision for students to easily change programmes and move to other institutions was considered a key characteristic and, in the initial proposal, developing local credit accumulation transfer agreements was an important component.

Like the CETLs, this policy initiative followed a bottom-up approach, and whilst LLNs were expected to conform to the characteristics described above, the exact structure and terms for LLNs were not prescribed. The rationale for developing such a policy approach was that initiatives that were sector driven, rather than prescribed by HEFCE, would present less risk in terms of take up by the sector, and continued sustainability beyond the funding period, with deepening effects across the sector, was more likely.

Unlike the CETLs, there was no firm deadline for proposals, so as not to be '*constrained by artificial deadlines*' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.2) and no bidding process as such; the proposals and business plans developed in consultation with HEFCE regional consultants and LSC regional directors were considered on a case by case basis. In September 2004, HEFCE approved the first three LLNs: Sussex, Higher York and Greater Manchester Networks and, by 2007, thirty networks had been established, twenty-eight having a regional focus, including 120 HEIs

and over 300 FECs, representing almost national coverage. In addition, two LLNs, National Arts Learning Network and VETNET (to widen participation in veterinary education), had a national focus in two distinct disciplines.

#### *7.2.5.2 Funding and accountability*

The approach to funding is noteworthy for being a combination of time-limited strategic development funding for the set-up of the LLN, and recurrent funding in the form of ASNs awarded to each LLN. Development funding was flexible, and unlike the e-University and CETLs, the original proposal did not stipulate a figure for the initiative and neither were there set boundaries for funding bands based on size or activity, as had been the case for the CETLs: *'we do not wish at this stage to set prescribed limits to the funding aspirations of prospective LLNs'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.3). Funding came from HEFCE's strategic development fund and HEFCE expected to award funds in the first instance for a minimum of three years, which would include start-up capital and running costs. However, in the longer term, LLNs were expected to attract funds from other external sources in order to continue activities.

Most proposals began by seeking funding for a 3-6 month development phase leading to the production of a full business plan, usually with funding of £10-30k. A HEFCE advisory group was established to ensure that there were multiple readings of the business plans by staff across HEFCE, who would develop well-documented feedback to proposed LLNs. To agree funding, the business plans were submitted to HEFCE's SDF committee or, in the case of very large proposals, HEFCE Board, for approval. Although HEFCE initially planned that LLNs would be a small programme with demonstrator models, over time a large percentage of the SDF, £105m, was spent on the LLN programme.

The award of ASNs was central to LLNs, particularly as a financial lever to encourage the engagement of FECs and HEIs. Some ASNs were used for new curriculum developments, or CPD where there was demand from employers, and there was a significant focus on using ASNs for Foundation Degrees (FDs). Indeed, FDs were a main focus of much of the LLN activity.

In the early stages, LLNs were able to choose between two funding models. In Model 1, ASNs were allocated to institutions within LLN partnerships as part of mainstream grant. In Model 2, ASNs were held outside mainstream grant by the LLN's lead institution for all institutions within it. Initially, networks had expected to get significant amounts of ASNs, and so put these in their plans; and between 2006 and 2009, 14,700 ASNs (£60m) were

awarded to LLNs. However, in 2009, following the wider economic difficulties and squeeze on public funding, HEFCE significantly reduced the number of ASNs available which, in some cases, impacted on LLN's ability to deliver their plans. By 2009-10, Model 2 was being phased out, with all subsequent ASNs being funded through the mainstream grant, in order to embed the LLN activity before the end of the initiative.

Echoing the policy approach of the CETLs, HEFCE did not propose any formal accountability for the networks, although, unlike the CETLs, HEFCE did propose to introduce some quantitative metrics for evaluating the success of LLNs, from data on progression and increasing widening participation:

*'The partners will evaluate the success of networks in the context of more wide-ranging research into the patterns of progression to higher education from vocational learners'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.6).

The 2005 HEFCE LLN progress report also proposed that, for the purposes of establishing value for money, the cost per student would be calculated by formula, calculated using the costs of the LLN divided by the number of students engaged with it (HEFCE 2005 p.3).

Targets (both in terms of progression arrangements and student engagements) were set by each LLN internally, and they were expected to establish their own criteria for success. It was anticipated that peer evaluation by the partners in each LLN would be sufficient to ensure that the key characteristics were being upheld and targets were being met. Despite the original expectation that LLNs would not be required to formally account for their progress, in the event there were regular progress reports on LLNs published by HEFCE in 2005, 2008 and 2009 and, following the recommendation of the interim evaluation in 2008, a standardised reporting mechanism was introduced for LLNs to submit an annual report. These were formally analysed by HEFCE and, along with statistical reports on LLN learner attributes, used to inform the HEFCE progress reports up until 2010.

### **7.2.5.3 Organisational structures**

The diversity of the approaches taken by LLNs meant that there were many and varied organisational structures. HEFCE supported proposals that established different models of engagement, and there was no formal expectation of organisational structure, other than a requirement for a management group and strategic level group. Some LLNs had a large core staff team leading on projects funded in the LLNs, whilst others had a small staff team and funded activities led by FE and HE partners. Initially, HEFCE proposed that LLNs would build



upon existing partnerships between FECs and HEIs, developing these into pilot LLNs to test different approaches to network formation, and so it was envisaged that networks would be different: some might be limited to some curriculum areas, and some might be much broader.

All LLNs proposed initially to map existing provision in their partner FECs and HEIs in order to identify gaps, and then to develop curricula, particularly bridging programmes, to create coherent progression routes from vocational programmes onto HE programmes.

Developing coherent PAs, IAG and individual learning plans were critical activities for LLNs, as outlined in the original briefing paper (HEFCE 12/2004). Although all LLNs shared the same long term ambitions, the nature of the initiative meant that they could develop individually in line with their partners' curriculum interests and their unique regional contexts, thus allowing them to focus on different and locally relevant employment sectors. As Williams notes,

*'The iterative nature of the policy approach had led to quite distinct differences between LLNs. Networks varied greatly in terms of their scope, focus and ambitions'* (Williams 2008 p.3).

In 2006, almost two years after the start of the LLNs, A National LLN Forum was established, and hosted by Higher York, the first LLN. Its purpose was to share good practice and promote new ideas throughout the LLN network, and it was very active, with evidence of sharing of good practice and co-activity, as well as a website and newsletters, noted in both the interim and summative evaluations.

### 7.2.6 Outcomes

As a consequence of the annual HEFCE progress reports, the statistical reporting of learner attributes for 2006-07 and 2007-08, and the data collated for the summative evaluation, it is possible to build up a clear picture of LLN activity and achievements throughout much of the time period.

Analysis of the key findings suggests that almost 50% of funding was spent on activities providing curriculum opportunities such as bridging courses, PAs and IAG. Towards the end of the funding, LLNs were actively seeking funding, securing £2,029,380 from other sources, some of which were other HEFCE initiatives, to ensure their sustainability (HEFCE 2009, HEFCE 2009/29, SQW 2010). Perhaps surprisingly, given the expectation that LLNs would

work closely with regional employers, less than 10% of funding was spent on employer engagement.

The scale of the activity was vast, and increased throughout the period of the initiative, with nearly 33,000 staff involved nationally and more than 8,500 PAs in place between institutions. The scale of IAG was equally large, with 200,000 paper based resources, 15,000 learners receiving one-to-one support and 39,000 group support, and there were almost one million website hits (HEFCE 2009, HEFCE 2009/29, SQW 2010). The need for such large scale IAG is unsurprising, given that the progression agreements were often complex between courses and institutions. Conversely, the scale of the activity is not reflected in the scale of learners engaging through LLNs. The numbers of LLN engaged learners was small, with little over 17,000 nationally throughout the period and, in 2008-09, the numbers represented only 0.7% of the total undergraduate first year population, and only a tenth were in the research intensive universities. In addition, although a large number of learners were engaging with the LLN at a higher level than their prior qualifications, almost 30% of LLN learners already had an HE level qualification prior to their engagement, and this level was consistent throughout the period (HEFCE 2009, HEFCE2009/29, SQW 2010).

These findings are summarised in Table 14 below and discussed in more detail in Section 7.3 (p.219), where they are relevant to the themed discussions.

**Table 14 – SUMMARY OF LLN ACTIVITY FROM HEFCE MONITORING AND STUDENT ATTRIBUTE REPORTS**

Area	2006-07 key findings:	2007-08 key findings:	2008-09 key findings:
Expenditure		Curriculum development (19%) PAs (16.6%) IAG (14.1%) Employer engagement (9.1%) were activities with the greatest expenditure	
Funding from other sources beyond LLN HEFCE funding		LLNs received £1,038,001 from other sources (some of which was HEFCE other initiatives)	LLNs received £2,029,380 from other sources (some of which was HEFCE other initiatives)
Curriculum development		Key area where LLNs are working to clarify and create progression routes is through BTEC qualifications and through HE from FDs.	14-19 engagement Significant activity in apprenticeships
Curriculum development		Over 700 new or modified courses (3/4 of which with involvement of employers, and some SSC involvement)	1,150 new or modified curriculum developments with another 700 in progress

Area	2006-07 key findings:	2007-08 key findings:	2008-09 key findings:
Curriculum	Creative arts and design most frequently studied subject area	Combined subjects most commonly returned as most frequently studied area	Business and administration studies, creative arts & design, architecture, building & planning most frequently studied area
Progression agreements		1,697 PAs in place	8,528 PAs in place
Progression agreements		Complex array of PAs (one LLN has 52 PAs with 15,000 pathways)	
Staff development and partnerships		350 staff development events, 16,000 staff involved (targeting admissions staff)	2,400 staff development events, 32,900 staff involved
IAG		IAG activity: 1-1 20,075 Group support 36,654 Website 211,833	200,000 paper-based IAG resources 1-1 15,000 Group support 53,000 Website 900,000
Qualification prior to LLN activity	28% already held HE level qualifications on entry 23% had A level or equivalent qualifications on entry 94% undertake a higher level of study in LLN than previous level of study	59% first-time starters in HE from level 3 28% already held HE level qualifications on entry 31% had A level or equivalent qualifications on entry 88% undertake a higher level of study in LLN than previous level of study	46% first-time starters in HE from level 3 36% had A level or equivalent qualifications on entry
Learner attributes	63% female 39% aged 19 or younger 83% white 12% from POLAR quintile 1	61% female 40% aged 19 or younger 83% white 12% from POLAR quintile 1	
Learner attributes	3,170 registered as LLN students (only 70 registered at a FEC)	8,080 registered as LLN students (only 440 registered at a FEC)	5,880 LLN flagged learners (0.7% of total ug 1 <sup>st</sup> year population) 28% registered for first degree, 39% for FDs
FEC/HEI	Almost two-thirds of students returned in general colleges, specialist HEIs and FECs One in 5 in research orientated universities	Half of students returned in general colleges, specialist HEIs and FECs A tenth in research oriented universities	

*Note: student attributes assumes LLN flagged learners (at all entry qualification levels)*

Since there were regular monitoring reports, and the summative evaluation, HEFCE was able to respond quickly to LLN issues as they arose. Whilst the general policy direction did not change, there were minor clarifications and modifications to enable the initiative to meet its objectives, and thus the initiative was more dynamic than that of the e-University or the CETLs. For example, in the 2005 monitoring report, HEFCE recognised that the issue of PAs was causing some contestation amongst LLN partners, and so provided greater guidance on the mechanism for PAs. In addition, the relationship with Aimhigher was

proving contentious and so HEFCE sought to clarify that LLNs should build on, not duplicate, the work of Aimhigher (HEFCE 2005 p.7). By the 2008 progress report, sustainability of the LLNs beyond the funding period was becoming a concern for LLNs, and so HEFCE sought to clarify that

*'it is not possible to provide 'continuation funding' for LLNs. It is inappropriate in any case; initiatives need to become embedded in the core business of institutions if they are to survive long-term'* (HEFCE 2008 p.3).

HEFCE also used the 2008 report to steer LLNs towards employer engagement which, as noted above, only represented 10% of LLN funding activity, but HEFCE saw it as a viable stream of work to enable sustainability of the LLNs. They were clear that this was '*LLN territory*':

*'If, moreover, the LLN is sustained successfully, there should be opportunities to contribute more fully in key strategic areas. Employer engagement is probably the most important of these. Workplace learners are likely to engage with learning in a discontinuous way over a period of time'* (HEFCE 2008 p.3).

HEFCE commissioned the interim evaluation of LLNs in 2007, from the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University (CHERI). At this point, LLNs were at differing stages of development, with some nearing the end of their funding and a small number not yet in existence. The evaluation, which took the form of desk-based research focussing on LLN monitoring reports and interviews with eight LLNs, reported in 2008. The interim evaluation found overall that LLNs were making progress in meeting their objectives, but that it was too soon to ascertain the extent to which learners or employers were engaging with LLN provision, or to say whether the policy would be a success by the end of the funding. The report highlighted a number of concerns, some of which HEFCE acted upon before the end of the period, and others which continued to arise as themes for concern in the summative evaluation. One of the key issues addressed by HEFCE at this time was the need for greater monitoring and evaluation, which was strengthened as a result of the interim report recommendations, with the introduction of a reporting template.

The summative evaluation, commissioned by HEFCE from SQW, included desk-based research, in which information including websites and LLN monitoring reports (2007-08, 2008-09) were evaluated, visits were made to each LLN, and an e-survey of learners was conducted. The e-survey only attracted 269 responses and so SQW noted that the

conclusions in relation to learners could only be illustrative. Overall, the summative evaluation found that

*'The LLN programme has achieved well against its objectives. The programme did lead to the development of new curricula, often involving employers. Information, advice and guidance for learners on vocational programmes have improved and there are several thousand PAs in place. The programme has also made an important contribution to other policy areas such as employer engagement, and the development of new 14-19 qualifications. In addition, many consultees provided evidence of the ways in which networks had helpfully formalised collaborative working and achieved considerable cultural change within institutions'* (SQW 2010 p.xii).

HEFCE's response to the summative evaluation also concluded that

*'It shows that the programme has successfully widened opportunities for progression to higher education (HE) for learners on vocational programmes'* (HEFCE 2010).

The summative report reflected on the main areas of activity, curriculum development, IAG and PAs, and also observed some key issues more broadly in relation to LLNs, some of which reflect those drawn out in the interim evaluation. These form the basis for the key themes which are explored in 7.3 below.

### 7.2.7 Timeline

The following Table 15 represents the key moments in the lifetime of the LLN policy initiative, and other pertinent policy events. It is noteworthy that in this policy episode, there were a large number of related policies interacting with the LLN initiative to some extent.

**Table 15 – TIMELINE OF KEY LLN AND RELATED POLICY MOMENTS**

Date	LLNs	Other Policies
1980s-1990s		Development of vocational qualifications such as BTEC National Diplomas and access to HE diploma
1997		Dearing recommends HEIs work with FECs to develop curricula and access routes in an attempt to streamline progression through bridging courses
1998		Regional Development Agencies established
2000		New Labour government policy to increase and widen participation in HE to 50%
2001		Launch of Foundation Degrees
2002		Sector Skills Councils established

<b>Date</b>	<b>LLNs</b>	<b>Other Policies</b>
December 2003	HEFCE Board endorsed work on LLN proposals as part of the Joint Progression Strategy with LSC and DfES	
2004		OFFA established Tomlinson Review and the development of the 14 – 19 qualifications framework Re-launch of apprenticeships
March 2004	Howard Newby announces LLNs as part of Colin Bell Memorial Lecture	
June 2004	Joint letter from HEFCE and the Learning Skills Council 12/2004	
August 2004		Aimhigher launched (a revision of Partnerships for Progression)
September 2004	HEFCE considered LLN proposals from partnerships	Schwartz report on admissions
December 2004	HEFCE SDF agree proposals for Sussex, Higher York and Greater Manchester Networks	
2005	5 LLNs established (inc. those above)	
2006	16 further LLNs established	Leitch Review of Skills
January 2006		Change in government policy to engage employers in education
March 2006	LLN National Forum and practitioner groups established	
September 2006		First variable tuition fees
December 2006	HEFCE set out strategy for evaluating LLNs	
2007	7 further LLNs established	
June 2007	HEFCE commissioned interim evaluation	
October 2007	30 total LLNs been established	
April 2008	Publication of interim evaluation National Forum seminar to reflect on interim report LLN pairings expected to produce written report on peer evaluation	
August 2008	HEFCE introduced a standard LLN monitoring procedure	
October 2008	First LLN reported against standard monitoring template	
September 2009	HEFCE commissioned SQW to undertake summative evaluation	
November 2010	Summative evaluation published	
2011	Funding for LLNs ends	

### 7.3 A critical review of the evidence and findings

A number of themes can be observed in the evidence and findings, which echo the stated objectives for the LLNs, such that they would facilitate core activities in curriculum development, IAG and development of PAs, as well as a focus on FEC and HEI partnerships and evidence of social mobility. These are explored below.

#### 7.3.1 Process: Approach

As described in 7.2, HEFCE took a bottom-up approach to the LLN initiative, departing from the typical consultation and bidding approach, and favouring consultation on, and development of, proposals ‘on the ground’ without a formalised structure. The interim report acknowledged that HEFCE had taken an innovative approach, but expressed concern that, in the event, the lack of structure meant that whilst there was considerable LLN activity, they failed to make sufficient progress in some of the more difficult areas of activity, and concentrated on the ‘easy wins’:

*‘We acknowledge that the LLN initiative has been innovative in terms of policy development in that it was a move away from the normal ‘top-down’ HEFCE bidding process... However, we would suggest that many of the potential proposals were ‘talked-up’ in terms of plans and anticipated achievements and outputs. Moreover, once funded, activities may have been biased towards ‘easy wins’...Such ways of working may not, in fact, capitalise on the opportunity provided by pump-priming initiatives involving the disbursement of one-off funds to experiment and tackle the more difficult aspects of the endeavour for fear of falling short of targets’ (CHERI 2008 p.8).*

The summative report is equally critical of the bottom-up approach, suggesting that the unplanned and short-term nature of the funding meant that the initiative could only be short lived and without the potential for a longer term legacy:

*‘The LLN programme emerged as a type of ‘bottom-up’ initiative and has seen significant shifts in the wider policy context. This approach was appropriate initially, as a small number of LLNs were originally planned as demonstrator models. However, as the programme expanded, a significant proportion of HEFCE’s Strategic Development Fund (SDF) was spent supporting LLNs, and it may have been helpful at this stage to adopt a more focussed and planned approach to the wider roll-out of the programme’...‘A five-year timescale with a commensurate reduction in annual funding may have been more appropriate’ (SQW 2010 p.x/xi).*

The policy approach also came in for some criticism from other commentators. For some, the approach was flawed since it did not provide sufficient structure or direction for networks, which meant that consistent and meaningful evaluation was difficult. Sheila Leahy undertook a PhD study, *‘an investigation into partnership working to widen*

*participation in higher education in the south-west of England, with particular reference to Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)', and Leahy is particularly critical of this policy approach, acknowledging the response from one interviewee in the study, that*

*'LLNs were badly thought through, and poorly implemented and managed...despite [HEFCE] having a genuine desire for change, it failed to be sufficiently directive to the sector...LLNs never had strategic direction' (Leahy 2013 p.123).*

Leahy concluded that,

*'Without any rules imposed by the funder or by policy, the LLN outcomes were variable and questionable, in some instances, in terms of value for money' (Leahy 2013 p.133).*

Conversely, Little and Williams (2009) considered the bottom-up policy approach to have been a success in mitigating against poor sector take up, and point to both the number of institutions involved and the high levels of activity as evidence of LLN's success.

### *7.3.2 Process: Monitoring progress*

One of the biggest concerns to arise from the interim evaluation was that of monitoring LLN's achievements in relation to their targets, and this concern resulted in a recommendation that a standardised monitoring procedure be introduced. The report was critical of HEFCE for failing to have a formal mechanism in place, and of LLNs for the lack of consistency in reporting, with often poor use of measurable baseline data and weak financial reporting. The evaluators noted that annual reports were often descriptive in nature, rather than evaluative, and needed to take a more critical approach (CHERI 2008 p.17). Like Leahy (2013), the report concluded that without more structured monitoring and evaluation, it would be difficult to demonstrate value for money. HEFCE took action as a result of this recommendation, and a standardised monitoring template was introduced, with LLNs being required to report annually, covering a range of topics:

- *Finance and expenditure*
- *PAs*
- *Curriculum development and employer engagement*
- *Staff development*
- *IAG*
- *Defining and measuring the learner constituency*
- *FE and HE progression links*
- *Qualitative commentary*

(taken from HEFCE's 2008 analysis of monitoring reports, HEFCE 2008)



Despite the new monitoring process and regular analytical reports from HEFCE in 2005, 2008 and 2009, effective monitoring and demonstration of value for money was still an issue for the summative evaluation (SQW 2010), and indeed the first recommendation of the report suggests that

*'HEFCE should ensure that any future programmes of this scale include up-front time for the design of consistent and appropriate monitoring mechanism which will aid subsequent evaluation'* (SQW 2010 p.59).

SQW concluded that, by the end of the funding, monitoring quality was still variable, with LLNs interpreting reporting categories differently, and there were frequent gaps, especially in relation to financial data. The report concluded that HEFCE should have developed monitoring processes at the launch of the initiative, to better ascertain value for money and avoid duplication of activities between LLNs. They suggested that it would have been beneficial if the programme, rather than rely on peer observation, had engaged an independent evaluation team early on:

*'Monitoring systems were not put in place to record spend on a consistent basis across different types of activity, and also because of different approaches adopted by LLNs to delivering and recording their activities. If clearer evaluation and monitoring systems had been established by HEFCE from the outset of the programme, they would have helped to ensure that LLNs were not duplicating activity, and would also have been able to inform decisions on future levels of funding for those LLNs with later start dates'* (SQW 2010 p.29-30).

*'Expenditure is not planned and controlled and that activity and performance is so variable that it cannot be managed or evaluated within established frameworks'* (SQW 2010 p.3).

Many LLNs themselves reported finding the monitoring difficult, in part due to a lack of systematised methods for collecting data, particularly in relation to learners. Many said they found it difficult to monitor learners, both ASNs and other learners, because data gathering was limited in institutions and through UCAS, and there was no formal requirement for LLNs to identify non ASN learners. The differing nature of LLNs, and the fact that institutions could belong to more than one LLN, meant that it wasn't always possible to attribute individual students to an LLN, and so there was a danger of duplication. HEFCE recognised the difficulties in tracking students in the 2009 monitoring report:

*'Identification of LLN students is difficult: whether or not a student is active on a course provided by a LLN is not currently captured directly by either HESA or ILR student records'* (HEFCE 2009/29 p.6).

*'The distribution of student numbers by each specific LLN is unknown: although a particular institution may return a number of LLN students, we are unable to determine the LLN in which those individual students are operating. It therefore follows that institutions, and numbers of students, appear under more than one LLN in several instances'* (HEFCE 2009/29 p.10).

From 2009-10, identification of LLN learners was built into HESA data collections.

The summative evaluation concluded overall that the lack of structured and appropriate monitoring mechanisms hampered the ability to reach any conclusions in relation to establishing value for money for an initiative that had absorbed a significant proportion of the SDF:

*'It is difficult, therefore, to draw firm conclusions about the proportion of spend on particular activities and overall value for money of the initiative'* (SQW 2010 p.xi).

### 7.3.3 Process: Sustainability

HEFCE originally proposed that funding for the LLNs would be for a period of three years, with the provision of start-up funds, and some recurrent funding through ASNs, but that in the longer term, sustainability would be achieved through funding from other sources. There was a clear expectation that the initial funding would be sufficient to allow LLNs to develop and embed their activities, but that partners would be sufficiently engaged such that long term sustainability was desirable and achievable:

*'We would envisage that the most ambitious LLNs might be supported by significant resources to cover start-up costs and then receive on-going recurrent funding, drawn from a range of sources'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.3).

In the longer term, HEFCE stated that where networks were *'meeting the aims and objectives of the Joint Progression Strategy'*, there might be further funding, but they would *'expect HEFCE funding to be supplemented by investment from other partners'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.6). Indeed, HEFCE saw the partnership working with other agencies as advantageous in identifying potential sources of funding beyond the development period:

*'We expect LLNs to attract substantial funds from other funders. Networks will therefore have to decide how best to integrate funders' priorities into their management arrangements'* (HEFCE 12/2004 p.7).

From very early on in the initiative, established LLNs were already looking at long term financial sustainability, and were engaging in activities seeking to find alternative sources of funding, such as membership subscriptions, pump-priming from lead institutions and further recurrent HEFCE funding in the form of additional ASNs. The interim report was

optimistic that many LLNs would survive beyond the HEFCE funding period, although it acknowledged that they may be fewer in number and would likely have lower levels of funding. However, the report also raised concerns, shared by some LLNs and partner institutions, that there was a large number of emerging policies and initiatives concerning vocational learning and the skills agendas, with little integration between them. As such, many of these initiatives overlapped the work of LLNs, and were competing for both finite funding streams and the attention of sector institutions and other stakeholders.

*'Some concerns have been expressed (by LLN staff, partner institutions and other stakeholders) about emerging government policies and the lack of integration between initiatives established in response to policy shifts...[and this] has caused some tensions in further/higher education partnership working' (CHERI 2008 p.28).*

The nature of the funding also impacted on how LLNs approached their activities. The interim report observed that LLN's approaches were frequently determined by both the need to report to HEFCE that objectives had been achieved within three years, and the uncertainty of future funding. It observed that LLNs were having to focus on 'quick wins' and so, at that stage, much of the progress in activities had been in favour of young college-based learners, rather than work-based adult learners, who were more difficult to reach and would require greater investment of time to achieve results. Indeed, it was noted in 7.2 that less than 10% of funding was spent on employer, work based, engagement. The report was critical of the short term nature of the funding, rationalising that the investment of time to change cultures was critical to embedding much of the work of the LLNs, which was not feasible in such a short timescale:

*'It is evident from our interviews that attempts are being made to embed LLN activities into institutional practices and procedures, but a clear message is that this takes time – embeddedness is as much about changing hearts and minds as it is about practice and procedures' (CHERI 2008 p.27).*

The summative evaluation was equally critical of the short term nature of the funding, suggesting that a different approach might have led to longer term sustainability:

*'Smaller sums of money over a longer period of time would have enabled the development of more sustainable activities... Overall, funding was generous and issued over a short period. A five-year timescale with a commensurate reduction in annual funding may have been more appropriate, as it would have enabled a longer planning period and helped to set up systems to ensure sustainability of activity' (SQW 2010 p.xiii).*

*'Our consultations revealed a widespread disappointment and frustration that central funding for LLNs had ended too soon in the process' (SQW 2010 p.53).*

SQW identified that many LLNs had a strategy for continuing in some form or other, often with a small team to continue the work of the LLN and, by the end of the initiative, more than £2 million in alternative funding had been secured. However, it concluded that it was not realistic to expect that all LLN work would be fully embedded, and noted that without continued financial support, there would be an inevitable contraction of activities.

Woodfield et al (2013), in their research into the effectiveness and sustainability of LLN progression agreements, also concluded that it would be difficult for LLNs to maintain the level of activity beyond the funding period:

*'Now that the LLN funding stream is at an end there is a key question about whether the PA work will be sustainable in the new political and financial climate.... It remains to be seen how these often fragile associations will continue beyond the HEFCE funding period'* (Woodfield et al 2013, p.16).

SQW noted the concerns of some LLNs that continuation of activities was reliant on the interests and support of individual staff, and that the essential institutional commitment was not always evident. However, many of those interviewed hoped that by embedding courses, PAs and culture into *institutional* processes, the legacy of LLN work could continue:

*'For many consultees, there was a sense that the overall capacity of institutions (both HE and FE) had been raised by the LLN programme and it was hoped that this would be sustained whether particular networks continued to operate or not'* (SQW 2010 p.50).

Little and Williams (2009), writing in the year following the publication of the interim report, considered the ambiguity of the LLN policy, and the wider policy arena, as context for questioning whether LLNs could meet the policy objectives in the longer term. They questioned whether take up in the sector was sufficiently strong to enable partnerships with different values and cultures to embed the work of the LLNs without the infrastructure and funding to continue, and whether LLNs would be significantly valued for some institutions with changing government priorities affecting institutional objectives. They also concluded that, given the policy and funding approach, sustainability could only be achieved through embedding LLN activities and practices within institutional processes:

*'the main issues for the 'legacy' of the initiative are the extent to which processes developed and put in place within LLNs to support the policy objective have become embedded in institutional practices in a sustainable way...These are issues that the interim evaluation was not able to answer in a sustainable way'* (Little and Williams 2009, p.13).

The 2009 Foundation Forward report into apprenticeships and the role of LLNs also acknowledged that collaboration and embeddedness into institutional strategies and processes would be key to sustainability:

*'Collaboration is important and will become increasingly important as LLNs seek ways to embed their many successful strategies into institutions and processes, which unlike some LLNs, are likely to keep functioning over the next few years' (fDf 2009 p.37).*

Ward et al (2012) shared this view and summed up the difficulties faced by LLNs in future sustainability:

*'The embedding of the work of LLNs within institutions and regions will produce a significant legacy. However it is a legacy which will need nurturing if it is to have long-term impact. There are financial implications, there needs to be a shared commitment from partner institutions towards this cultural and operational approach. There is evidence of this, but a reluctance or inability to fund the work from existing budgets. The LLNs have stimulated innovation and forged change, it would be extremely disappointing if the vision of Sir Howard Newby were lost' (Ward et al 2012 p.3).*

#### **7.3.4 Process: Impact of other policies**

One of the main issues of concern, highlighted in both the interim and summative evaluations, was that of shifting government priorities and policies in relation to the skills agenda, and its impact on the objectives and activities of LLNs and their partner organisations. During the initial period of the LLNs, as they were becoming established, the 14-19 qualifications framework was introduced (2004), with qualifications from four different routes: apprenticeships, general qualifications such as 'A' levels, diplomas, and foundation degrees. In addition, the Leitch Review of Skills was published in 2006, which proposed a significant change, whereby vocational training would be demand led and, as such, employers would need to be involved in the training provision, as well as changes to apprenticeships and the introduction of regional higher level skills pathfinder pilots (which sat outside the LLNs). As such, these policy shifts impacted on the work of the LLNs in illuminating and improving progression opportunities for vocational learners. The slow response by government to the Leitch Review, and the complex relationships between the organisations involved in delivering the government's skills agenda, which included LLNs, as demonstrated in Figure 12 (p.207), led Little and Williams (2009) to observe that

*'A number of LLNs perceived a lack of clarity about broader government policy and strategy and the whole fit with LLN policy....In summary we can see that, although there may well have been a clear policy underpinning the LLN initiative, as LLNs were granted funds and set about putting their proposals into action, other impacting policies were also being developed. While it was not the intention for these other policies to necessarily weaken the rationale for LLNs, they were nevertheless perceived as shifting and/or broadening (and in some instances duplicating) the work of LLNs' (Little and Williams 2009 p.6/7).*

This confusion and lack of clarity led the interim evaluation to recommend that

*'HEFCE should continue to discuss with other agencies and government departments the desirability of creating conditions whereby policies can be developed in a coherent and interlocking fashion, against which particular activities can be planned and sustained in a manner to meet the agreed goal '(CHERI 2008 p.34).*

The summative evaluation also observed that the skills agenda had been continually shifting throughout the duration of the LLNs, which had then to adapt to a changing environment. This was particularly evident in relation to a greater focus on employer engagement, with the development of higher apprenticeships. The summative evaluation credits the existence of the National Forum as being instrumental in enabling LLNs to adapt quickly to the shifting policy environment and share good practice. However, the report also cautions that by adapting to shifts in policy, the reach of LLNs had become so diverse that the legacy of their impact had become diluted, fragmented and less visible.

*'A broad theme emerging from many of our consultations has been the multi-faceted contributions of LLNs both to widening participation and a range of other policy areas. Because their reach is so wide, there is a danger that the true impact of LLN activities may not be fully apparent to some national policy makers at present... whilst their adaptability to changing circumstances may be seen as a key strength of many networks, it has also perhaps contributed to a sense of disconnection between their actual achievements and the understanding of policymakers' (SQW 2010 p.48).*

### **7.3.5 Programme: Partnerships and alliances**

The LLNs were defined by their partnerships, with alliances formed from regional FECs and HEIs and engagement with regional employers, and regional and national organisations. As such, their partnership arrangements were many and complex, as demonstrated below from extracts of the text of the initial circular:

*'Networks will typically link FECs and HEIs across a city, area or region that potential learners identify with. These need not conform to existing administrative boundaries as long as they have an 'identity'...The network will establish close working relationships with other stakeholders including Aimhigher networks...LLNs will have the involvement and commitment of the Learning Skills Council... with coordinated inputs from local employers, Sector Skills Council, and other regional agencies' (HEFCE 12/2004).*

The interim report particularly highlighted the difficulties raised by LLNs in seeking to establish partnerships between such a diversity of organisations in the time period, and the likelihood of being able to maintain these partnerships once the funding ceased:

*'Interviews with LLNs have highlighted that the processes of building up genuinely inclusive relationships with institutions and stakeholders are complex and time consuming – especially in large partnerships' (CHERI 2008 p23).*

One of the most important partnership relationships in LLN activity was that between the FECs and HEIs, and this was recognised as a success, on the whole. The LLNs were able to bring together FECs and HEIs to develop shared understanding of courses and the needs of vocational learners, and by the time of the summative evaluation, more than 39,000 institutional staff had engaged with LLN staff development activities across the sectors. HEFCE's 2008 analysis of the LLN monitoring reports noted that the main outputs from the FE-HE activity were improved communication between the two sectors on progression, credit and curriculum alignment. The interim evaluation particularly noted that there was evidence that much effort had been put into '*building relationships and gaining trust and buy-in to the LLN mission*' (CHERI 2008 p.24) and, equally, the summative evaluation highlights the scale of collaboration between the two sectors:

*'A consistent theme in our consultations has been the positive impact of LLNs on the scale and level of collaborative working between HEIs and FECs across England'* (SQW 2010 p.45).

May et al (2012) and Woodfield et al (2013), in their work on the value of the progression agreements, noted that one of the constructive outcomes of LLNs was improved partnership working, and that this was most recognisable in the impact of PAs, and improved shared understandings of curricula and vocational students' needs. They concur with an extensive research report '*A Synopsis of LLN Research 2006-2010*' by Wise and Shaw (2011), who concluded that

*'Unanticipated benefits included working with and establishing good working relationships with peers across the curriculum areas and support staff'* (Wise and Shaw 2011 p.38).

Leahy (2013) also concluded that it was the partnerships themselves that were key to the success of the LLNs, rather than their shared objectives:

*'In general terms, the success of the partnership appears to be based on three ingredients: individuals who get on with each other, who have sufficient seniority in their organizations to be influential in obtaining change, and the partnership offering tangible benefits to every partner. It would seem that these ingredients are more important than the goal of the partnerships itself'*. (Leahy 2013 p.126).

Likewise, Wise (2010), in a review of LLNs with a focus on hospitality, leisure and sports-related activities, argues that the success of the partnerships had been key to the success of LLNs:

*'Partnership working has been productive over the lifetime of the LLNs and has been instrumental to the success of initiatives to improve and extend opportunities available to vocational learners'* (Wise 2010 p.21).

In their 2008 monitoring report, HEFCE had acknowledged Parry's (2006) conclusion that the introduction of variable fees might intensify an element of competition between FECs and HEIs, that might perversely restrict the opportunities for vocational learners to progress to higher education. However, the interim evaluation suggested that institutional commitment to a shared allegiance had been greatly enhanced by building relationships at a strategic level in institutions, and by the 'hard cash' of ASNs, such that LLNs were able to counteract this potential difficulty:

*'It is clear that partnerships have become stronger and more mature because levels of understanding have increased; hence trust has started to replace (actual and perceived) competition' (CHERI 2008 p.25).*

This view was echoed in the summative evaluation, which noted that:

*'LLNs have provided a more independent or impartial perspective that has been seen to have the interests of the sub-region (or discipline) at heart. HE and FE partners in a number of LLNs pointed to how institutions that had traditionally been in competition with one another were now collaborating for the first time' (SQW 2011 p.45).*

However, despite these positive assertions, it was observed that engagement by partners varied considerably across LLNs, and was better where there had been pre-existing relationships between institutions. Buy-in from post-92 institutions was stronger, but some partners, particularly research-intensive HEIs, or institutions where the LLN curricula focus did not align with individual institutions, were not so pro-active in the networks. SQW observed that

*'partnership working was more difficult in those LLNs where institutions competed for students, where there was no history of working together, where institutions had joined the LLN in order to access project funding rather than from an overarching commitment to furthering its objectives and where ASNs were not available' (SQW 2010 p F-1).*

Whilst the value of partnerships was recognised during the development period, some expressed doubt that they would be strong enough to continue once HEFCE project funding ran out, as Woodfield et al (2013) observed:

*'the end of the HEFCE funding streams supporting progression, and recent HE policy developments, places the long-term sustainability of inter-institutional partnerships and networks at risk' (Woodfield et al 2013 p.6).*

Much of the debate around the continuation of partnerships beyond the end of the funding period focussed on the robustness of those partnerships to continue in their existing form, but also the extent to which other policies, in particular the complex skills agenda and further increases in fees (Parry 2006), would impact on shared views of partnership against



increased competition between FECs and HEIs beyond 2010. Indeed, this concern was raised in the 2009 report for the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee, *'Re-skilling for recovery: after Leitch, implementing skills and training policies'*, which stated that

*'We are also concerned by the evidence we received about the development of competition, rather than collaboration, which may well stem from a lack of clarity over the roles of HE and FE and their place in the agenda'.*

May et al (2012) also observed that whilst HEIs were willing to hold partnership agreements when ASNs, and therefore hard cash, were on offer, the withdrawal of ASNs could result in HEIs being unwilling to sacrifice their 'real' students for vocational learners.

Engagement with employers was a key objective of the LLNs, but the interim evaluation described such engagement as *'patchy'* (CHERI 2008 p.5), and noted that many LLNs had not, at that stage, made employer engagement a priority. The most activity in employer engagement was in relation to curriculum development, particularly in employment areas such as health care, where there was a clear public service demand, and in LLNs where an employer champion had been recruited to work with local businesses. The summative evaluation also observed that employer engagement was better in some LLNs than in others, and engagement was often more successful when alliances had been formed before the establishment of the LLN, and there had been sufficient time to nurture partnerships. In HEFCE's 2009 analysis of the LLN monitoring reports, they too observed that more established relationships produced more collaborative working. However, despite the patchy nature of employer engagement, SQW noted that 78.6% of curriculum developments included *'some form of employer engagement in the design or delivery'* (SQW 2010 p.34). It concluded that

*'LLNs have experienced varying degrees of success in engaging and involving employers in their work. Several consultees from a range of LLNs cited how they were able to engage training providers and employer groups with relative ease, while other networks had found it more difficult. In some sectors where employers were hard to engage, networks had had considerable success in working with SSCs instead'* (SQW 2010 p.46).

During the time of the LLNs, employer engagement had become an increasingly important strand of policy work by government as part of the skills agenda but, conversely the economic downturn in 2008 had led to employers being more cautious in committing to new ventures, as noted in HEFCE's 2009 analysis of the monitoring reports.

It is noteworthy that with the exception of SSCs, little mention was made in either the interim or the summative evaluations of engagement with other stakeholders, such as the LSC or Aimhigher, other than to note that some LLNs had not made progress in areas where they felt that there was the potential for duplicating other initiatives in other organisations (CHERI 2008 p.23). Equally, little mention is made of the National Forum, despite the summative evaluation observing that it had been instrumental in assisting with high levels of cross LLN working, and in particular in encouraging partnerships and commissioning joint research (p.45). Indeed, the report goes so far as to recommend to HEFCE that such a forum could be considered as best practice for other policy initiatives:

*'HEFCE should ensure that any future programmes of this scale have some funding for sharing best practices, perhaps through the establishment of a forum on the model for the National Forum' (SQW 2010 p.59).*

### 7.3.6 Programme: Curriculum development

In the initial HEFCE circular, the development of curricula was expected to be one of the key activities for the LLNs:

*'A great deal will be accomplished within the existing curriculum... However, they may also identify gaps in provision and will, where appropriate, develop new programmes to facilitate progression. These might be 'bridging courses' to enable learners to acquire the skills to progress along a chosen pathway, or more substantial programmes that constitute progression opportunities in their own right' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.8).*

The interim report highlighted that LLNs had made progress in developing curricula, particularly in mapping existing provision and encouraging institutions to put in place new and modified programmes, such as FDs and courses targeted at younger college based learners. The development of new programmes tended to be those to facilitate progression, such as bridging courses, and the most common curriculum areas identified were in *'health and social care, creative and cultural industries, finance, business, enterprise and management, engineering and technology'* (CHERI 2008). CHERI concludes that this,

*'in the fullness of time, could make a significant difference to the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners' (CHERI 2008 p.4).*

The summative evaluation found that 1,200 new and modified courses had been established as a result of LLNs by 2008-09 and, by the end of the funding, HEFCE concluded that there had been around 2,000 curriculum developments or modifications (HEFCE 2009/29). New programmes included HE-level provision (of which FDs were the most common at 44%), bridging courses and work-based learning opportunities. Of the modified

courses, BTECs were the most common (36%). There was considerable variability between LLNs, with some seeing new developments as key to filling gaps in provision, whilst others preferred modification of existing courses to enable progression. The high level of FD development by LLNs is significant, since the qualification was often perceived by LLNs themselves as an agent of change in facilitating progression. In Leahy's research of LLNs in the South West, one interviewee concluded that

*'Foundation Degrees have been a greater spur for curriculum change than I believed they would be...I have seen change I never thought I would see... away from traditional forms of teaching to embracing new...ways of doing things (Respondent B)' (Leahy 2013 p.110).*

77.5% of new courses and 41% of modified courses involved some employer engagement, and there were many examples of engagement at the design stage, but fewer in relation to delivery or assessment. Some LLNs had also developed significant amounts of e-learning at the specific request of employers. This is perhaps surprising, given the concerns raised in both evaluations that employer engagement was patchy across the networks. It is noteworthy that the involvement of the SSCs was much lower, with only 36% of new programmes having some involvement (SQW 2010 p.20).

Although '16,155 FTE ASNs were provided to LLN member institutions' overall (SQW 2010 p.13), in 2009 HEFCE reduced the number available, and consequently some anticipated new programmes were not developed as planned. The Wise (2010) review of LLN activity in hospitality and leisure-related subjects noted that some programmes set up specifically for ASNs were not recruited to as a result of this change in HEFCE policy.

### **7.3.7 Programme: Progression agreements**

In the original circular, there was a strong emphasis from HEFCE on the development of PAs to ease the transition from vocational qualifications to higher education: '*at the heart of every network will be arrangements to facilitate progression*' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.5). As such, the development of PAs between institutions was a major stream of work for LLNs, accounting for 16.6% of expenditure and resulting in more than 8,500 agreements.

By the time of the interim evaluation there were 1,697 PAs in place, but they had proved to be a most contentious area of work for the LLNs, since there had been initial confusion about how they might be defined, and LLNs were slow to develop agreements in favour of less disputatious areas of work. The form of agreements varied, from simple bi-lateral

agreements between sending and receiving courses, to more complex 'in principle' agreements between institutions, with one LLN having 52 PAs with 15,000 different pathways. One of the main difficulties with PAs was reviewing and establishing changes to admissions policies and procedures within institutions and, as Betts and Burrell (2011) also observed in their research and account of the progression story, the bureaucracy involved in the development of PAs was a challenge to LLNs, partners, and particularly employers:

*'our interviews have shown that the progression agreement aspect of LLNs' core business has probably been the most divisive amongst partner institutions and is also the most diverse between LLNs. Divisiveness amongst partners seems to stem from fears that initiatives in the area of the progression agreements could undermine institutional/departmental autonomy in terms of admissions policies and practices'* (CHERI 2008 p.20-21).

Although the negotiation of agreements was a useful way to develop relationships with institutions, as reported by both Betts and Burrell (2011) and SQW in the summative evaluation (2010), in practice they were difficult to implement between the two sectors, with a lack of common understanding or practice between LLNs and staff in institutions. Consequently, the interim evaluation questioned

*'how far LLNs are meeting the original purpose of developing progression routes into as well as through higher education for a range of vocational constituencies'* (CHERI p.19).

Despite the misgivings in the interim evaluation, by 2010 the summative report found that 19,500 learners were expected to benefit from PA routes, and it was expected that a further 55,000 would benefit over time. However, there was still concern over the quality of some agreements, and that many were bi-lateral and therefore limited students' options, rather than multi-lateral and allowing learners greater choice. SQW perceived that, for many agreements, the bureaucracy was given a higher priority than students' needs and, in most cases, PAs were either simply a guarantee of an interview, or an agreement on the number of places on courses. The summative evaluation also noted that the extent to which agreements had been embedded within institutions was variable:

*'Although it was generally agreed that PAs had opened up opportunities for learners, there was considerable concern amongst many consultees that the quality and scope of some PAs was not as good as it could or should have been'* (SQW 2010 p.42).

For the summative evaluation, the lack of consistency in both the development and embedding of agreements, and variable quality, had led to little progress in developing network-wide progression and mobility, which HEFCE had envisaged as a key objective for the LLNs. As such, this also impacted on LLNs' ability to develop Credit Accumulation

Transfer Agreements (CATs), which had equally been a key objective. SQW concluded that *'on the whole, perception of PAs has been mixed'* SQW 2010 (p.43).

One area of contestation amongst other commentators was that of the *value* of PAs. Both Watson (2005) and Layer (2005) argued that agreements should have ensured parity of progression with 'A' levels, but this was not possible without national agreement on a framework for progression. As Layer points out, this was one of the biggest challenges for LLNs:

*'Without the progression framework being in place they will not succeed in being regarded as having parity of esteem amongst learners'* (Layer 2005 p.201).

Woodfield et al (2013) reflected that the different cultures and contexts of partnerships between institutions meant that agreements were inherently open to variability, both in their quality and implementation. For May et al (2012), most LLNs' own evaluations did not quantify the *impact* of PAs on the number of students who might have benefitted once they gained admission to HE, and hence, without evidence, the issue of parity would always be contested:

*'The reported number of participants and agreements signed – facilitated by the LLNs – clearly indicates the potential for increased progression to HE of students studying for vocational qualifications and hence a degree of social mobility. However, there is a dearth of evidence of the additional impact of PAs to progression patterns and the performance of the participants whilst at university'* (May et al 2012 p.9).

### **7.3.8 Programme: Information, Advice and Guidance**

The provision of IAG was not an explicit objective of the LLNs, although it was implied throughout the initial circular, through its expectations that LLNs would make progression opportunities clear to students. Most LLNs had evaluated existing IAG provision, identified gaps and filled them through a range of mechanisms, including marketing materials and websites, as well as individual and group IAG consultations for both potential learners and staff in institutions, representing 14% of LLN expenditure. Such was the scale of activity that, by the summative evaluation, more than 65,000 individuals had received one-to-one or group support, 200,000 paper based resources had been produced and there were nearly 1,000,000 website hits. There was significant LLN activity in providing guidance and training to staff in institutions regarding vocational qualifications and engagement, with 2,400 development events and engagement with external organisations, such as Aimhigher, in the development of paper and web based materials (SQW 2010).

The interim evaluation found that *'These developments are innovative and are clearly filling a gap where little or no IAG existed previously for young people taking vocational level 3 courses and adults seeking IAG about higher education study'* (CHERI p.20). However, there was some concern that LLNs had particularly focussed on the provision of IAG because it could be seen as a 'quick win'. The summative evaluation echoed the CHERI report in acknowledging the value of IAG, noting the high level of engagement between LLNs and institutions in the provision of IAG, and concluding that this was a very positive development in achieving HEFCE objectives:

*'For some LLNs, work with FE tutors on IAG was quickly established as being one of the most important activities for breaking down barriers to progression'* (SQW 2010 p.37).

Wise's (2010) review of LLN activity in hospitality, leisure, sport and related subjects also concluded that the engagement of the LLNs in providing IAG to staff in institutions had been critical in building the understandings and relationships between institutions: *'this led to on-going activities between FE and HE and a greater understanding of each other's requirements'* (Wise 2010 p.6).

However, despite such high levels of engagement with IAG, the interim evaluation expressed some concern that each LLN was developing its own strand of IAG activity, and therefore there was a lack of national coherence in a joined up service to learners. This concern was echoed in Wise and Shaw's *'Synopsis of LLN Research 2006-2010'* report to the National Forum, in which they recommended *'a single comprehensive and easy access source of information'* (Wise & Shaw 2011 p.11). The interim evaluation also observed the potential for duplication of effort with other organisations providing information to learners, such as Aimhigher, and HEFCE's own analysis of the 2008 LLN monitoring reports warns LLNs to ensure that they were *'careful not to re-invent structures that already exist'* (HEFCE 2008 p.10). There seems to be no evidence to suggest that the development of the National Forum aided a more collective approach to IAG, although it was praised for its dissemination of good practice (SQW 2010).

Concerns were also raised in the interim evaluation concerning the extent to which IAG was accessed by learners themselves or employers, rather than staff in institutions where there was much evidence of engagement:

*'There is some evidence of staff in partner institutions and staff in IAG-specific agencies making good use of the information and resultant maps that have been produced, but much less about (potential) learner (and parental) and employer use'* (CHERI 2008 p.20).

SQW, in the summative evaluation, also questioned the extent to which IAG provision had been accessed by learners, with its learner survey suggesting that learners tended to look to FECs and HEIs as key sources of IAG, whilst LLNs were key sources of information for staff in partner institutions. SQW also reflected that whilst LLNs had provided IAG support to both potential learners and staff in institutions, the tendency had been to provide *information*, rather than tailored *guidance*.

The issue of sustainability in relation to IAG had also been a concern, with CHERI (2008) noting from interviews that staff in LLNs and institutions were concerned that the provision of IAG would be difficult to sustain once the development funding was concluded, especially given the high cost of maintaining web-based information.

### *7.3.9 Programme: Learners and social mobility*

The interim evaluation concluded that they were not, at that stage, able to draw any conclusions in relation to the impact of the LLNs on learners, partly because of the difficulties that had arisen in collecting and monitoring learner data. However, by the summative evaluation, there was sufficient data available to draw some conclusions, although it is noteworthy that the response rate to SQWs' learner survey was so small that they were unable to draw any conclusions on the views of learners themselves.

The data available reveals that the profile of LLN learners changed little between 2006-7 and 2007-8, with 63-64% being female, 83% being white, 39-40% being 19 or younger and only 12% from POLAR quintile 1. This brings into question the extent to which LLNs were able to influence *widening* participation as well as increasing it, and this will be discussed in due course. The data for how this might have changed by 2008-09 is not available, and it is noteworthy that the summative evaluation did not address the profile of learners, choosing instead to focus on the type of qualifications on entry as the key learner characteristic to demonstrate the value of LLNs. SQW specifically requested this data from HEFCE, and it reveals that there was a significantly high proportion of LLN flagged learners who were entering with 'A' level qualifications, or already held HE level qualifications, and thus about a third of LLN students were outside the target group:

*'A diminishing but still large proportion of the LLN-flagged ASNs entered HE with academic qualifications, representing 48 per cent of flagged ASNs in 2006-07 and 36 per cent in 2008-09' (SQW 2010 p.24).*

However, the data also revealed that the number of LLN learners entering HE with vocational qualifications rose from 38% in 2006-07 to 46% in 2008-08. The analysis led SQW to conclude that

*'the LLN programme made a small but improving contribution to the increasing numbers of learners on vocational programmes entering HE in the context of a growing student population' (SQW 2010 p.25).*

Likewise, May et al (2012) observed that only a few cohorts of vocational learners would ultimately have benefited from the LLNs, and they question the extent to which the focus on 'quick wins', identified in the interim evaluation, played out by the end of the initiative. As such, it is questionable the extent to which LLNs were able to meet their overriding objective to *widen* participation and increase social mobility:

*'Evidence from individual LLNs suggests that they embedded social mobility in their overarching aims and that they associate this with the progression of vocational learners. However, when LLN objectives are considered over the three core activities of LLNs, it seems that the aspiration for social mobility becomes watered down in favour of more technical and realisable objectives, resulting in limited opportunities for evaluating impact of progression agreements on social mobility' (May et al 2012 p.12).*

This lack of evidence for widespread benefit to learners led to many commentators questioning the extent to which LLNs had, in reality, contributed to social mobility. For some, the continued 'eliteness' of the research intensive institutions, and their limited engagement with LLNs (only 10% of LLN learners were in research intensive institutions), was a critical barrier to genuine social mobility. May et al (2012) and Woodfield et al (2013) questioned whether the lack of progression opportunities into professional subjects such as law, sciences and medicine meant that the actual opportunities for vocational students to access the research intensive institutions and professions were limited:

*'Although the LLNs have contributed to progression in vocational subjects in HE, they do not appear to have stimulated learners' wider intellectual horizons. This indicates a cap on the LLN's social mobility aspirations at the outset, with an emphasis on social reproduction by taking a conservative stance on the vocational learners' background, talents, study needs and future careers' (Woodfield et al 2013 p.18).*

The concentration of effort on younger, rather than work-based, learners was also picked up on in the Open University's response to the Select Committee on Education and Skills' 'Leitch report review' in April 2008, which said,

*'Although some LLNs are beginning to address the needs of adult learners, the main focus of the initiative has been 15-18 year-old vocational learners. There is an urgent need to connect government's skills agenda with its engagement with ageing workforce*



*as evidenced by the first and second reports of the Turner Commission' (Open University 2008).*

Leahy (2013) concluded that policy initiatives like LLNs were simply not sufficiently robust to weaken the eliteness of the system:

*'LLNs are an example of a field disruption which proved too weak to challenge the prevailing hierarchy' (Leahy 2013 p.101).*

For others, the barriers to social mobility were both cultural and structural, with Watson (2005) arguing for a stronger approach in aligning tertiary and higher education, whilst acknowledging that the prevailing hierarchical and culturally competitive system of HE snobbery is unlikely to change. As such, he questions the value of LLNs in this regard:

*'Would a more unified approach to a tertiary system make a positive difference, and is the LLN the best approach?' (Watson 2005 p.192).*

Like Leahy, Watson questioned whether LLNs were sufficient to challenge the system, and it is noteworthy that, as described in 7.2, this approach was rejected by HEFCE as being too controversial. Little and Williams (2009) also observed that the English establishment's regard for 'status' challenged LLNs' ability to successfully overcome barriers to social mobility, and questioned whether institutions might '*revert to type*' once funding ceased (Little and Williams 2009, p.13).

Conversely, some commentators were of the opinion that LLNs had enabled greater opportunities for vocational learners:

*'Their achievements were far-reaching and successful in changing the landscape and opportunities for vocational learners... The LLNs were pioneers of this work and as such it is important that the richness and diversity of their work is not lost' (Ward et al 2012 p.1,4).*

*'These initiatives...have undoubtedly reduced the barriers for vocational learners and stimulated progression into HE' (Woodfield et al 2013 p.11).*

Although May et al (2012) were sceptical that LLNs had achieved their overall objective, they acknowledged that LLN focus on progression agreements were key in promoting social mobility:

*'One of the strengths of progression agreements is their potential to promote the upward social mobility of students from low income backgrounds' (May et al 2012 p.4).*

Jill Ward (Chair, Lifelong Learning National Directors' Forum), writing in the THES in 2010, equally argued that

*'The Lifelong Learning Networks have managed to help vocational learners to progress in an environment of equity and parity of esteem. Indeed, they are heavily involved in a number of key national developments - including frameworks for higher-level apprenticeships, ensuring that 14- to 19-year-old diploma learners are fairly treated, and offering innovative guidance to those outside learning who want to return' (Ward 2010).*

It was not just those in the sector that perceived that LLNs had added value to widening participation and social mobility; their apparent success was also observed at government level. In response to a question in the House of Commons on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008, from Mr David Willetts to Mr David Lammy, the then Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, on plans for the future of LLNs, Lammy responded that

*'The Government and HEFCE are in no doubt about the value of LLNs. Their focus on progression and widening opportunity means that they can make an important contribution to a number of the Government's strategic objectives including lifelong learning, credit transfer, articulation arrangements between higher education programmes and the qualifications and credit framework, employer engagement and workplace learning, and progression from the 14-19 diplomas' (Hansard 2008).*

## 7.4 Conclusion

The LLN initiative was introduced at a time when the skills agenda, employability and vocational progression were hot policy topics across a number of public sectors, and the policy environment was both complex and subject to constant change. The LLNs were a unique policy initiative for their time, in their requirement to engage with both FE and HE sectors, employers and other external organisations, and be responsive to the changing policy environment, which added further dimensions of complexity to their work. The approach taken by HEFCE was bottom-up, since engagement by the sector was judged to be subject to less risk of failure, and HEFCE imposed few expectations in terms of structures, targets or funding requirements on the networks. However, this loose approach drew some criticism, since a lack of robust monitoring and reporting in the early stages meant that it was problematic to evidence value for money.

Evidence of LLN activity suggested that they were highly active in curriculum development, PAs and IAG, and FE-HE partnerships were strengthened as a result of the activities. Despite a high level of employer engagement in curriculum development, inconsistent engagement with employers and other agencies, such as SSC, across the networks, was criticised. The summative evaluation concluded that there had been an increase in the number of vocational learners progressing to HE during the funding period, but only two-thirds of LLN

learners were in the target group and thus, overall, only a small number had benefited from the initiative. Whilst commentators in the sector and government praised LLNs for the extent of their work, some questioned the extent to which the initiative had made a significant impact in widening participation and contributing to social mobility. There was also some doubt that, beyond the funding period, LLNs were sufficiently robust to be able to ensure their sustainability, or be in a position to instigate culture change in relation to parity for vocational qualifications, against the prevailing eliteness of the HE system.

The next chapter, Chapter 8, interprets all three policy episode against McConnell's framework to assess success or failure in terms of the '*process, programme and political dimensions*' (McConnell 2010). The chapter then seeks to bring together the case studies to identify commonalities and differences between them and to identify opportunities for policy learning.

## Chapter 8: Analysis and discussion of the case studies against the theoretical framework

### 8.1 Introduction

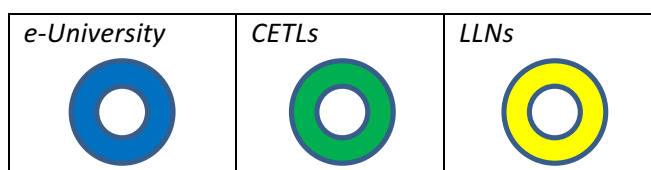
This chapter draws on the thick descriptions of the three policy episodes considered in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to address the main research question, *'How can policy success and failure be understood, from the study of three policy episodes in the context of contemporary higher education in England, by applying criteria from an existing framework for success and failure?'* For each case study, in Sections 8.2 (p.242), 8.3 (p.254) and 8.4 (p.268) of this chapter, the descriptions are used as evidence to position the policy episode on the spectrum of the analytical framework *'three dimensions of policy success and failure'* (McConnell 2010). Each dimension - policy as process, policy as programme and policy as politics - is considered in turn, using the framework by McConnell (2010) set out in Chapter 2, Table 3 (p.47). In each dimension, the vertical axis of the framework articulates the criteria that McConnell advises need to be considered:

*'Evaluators need a typological framework to help group different types of outcomes with broadly shared characteristics'* (McConnell 2011 p.71).

The horizontal axis articulates the *'broad positions on a continuum'* (McConnell 2010 p.60) viz: *'success, durable success, conflicted success, precarious success and failure'*, with characteristics in relation to each criterion devised by McConnell (2010) to aid the researcher in making a nuanced judgement about the success or failure of aspects of the policy.

In order to make my judgements systematic, rigorous and grounded in McConnell's criteria, I have used the 10-point framework advised by McConnell (Chapter 3, Table 5, p.60), and my own resultant coding, as a guide to assessing success or failure. Trustworthiness in my interpretation against the framework has been achieved through the application of Lincoln and Guba's (1995) evaluative criteria to establish *'trustworthiness'* in the study: *'credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability'* in the thematic evaluation of the primary and secondary texts, as described in Chapter 3, Section 3.6.2 (p.75). For each case study, I take each of the three dimensions of policy process, programme and politics in turn, with a separate table for each. Then, I take each of the dimension's criteria on the vertical axis and proceed to justify my positioning in relation to the spectrum of success and failure on the

horizontal axis. This is articulated with a short summary in each criterion and a symbol, which is differently coloured for each case study, thus:



**Figure 13 – COLOUR KEY TO CODING OF CASE STUDIES AGAINST THE FRAMEWORK**

The justification for each criterion is more fully articulated under sub-headings following each dimension table.

Then, in Section 8.5 (p.280), I address the first supplementary research question, *‘Does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in higher education?’* The work of May (1992) on policy learning is strongly aligned to McConnell’s dimensions of policy success, where he considers the *‘viability of policy instruments, implementation designs and political learning’* (p.332). He articulates distinctions in the forms of learning and the sources of evidence that might be considered for each approach in order to conceptualise and operationalise his approach. I consider that May’s approach to examining policy learning is useful in the context of this study, since it is so closely aligned to the framework and assists the researcher in identifying learning in the instrumental, societal and political dimensions. I will use his distinctions set out in Chapter 2, Table 4 (p.53), to inform this section of work.





In Section 8.6 (p.294), I use the interpretations from this analysis, and the understandings of the locus of HE policy-making as articulated in Chapter 4, Table 8 (p.123), to address the second supplementary research question, *‘What can an analysis of HEFCE policy-making reveal about the locus of power in policy-making in higher education?’*

Finally, in Section 8.7 (p.297), I offer a critique of the methodological framework, in order to address the final supplementary research question, *‘To what extent is the chosen methodological framework sufficient or inadequate in analysing policy success and failure in the context of contemporary theoretical approaches to policy analysis?’* with observations on its appropriateness and limitations in the context of higher education, and relating back to the discussion in Chapter 2 on contemporary understandings of policy and policy analysis.

## 8.2 The e-University – mapping the policy episode to the framework

### 8.2.1 Policy process

**Table 16 – POLICY AS PROCESS (E-UNIVERSITY)**

<b>Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Process success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Process failure</b>
Preserving government policy goals and instruments	Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements.	Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed.	Government's goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance.	Termination of Government policy goals and instruments. 
<i>The policy goals, increased global market share in e-learning, social inclusion and a reduction on the reliance on public funding failed to be achieved by the policy instrument, the e-university. HEFCE had to revise its policy instrument for e-learning as a result of the failure of UKeU.</i>				
Conferring legitimacy on a policy.	Some challenges to legitimacy, but of little or no lasting effect.	Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long term.	Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy.	Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy. 
<i>There were minor challenges to policy legitimacy initially, particularly during the consultation phase, but these were dealt with through reassurances to the sector and the development of a business plan by PwC which demonstrated the commercial viability of the initiative. However, as UKeU failed to fulfil the terms of the grant and were almost solely reliant on public funds, HEFCE itself questioned the legitimacy, ultimately closing UKeU.</i>				
Building a sustainable coalition	Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement.	Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation.	Coalition on the brink of falling apart.	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition. 
<i>There was support from within the HE sector initially, with a steering group led from within the sector and all but 4 HEIs signing up to ownership of UkeU. The involvement of PwC in the development of the business model and their assertion that they were 'confident of its success' shows confidence from the private sector; however a coalition with the private sector failed to materialise and the differing cultures between the public and private sectors was never fully addressed. Towards the end of the policy period, the coalition was not sustainable as HEIs withdrew from UKeU and there was little private sector engagement.</i>				
Symbolising innovation and influence.	Not ground-breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive.	Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading (at times) to criticisms from both progressives and conservatives.	Appearance of being out of touch with viable alternative solutions. 	Symbolising outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues.
<i>The policy was not innovative globally, with many other examples, some of which showed signs of success such as SNU and Global University Alliance. The complex corporate structure led to UKeU failing to observe alternative solutions. However, this was an experimental public-private approach that was novel for HEFCE.</i>				

### *8.2.1.1. Preserving government policy goals and instruments*

The conception of the e-University was in line with New Labour's *'Third Way'* (Giddens 1998) objective to enhance the UK's competitiveness in the global economy, widen participation and social inclusion, and reduce reliance on state funding for higher education (Giddens 1998). It also sat well within other policy agendas with regards to educational technology and communication in schools, where there had been some evidence of success. Despite this policy goal, some commentators, such as Rumble (2001), questioned whether e-learning was relevant to global educational needs, or succeeds in meeting the social inclusion agenda, since there was a tendency for e-learning approaches to be commercially led, passing the cost on to students who could most afford to pay.

As a policy instrument, the e-University, in McConnell's terms, failed to meet the policy goal. Much of its failure stemmed from a weak organisational structure between HEFCE, HoldCo and UKeU, and a lack of engagement with the private sector which, despite some proposed initial interest, failed to commit to the project. UKeU moved away from the original PwC business plan and did little to increase the UK's market share of the global e-learning market, with limited international engagement, as evidenced by the lack of student registrations. UKeU also failed to address the social inclusion agenda, by focussing on students who could afford to pay and ignoring the domestic market. The expectation that the initiative would reduce reliance on state funding through a public-private partnership, which would be self-financing in the medium term, failed to come to fruition, with HEFCE still being the main funder by the end of the initiative. An inability to resolve issues arising from the different cultures of the public-private sectors, and particularly imposing commercial protocols on a public sector initiative, contributed to the failure to meet the self-financing goal. Following the failure of UKeU, HEFCE sought to reframe its policy instrument in respect of e-learning, devising a strategy that focussed more on blended learning approaches and invested the remaining e-University funding at institutional level.

### *8.2.1.2. Conferring legitimacy on a policy*

The policy could initially be regarded as legitimate, since there was evidence from other countries, such as the USA and Sweden, that an e-university approach could be successful. Sir Brian Fender, then CEO of HEFCE, had instigated its inclusion in the spending review, and so it had support of both the sector's primary agency and government. The e-University

was underwritten by a business model developed by PwC, one of the world's largest and respected multinational professional services networks, who expressed 'confidence' in its success (HEFCE 00/44a p.3), giving it evidence-based commercial legitimacy and little room for challenge from opponents. At the consultation stage with the sector, a Steering Group was established, chaired by Professor Ron Cooke, then Vice-Chancellor of York University, legitimising the project within the HE sector.

There were some minor challenges, particularly from the HE sector at the consultation stage, with regards to the inclusion of all HE institutions, and these concerns were addressed by HEFCE. However, this remained a contested issue, with some institutions, such as LSE, questioning the effect on their quality brand if the project was inclusive of all institutions. HEIs were also concerned that the strong commercial aspects of the initiative would entail a focus on elements of the market that could afford to pay, rather than addressing a key objective of social inclusion, but this concern was never addressed by UKeU. Once UKeU had revised the business plan, such that student number targets were reduced and the public-private partnership was all but abandoned, and with UKeU remaining heavily reliant on public funding, HEFCE itself began to question the legitimacy of the initiative, which ultimately led the agency to take the decision to close down UKeU.

#### *8.2.1.3 Building a sustainable coalition*

Initially there was evidence that the e-University could build a sustainable coalition. All but four HEIs signed up to be members of HoldCo, although as John Beaumont, Chief Executive of UKeU, pointed out, the £1 fee did not demonstrate full commitment from institutions. It is worthy of note that although HEIs appeared to give their full support to the initiative at the consultation stage, in July 2003, when HEFCE consulted the sector on a new e-learning strategy (HEFCE 2003/35), the vast majority of responses supported an approach that was blended, not fully distance learning, which might suggest that there was not in fact such strong support for the e-University approach.

In the event, institutional commitment failed to materialise, with only 25 courses being provided on-line (SC 2005). A key finding of the research by Conole et al (2006, 2006a, 2006b), and concurred with by John Beaumont of UKeU, suggests that the HE sector itself was not fully engaged in a coalition at institutional level, with many instances where the work in developing programmes was left to enthusiastic individuals, with little engagement from senior management. They concluded that the internal processes within institutions,



and how decisions were made, were often factors indicating a lack of engagement with UKeU.

The confidence expressed by PwC in the initiative from a commercial perspective meant that there was initially some proposed interest from the private sector, with both Pearson Education and the BBC purportedly being interested in partnership with the e-University. However, the involvement of the private sector failed to materialise, with only Sun Microsystems Ltd partnering with UKeU. The Select Committee (SC 2005) found that Sun Microsystems was not in fact a true partner, but had more of a supplier relationship with UKeU in supporting the technical platform. One of the key findings, both by the Select Committee and the research by Conole et al (2006, 2006a, 2006b) was the failure of the initiative to successfully form a coalition between the public and private sectors and address the cultural differences between them, resulting in contested issues such as the payment of bonuses to the company directors, which Sir Anthony Cleaver and John Beaumont claimed were in line with commercial practices, but drew criticism from the Select Committee.

By 2004, the coalition was showing significant signs of disagreement, with tension between HEFCE, HoldCo and UKeU, a lack of engagement from the private sector and some HEIs withdrawing from HoldCo.

#### *8.2.1.4 Symbolising innovation and influence*

The policy was not innovative in global terms, with many other examples of e-learning being available, particularly in the USA, which had examples of strongly branded ventures such as that at Phoenix University. It was these e-university initiatives in the United States that were perceived as a major threat to the UK's international market, and as such a driving force behind the initiative, although as Hedberg (2006) observed, the USA also experienced similar failures. The Swedish Net University, which is still in existence, is a good example of success, but with an entirely different approach, being wholly publicly funded, with recurrent funding for institutions received upon the successful completion of a student's studies. Courses offered by SNU are taught entirely in its native Swedish and have a strong focus on the home market. Roger Waterhouse, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Derby, writing in the THES in 2000, observed that whilst the e-University was just getting off the ground, a Global University Alliance of *'ten universities from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the UK had already managed to set up in Hong*

*Kong with more than 100 courses, and students already enrolled'* (Waterhouse 2000).


Significantly, he reported some characteristics of which HEFCE and UKeU might, in retrospect, have taken heed:




*'They share a focus on higher vocational education and have pooled their distance-learning experience. They have done their market analysis of Southeast Asia and targeted professionals in mid-career. And, crucially, they have enlisted a commercial partner with a proven delivery platform'*. (Waterhouse 2000).

Whilst the initiative was not innovative on the global stage, in English HE policy terms this was a distinctive and experimental approach for HEFCE, in forming a coalition of public and private stakeholders. The crucial failing related to the complex corporate structure, which meant that UKeU was able to divert from the PwC business plan and not pay heed to other successful e-university ventures. For example, SNU had been successful in part due to its teaching in native Swedish and concentrating on the home market, contrary to UKeU's perception, based solely on the result of conversations in the Far East that, globally, students wanted all courses in English. Dr Kim Howells (Minister for Higher Education in 2005), in his evidence to the Select Committee, concedes that more could have been done to observe what was going on internationally.

### 8.2.2 Policy programme

**Table 17 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (E-UNIVERSITY)**

<b>Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Programme success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Programme failure</b>
Implementation in line with objectives.	Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations.	Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems.	Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend.	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives. 
<i>UKeU failed to meet any of the objectives in terms of being learner-driven, responsive to change, developing excellence in the technological platform, securing economies of scale or being financially self-sustaining. The public-private organisational structure meant that UKeU were able to move away from the objectives and business plan without accountability for use of public funds.</i>				

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
Programme success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Programme failure
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls.	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high profile instances of failure to produce results. 	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
<i>UKeU failed to produce the desired outcomes in terms of increasing the UKs share of the global e-learning market or meeting domestic social inclusion. In meeting the milestones set out in the business plan, the number of programmes on-line was lower than expected and target student numbers failed to be achieved, due to a supply-led rather than demand-led approach. A sustained public-private partnership failed to materialise through lack of engagement by the commercial sector. The e-China project was a minor success which continued after the demise of UKeU.</i>				
Meets policy domain criteria.	Not quite the desired outcome, but sufficiently close to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria.	Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high-profile examples, eg. on-going wastage when the criterion is efficiency.	A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention; eg. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency.	Clear inability to meet the criteria. 
<i>UKeU failed to meet wider 'Third Way' objectives: raising attainment, social inclusion and widening participation, or enhancing the UK's position within the global economy. UKeU failed in other policy domains: public-private sector collaboration as well as value for money in the use of public funds.</i>				
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.	Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended.	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering. 	Damaging a particular target group.
<i>The failure to meet student registration targets is sufficient evidence that the project failed to create significant benefit for the target groups. There were some minor successes for individual students registered, although these were later transferred to the relevant institutions. The lack of focus on the domestic market ignored social inclusion and potential students. There were no high profile stories of students being disadvantaged.</i>				

### 8.2.2.1 Implementation in line with objectives

In the implementation of the programme, the corporate organisational structure was central to the failure of the e-University, as it allowed UKeU to divert from the original objectives and business plan without sufficient accountability to HEFCE for the use of public funds. This was further compounded by the distance put between HEFCE and UKeU, with HoldCo acting as an intermediary, as HEFCE could not, by law, give public funds to a private company.

To re-iterate, the objectives were that the e-University would be:

- Learner driven (demand led)
- Responsive to change (to meet changes in demand)
- Excellent fit for purpose (in programmes being offered)
- Excellent in use of new technology to enable learning experience to be delivered
- Able to secure economies of scale
- Financially self-sustaining over time

Evidence points to failure in the first objective to be learner driven, since the Select Committee criticised UKeU for taking a supply led approach in looking to HEIs to provide programmes, rather than focussing on demand from students by undertaking sufficient market research. It failed to shift the decision-making *'towards the consumer and away from the provider'* as required under the business model (HEFCE 00/44a p.9). In failing to meet this objective, UKeU was unable to meet the second objective to be responsive to changes in demand, since the venture was entirely supply driven. The business model stated that the interpretation of excellence should be *'that the e-U can, and should, be relatively inclusive for UK HEIs in terms of the types and sources of offering which it makes available'* (HEFCE 00/44a p.9). The evidence points to failure in this regard, as by 2004 only 25 courses, from a small number of institutions, were available on-line.

UKeU was heavily criticised for the amount of time and funding (£14.5m) that had been focussed on the development of a new technological platform, particularly as cheaper off-the-shelf technologies were available. However, given the short amount of time that the UKeU had to run, it is not possible to determine how successful the platform might have been in the longer term. Indeed, there are mixed views on whether the plug was pulled on the initiative too early, with several witnesses to the Select Committee, such as Dr Kim Howells and Sir Anthony Cleaver (Chairman of UKeU), observing that this was the case, claiming that the initiative was not given time to succeed. Bacsich (2004, 2010) also supports this view.

Economies of scale were not achieved as the number of students registered was significantly below the intended targets, with less than 1,000 registrations against an original target of 5,638 by 2003, and a significant amount of money had already been spent. The business model expected the e-University initiative to be self-sustaining within 5-6 years, requiring it to be profit maximising.

*'Most aspects of the e-U's operations will be profit maximising; its management style should certainly be performance driven, and it will need to make surpluses so that it is not wholly dependent upon external funding for re-investment'* (HEFCE 00/44a p.10).

Almost £50m of public money was invested in UKeU, and by the time it revised its business plan in 2003, there would be a further 6 years before any private sector investment was planned. Consequently, additional public funding would be required. With so few student registrations, and revisions to student number targets, there was no confidence in the self-sustaining objective being achieved.

#### *8.2.2.2 Achievement of desired outcomes*

The original PwC business plan forecast 110,000 students within 6 years, growing to 250,000 by 2012-13, in order to increase the UK's market share, both in on-line learning and in meeting the Prime Minister's target of increased market share of overseas students (from 17% to 25%) by 2005. UKeU failed to achieve these targets, and indeed in 2003 significantly reduced the target in its revised business plan to just 45,000 students by 2009-10. There were some small elements of success, such as the e-China project, which was retained after the demise of UKeU, but these were limited and still reliant on public funding. It cannot be known whether UKeU could have ever reached these targets.

Although the Select Committee did not focus on UKeU's failure to increase social inclusion in the domestic market in its main findings, it was nevertheless one of the key aims set out in the business model. It is noteworthy that the business model itself recognised the tension between the development of a profit maximising public-private venture and a policy that promotes social inclusion: *'wider intentions to increase social inclusion and to disseminate good practice do not sit comfortably with a focus on profit maximisation'* (HEFCE 00/44). Based on the evidence that UKeU focused on the fee paying overseas market, there is little evidence that this wider aspiration was achievable.

### 8.2.2.3 Meeting policy domain criteria

The programme failed to meet the wider policy domain criteria in terms of raising standards through raising attainment, social inclusion and widening participation, or enhancing the UK's position within the global economy. Other dimensions of policy domain that came into play were encouraging public-private sector collaboration, with an emphasis on meeting private sector management and accounting standard benchmarks, and demonstrating value for money in the use of public funds. In all cases, UKeU failed to meet these policy domain criteria, as evidenced by the lack of student registrations (see page 160), failure to secure private partners, and £50m of redundant public funded expenditure on UKeU.

### 8.2.2.4 Creating benefit for the target group

The original proposal for the e-University had envisaged the target groups to

*'be in careers-associated areas as some postgraduate and/or post-experience areas, and particularly various forms of continuing professional development, and with a focus on both corporate and government consumers'* (HEFCE 00/44a p.15).



UKeU failed to engage with these target groups, particularly in the domestic market, concentrating their effort on the overseas market as the main source of income from students. However, the resulting lack of student numbers is evidence of the lack of engagement with even overseas students as a target group. Indeed, the UK's market share of international students had only risen by less than 2% since 2000 [10.7% in 2000, 12.6% in 2010] (source: Patterns and Trends in UK Higher Education, Universities UK, 2014). A number of reasons for this were established by the Select Committee: the confused branding for students with a lack of focus on the quality of individual institutions, a lack of market research by UKeU, and the focus on provision in English. The domestic market, and raising aspirations through social inclusion, were wholly ignored.

In terms of the benefit to HEIs, although all but 4 UK universities signed up to UKeU, in the end only 25 courses were put on-line by a small number of HEIs. The original circular to HEIs stated a number of anticipated benefits to HEIs in being involved with the e-University: increased income from student numbers from overseas and home CPD markets, reduced costs for development of on-line courses, scope to use existing programmes to increase student numbers, involvement in the development of technologies, and enhancement of

their reputation through involvement with a flagship project (HEFCE 00/04). However, in the event, none of these benefits came to pass.

### 8.2.3 Policy politics

**Table 18 – POLICY AS POLITICS (E-UNIVERSITY)**

<b>Policy as politics: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Political success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Political failure</b>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders.	Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks.	Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working both for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure.	Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability.	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit.
<i>No apparent effect on electoral prospects.</i>				
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing.	Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed. 	Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected.	Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue.	Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government's capacity to govern.
<i>Some adverse publicity and some questions raised in the House of Commons in response to the Select Committee report. However, HEFCE managed to contain the episode and divert remaining funds to a revised strategy for e-learning.</i>				
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government.	Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded.	Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has prompted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes. 	Entire trajectory of government is being compromised.	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government.
<i>HEFCE reviewed its strategy in e-learning and put the remaining £12m into individual institutions. A review in 2008 ensured that the policy agenda remained intact to a large extent, although with major modifications to the original programme and a withdrawal from the public-private sector consortium model.</i>				

#### 8.2.3.1 Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders

There is no evidence to suggest that the failure of UKeU had either a damaging or an enhancing effect on the electoral prospects of the then Labour government. Indeed, since

the initiative had its genesis within HEFCE, it would have been feasible for government to deflect any damaging effects. However, the e-University was the most politically 'hot' of the chosen case studies, and did attract some adverse media attention, although surprisingly little, with a few mentions in the THES and a small number in the Guardian and Observer newspapers, mostly focussing on the level of public funding that had been put into UKeU. The e-University was the only one of the case studies to result in a Select Committee inquiry, although there is no evidence to suggest that this damaged the reputation of government or its leaders.

#### *8.2.3.2 Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing*

Despite the Select Committee inquiry and some media attention, few questions appear to have been asked in the House of Commons, with most questions focusing on requests for progress reports and, as such, the capacity to govern was unaffected, despite some difficulties with managing the agenda. HEFCE's abrupt closure of UKeU points to a concentrated attempt at agenda management and damage limitation. There was, however, a request for a debate on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005, the day that the Select Committee report was published, where Oliver Heald MP asked

*'When can we debate today's damning Education and Skills Select Committee report on the so-called UK e-university? It shows that only 900 students have taken part in this £50 million project—a whopping £40,000 per student. It also finds that there was inadequate research, a skewed focus and a failure to work successfully with the private sector. So what did Ministers do? They paid bonuses to the senior executives. Should not Ministers have done their homework before throwing vast sums of public money at a project that nobody wanted? Is that not yet another piece of Government incompetence to rank with the millennium dome, the Child Support Agency computer and the tax credits administrative fiasco? The two computer projects that I have mentioned were the work of EDS, to which the Government have this week given a £4 billion contract to supply defence computers. Can we have a debate on the rewards of failure, so that we can seek serious assurances about that massive contract?'* (Hansard 03.03.2005).

#### *8.2.3.3 Sustaining the broad values and direction of government*

Despite some limited adverse publicity and the Select Committee inquiry, the government was able to contain UKeU as a short-term episode of failure. The remaining funding (£12m) was used by HEFCE to re-focus its e-learning strategy and to support individual e-learning programmes in HEIs, where the emphasis was on a blended learning approach and one that focussed on the public good rather than commercial objectives. HEFCE re-wrote its e-learning strategy in 2005 and Glenaffric Ltd undertook an independent review of the strategy in 2008. The revised framework focuses on



*'the broader opportunities offered through the use of technology, rather than concentrating on issues such as distance learning...our primary focus on the enhancement of learning and teaching drives our approach'* (p.8 HEFCE March 2009/12).

Thus, HEFCE was able to control the policy agenda and refocus its e-learning policy.

#### 8.2.4 Summary

The policy *process* can be judged to have been a failure in McConnell's terms. Although the initiative seemed at first to be legitimate, with a desire to increase the UK's global share of e-learning in the face of competition from the USA, and strong support from the private sector through the confidence expressed by PwC, the weakness of the organisational structure all but delegitimise the project. Despite support from all but four HEIs through their initial commitment to HoldCo, and initial expressions of interest from the private sector, the coalition was in fact weak, with little institutional commitment and a lack of engagement by the private sector. The aim for the e-University to address social inclusion failed to come to fruition, as UKeU was not targeting the home market, but focussing instead on overseas markets, thus failing to meet New Labour's 'Third Way' agenda. UKeU, through internal shortcomings, did not look to other successful e-learning initiatives globally to legitimise its approach.

The *programme* can be viewed a failure, with a weak organisational structure which was not only experimental for HEFCE in terms of public and private partnership, but allowed UKeU to move away from the original objectives. Failure in a number of areas, as identified by the Select Committee report, led to the e-University failing to meet its objectives or the desired outcomes. There were few benefits for the target groups, with little demand-led student engagement, either from an increase in the UK's share of the overseas market, or in meeting the social inclusion agenda.

In terms of *politics*, despite some limited adverse publicity and questions in the House of Commons, particularly in relation to the perceived waste of public money that was articulated in the Select Committee report (SC 2005), government was able to contain the episode and realise a durable, although conflicted, success with a change in HEFCE strategy and movement of funds to support a revised e-learning policy.



In addressing the main research question, by applying the McConnell framework criteria to the policy episode, the e-University can be judged to be a process and programme failure,



but politically, the government was able to contain the episode, with a change in e-learning policy and re-direction of funding.

### 8.3 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning – mapping the policy episode to the framework

#### 8.3.1 Policy process

Table 19 – POLICY AS PROCESS (CETLs)

Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure				
Process success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Process failure
Preserving government policy goals and instruments	Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements.	Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed. 	Government’s goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance.	Termination of Government policy goals and instruments.
<p><i>The policy goals were preserved throughout the initiative, to raise the profile of learning and teaching in line with research. However, the policy instrument, a bottom-up initiative, in which HEFCE took a hands-off approach, and the time limited funding, meant that whilst there was considerable CETL activity and successes at a local level, these were difficult to sustain beyond the funding period, and the lack of a nationally co-ordinated approach meant that sectoral impact was difficult to achieve.</i></p>				
Conferring legitimacy on a policy	Some challenges to legitimacy, but of little or no lasting effect.	Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long term. 	Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy.	Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy.
<p><i>There were a number of contested issues, particularly in relation to defining excellence, which impacted on both how bids were made and how the panel used their own value judgements to select CETLs. The competitive nature of the funding led to concerns about potential unintended consequences for HEIs that failed to secure a CETL. There were questions concerning the reliability of the evaluation process which pointed to substantial activity but little evidence of impact.</i></p>				

Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure				
Process success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Process failure
Building a sustainable coalition	Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement.	Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation. 	Coalition on the brink of falling apart.	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition.
<i>The individual institutional prevailing cultures, level of engagement by senior and middle managers, and the relative power of the CETL to achieve engagement and change within their own institutions, impacted on the likelihood of success at institutional level. The lack of a nationally coordinated programme meant that sectoral impact was compromised.</i>				
Symbolising innovation and influence.	Not ground-breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive.	Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading (at times) to criticisms from both progressives and conservatives.	Appearance of being out of touch with viable alternative solutions. 	Symbolising outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues.
<i>Other jurisdictions had similar schemes, particularly in the USA, Australia and Europe. A combination of approaches suggests that a nationally co-ordinated approach with sustainable funding for all institutions might be the most appropriate approach.</i>				

### 8.3.1.1. Preserving government policy goals and instruments

The policy goals were preserved during the period of the CETL initiative: to raise the profile of learning and teaching quality in line with research quality, and professionalise teaching with the introduction of fees and higher expectations from students. This was achieved to an extent, but the effects were mainly seen at a local level; sectoral change proved more difficult to achieve and the impact from any engagement between the CETLs, or beyond to parts of the sector without a CETL, proved difficult to assess, as was concluded by the summative evaluation (SQW 2011). There were no modifications to the policy goals in the timeframe observed.

The policy instrument, characterised by a bottom-up approach in which HEFCE was deliberately loose in its definition of excellence, and time-limited project funding, was

subject to some contestation and disquiet throughout the period of the initiative. One of the key, albeit subtle, changes to the policy instrument was the change in title from Centres **of** Excellence, as articulated in the 2003 White Paper, to Centres **for** Excellence, by the time the invitation to bid for funds was announced in 2004 (HEFCE 2004/5). This suggests a change from funding existing excellence (like research funding) to an initiative which promotes the establishment of excellence. Other areas of contestation were, firstly, the articulation of what was meant by excellence, particularly in the selection process, where value-laden judgements were often observed (Gosling and Hannan 2007b). The notion of excellence is already regarded as a challenging concept within higher education (Nixon 2007), and learning and teaching in particular (Skelton 2005), with some scholars arguing that it is an empty notion (Barnett 2000) and should be seen as a process rather than a product (Nixon 2007). Secondly, the original intention to award institutions that failed to succeed at stage one of the bidding process with a 'commended' status was abandoned by HEFCE, in the light of some disquiet from the sector that there might be some reputation damage for institutions that were not awarded a CETL. Finally, the sector's concern that the competitive nature of the funding was divisive persisted throughout the initiative, particularly in observing the lack of dissemination and deepening effect across the sector (SQW 2011). Both the formative and summative evaluations of the CETLs commissioned by HEFCE (Saunders et al 2008, SQW 2011), observed that the sector would have generally preferred an approach that was inclusive of all institutions. The short term nature of the funding meant that the policy goals, whilst showing evidence of success at a local level, were more difficult to sustain beyond the funding period, with the summative evaluation concluding that future funding was not in most cases an institutional priority, and that only 20% of institutions had arranged some level of future funding (SQW 2011).

Accountability and monitoring of the CETL process was characterised by HEFCE's 'hands-off' approach (HEFCE 2003/36). Whilst welcomed by the sector, it came in for much criticism, in both formative and summative evaluations and by other commentators (Turner 2007, Gosling 2013, Gosling and Turner 2015). The formative and summative evaluations concluded that the self-evaluations undertaken by CETLs, although evidence based, took a wholly positivist stance, lacked robust and theorised evaluation strategies and made it difficult to quantify the impact of CETLs in a rigorous way. Thus, addressing value for money, which itself is a contestable issue at the level of discourse, was problematic.

Linked to the weak monitoring was the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the network by HEFCE, which made the coherence of the programme at a national level problematic. Although by the summative report there had been a good deal of external activity, with over 3,000 publications and more than 5,500 dissemination events, measuring the impact of that activity proved difficult. Consequently, one of the main recommendations of the summative evaluation was that *'any future programme of this kind should build in more active central management and coordination'* (SQW 2011 p.53).

#### *8.3.1.2. Conferring legitimacy on the policy*

As observed in Chapter 6, there are many examples of learning and teaching enhancement policies and funding schemes in other countries, which followed a similar policy process (Brawley et al, 2009, Lemmens-Krug 2015). This gave the CETL initiative, and its approach, a level of validity, as will be discussed in 8.3.1.4 below. Although there was sector engagement at a national level, the competitive nature of the funding meant that not all institutions were awarded a CETL, which gave rise to fears that there could be unintended consequences for institutions without a CETL, particularly in terms of reputation for quality. Whilst these fears did not seem to be realised, the summative evaluation observed that there was limited impact of CETL activity for institutions that were outside of the CETL network (SQW 2011).

The bidding process and contested nature of 'excellence' also suggests some threat to the legitimacy of the process, where bidders made calculated judgements on what HEFCE would consider to be excellent, and CETLs were awarded based on the value judgements of the panel. Research conducted by Gosling and Hannan (2007a, 2007b) suggested that the bidding process was flawed by the lack of clarification and uncertainty over the defining of excellence.

#### *8.3.1.3. Building a sustainable coalition*

The coalition remained intact through the period, but the areas of contestation as described above meant that there were some threats to its sustainability. At institutional level, there were signs of disagreement and fragmentation, since there was variation in the engagement of senior management, which Gosling and Turner (2015) argued was crucial if the work of the CETL was to be embedded across the institution. By the time of the summative evaluation, deepening effects across institutions were being observed, but there were difficulties in some CETLs being able to gain sufficient purchase to embed their

work where they conflicted with the prevailing culture, or were seen to be on the periphery, of the institution. There was also evidence to suggest conflict between staff in the CETLs and their managers in terms of time and resources to deliver CETL activities, as was reported to both the formative and summative evaluations (Saunders et al 2008, SQW 2011).

The lack of a nationally coordinated programme and the competitive nature of the funding meant that a coordinated approach through a network of CETLs, and engagement with the HEA, were sporadic, although the evaluations observed that there were often strong connections with the HEA Subject Centres at discipline level (Saunders 2008 p.32). The HEA and former Chief Executive Paul Ramsden were particularly critical of the policy approach, especially since it was observed that the lack of clarification on the policy made any formal connections between CETLs and the HEA problematic.

#### *8.3.1.4. Symbolising innovation and influence*




The CETLs were not a ground breaking initiative internationally. Scotland has a similar enhancement led policy with the National Quality Enhancement Framework, introduced in 2003, but one of the key differences is that this scheme is not competitively funded, with all universities being eligible to receive funding. Like England, Germany's 'Quality Pact for Teaching' scheme and New Zealand's Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence have competitive funding schemes, as does Australia's Carrick Institute. Australia also has substantial central government funding, with the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, a performance based funding model.


The USA, with a much more de-centralised system of higher education, and a larger number of institutions focussing exclusively on teaching rather than research, has far less emphasis on professionalising teaching and learning through pedagogic research, and there is much less of a discipline based approach. There is some national level support, through the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) but its level of funding is small and inconsistent. Mills and Huber (2005) suggest that learning and teaching enhancement in the USA is less robust than in the UK or Australia because it is less determined by central government policy.

The evidence from other countries above and in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3 (p.166), suggests that nationally determined approaches, with sustainability of funding for all institutions, might be the most appropriate approach for learning and teaching enhancement.

### 8.3.2 Policy programme

Table 20 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (CETLs)

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
Programme success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Programme failure
Implementation in line with objectives.	Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations. 	Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems.	Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend.	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives.
<i>The Implementation was broadly in line with the objectives, although there were subtle changes between the original articulation of the 2003 White Paper, the 2004 consultation and invitation to bid. Critically, there was a focus on embedding excellence rather than celebrating existing excellence and the 'commended' category of CETL was abandoned. Concerns around the competitive nature of the funding were not addressed.</i>				
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls. 	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high-profile instances of failure to produce results.	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
<i>In the broadest terms, objectives were achieved, with more than 90% of the CETLs reporting that they had achieved what they set out to do. However, the summative evaluation concluded that the evidence for success was limited to descriptions of actions, and failed to demonstrate qualitative impact, particularly at institutional level and across the sector. There was, however, no evidence of unwanted results leading to controversy.</i>				
Meets policy domain criteria.	Not quite the desired outcome, but sufficiently close to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria.	Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high-profile examples, eg. On-going wastage when the criterion is efficiency. 	A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention; eg. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency.	Clear inability to meet the criteria.
<i>The policy domain criteria were only partially achieved. In raising the profile of learning and teaching, there is evidence of success at CETL and institutional level, but not throughout the sector. There is some evidence of teaching and learning being seen to be on a par with research in terms of recognition for individual staff and changes to institutional HR strategies, but this is very much at an individual institutional level, rather than a sectoral achievement.</i>				

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
<i>Programme success</i>	<i>Durable success</i>	<i>Conflicted success</i>	<i>Precarious success</i>	<i>Programme failure</i>
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.	Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended. 	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering.	Damaging a particular target group.
<p><i>The target groups were individual staff and students. There is evidence that individual staff did well in terms of professional development opportunities, with evidence of staff receiving recognition for their CETL work, but this was an area of contestation with staff feeling that their work was frequently not recognised by managers. There is also evidence in the summative evaluation that possibly thousands of students engaged with CETLs in terms of provision of resources and learning opportunities, but it is difficult to assess the impact of that engagement. Benefits are apparent but not as widespread or deep as intended.</i></p>				

### 8.3.2.1 Implementation in line with objectives

The programme was implemented broadly in relation to that intended in the original 2003 White Paper, although there was a distinct, but subtle, change in approach from Centres of Excellence to Centres *for* Excellence (see Section 6.2.5, p.169). There were some modifications to the programme, particularly after the consultation stage, where the category of ‘commended’ was abandoned for those bids that were unsuccessful at stage two. In addition, although the programme had initially intended to focus on disciplines only, in the event a number of pedagogically focussed bids were successful. The number of differently focussed CETLs did lead to some criticism, for example Skelton (2005) observed that ‘CETL appears to be more a ‘postmodern celebration of difference’ (p.68).

As demonstrated in Table 11 (p.172), there were subtle changes in the language of the objectives between the consultation and the invitation to bid, with the former focussing on encouragement and the latter being more action focussed.

### 8.3.2.2 Achievement of desired outcomes

CETL self-evaluations concluded that 90% of the objectives had been achieved and, indeed, at a local level evidence from the summative evaluation (SQW 2011) suggests a good deal of success, with 89% reporting that access to additional resources was advantageous in changing practice, 92% reporting a direct positive effect on teaching and students’ learning,



2,679 spin-out projects, secondments, fellowships and awards had been achieved and there had been 3,435 peer-reviewed outputs and 5,594 development and dissemination events (SQW 2011 p.12). There is evidence reported in the SQW summative evaluation that individual CETLs improved the opportunities for professional development and pedagogical research for a large number of individual staff. The evidence also points to a wide diversity of disciplines and pedagogic areas being covered by the range of CETLs, and hence a variety of learning contexts. There are many examples of local CETL innovation (as reported in Chapter 6), particularly in technological solutions, which were a favourite of the selection panel.

One area of uncertainty related to the outcomes for students, where it was concluded in the summative report that although CETLs had reported the development of modules, degree programmes and learning toolkits, advantaging thousands of students, there was little information provided with which to back up these claims (SQW 2011 p.11).

In terms of the broader objectives at the sectoral level, which were to *'enable institutions to support and develop practice that encourages deeper understanding across the sector of ways of addressing students' learning effectively'* and *'demonstrate collaboration and sharing of good practice and so enhance the standard of teaching and effective learning throughout the sector'* (HEFCE 2004/05), the formative and summative evaluations questioned whether the desired outcomes had been achieved, particularly in terms of impact. The summative evaluation concluded that

*'The legacy of the programme rests largely in individual staff, and in those institutions which have embedded CETL developments and continue to support innovation and development in teaching and learning, rather than a general enhancement of teaching and learning across the sector... We do not believe the CETL programme itself has led to material changes in non-participating HEIs and across the sector as a whole'* (SQW 2011 p.53).

### 8.3.2.3 Meeting policy domain criteria

The wider policy domain criteria were only partially met. Raising the profile of learning and teaching was achieved to an extent at local level, with a good deal of CETL activity reported and many individuals benefiting from the initiative. However, even at the local level, there were difficulties reported in enabling the work of a CETL to reach other parts of its institution, particularly where the CETL was discipline based. Tolley's evaluation of the engineering CETL at Loughborough University (2008) and Gosling and Turner's research (2015) both concluded that embeddedness across an institution was patchy, reliant on

individuals and difficult to achieve in cases where the CETL did not have the purchase to influence senior management or institutional strategy. Wider reach beyond institutions to the sector and HEIs without a CETL proved even more problematic. Whilst the summative evaluation observed that 73% of pro-vice-chancellors for teaching and learning, and 61% of CETL based staff, suggested that their work had been disseminated to other CETLs and HEIs through thousands of events and publications, SQW also concluded that *'there is, however, little evidence of collaboration across the range of CETLs as a whole'* (SQW 2011 p.13) and consequently it was difficult to assess the sectoral impact. As such, the sporadic nature of the impact can only lead to the conclusion that raising the profile of learning and teaching was only partially achieved at sectoral level.

Equally, based on the evidence of the evaluations, the wider policy goal to put learning and teaching excellence on a par with research excellence does not appear to have been achieved. The different funding methodologies between teaching and research excellence suggest that the project-based approach of the CETLs had less purchase in terms of sustainability than the recurrent nature of research excellence funding. Gosling and Turner (2015) argue that there is relative powerlessness in funded short-term projects. Many concerns were raised by HEIs, evaluators and other commentators on the sustainability of the CETLs beyond the funding, and there was evidence to suggest that it was not an institutional priority in the majority of cases, as concluded by the summative evaluation (SQW 2011). Whilst there was some evidence of teaching and learning being seen to be on a par with research in terms of recognition for individual staff (SQW 2011 p.25), with changes to institutional HR strategies, this is very much at an institutional level, rather than a sectoral achievement.

#### *8.3.2.4 Creating benefit for the target group*



The target groups were individual staff, through the reward and recognition objective, *'To reward practice that demonstrates excellent learning outcomes for students'* and students, *'to raise student awareness of effectiveness in teaching and learning in order to inform student choice and maximise student performance'*. The evidence points to a good deal of individual successes for staff, with 79% concluding that their overall learning and teaching practice had improved as a result of the CETL and professional development opportunities made available through the funding (SQW 2011 p.19). However, it is noteworthy that only 46% of respondents agreed that their work had been recognised via promotion or other reward (SQW 2011 p.25). There was some contestation in regards to reward, since most

rewards had some financial element, but the majority of CETL staff asserted that recognition was much more important than financial gain. However, recognition proved to be difficult for many, where their CETL work was not recognised in their workloads, and many felt that their managers did not recognise the value of their work. Research by Turner et al (2008) for the HELP (Higher Education Learning Partnerships) CETL concluded that managers and colleagues did not recognise the value of CETL staff's work.

The majority of the CETLs pointed to positive effects in providing resources for students and several noted the engagement of students, as discussed in Section 8.3.2.2 (p.260) above, which were estimated to number in the thousands. However, there is little substantial evidence of demonstrable impact in learning maximising performance for students. There is no evidence from the evaluations, and indeed there is little mention, that CETLs helped to inform student choice. Hence as a benefit to students as a target group, the evidence of success is limited.

### 8.3.3 Policy as politics

Table 21 – POLICY AS POLITICS (CETLs)

Policy as politics: the spectrum from success to failure				
<i>Political success</i>	<i>Durable success</i>	<i>Conflicted success</i>	<i>Precarious success</i>	<i>Political failure</i>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders.	Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks.	Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working both for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure.	Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability.	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit.
<i>No apparent effect on electoral prospects.</i>				
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing.	Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed. 	Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected.	Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue.	Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government's capacity to govern.
<i>Difficulties in agenda management were limited to the sector and managed by HEFCE, rather than government. Therefore, there was no effect on capacity to govern.</i>				
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government.	Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded. 	Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has prompted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes.	Entire trajectory of government is being compromised.	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government.
<i>The broad direction and values of government were not affected by the CETL initiative, but wider political and economic issues did lead to some considerable refinement of policy direction, through less reliance on state funding and a change of role for HEFCE from funder to regulator. It was not the CETL initiative itself that led to a re-think of policy goals, but a change in government and a global economic crisis.</i>				

#### 8.3.3.1. Effect on government's capacity to govern

Given the project-based approach and time-limited nature of the CETL programme, the initiative did not have sufficient longevity, or a sufficiently high profile beyond the sector, to have any effect on government's capacity to govern. There was very little media attention

given to CETLs, and although there was disquiet in relation to their success, particularly after the publication of the summative report, this was limited to the specialist HE press. CETLs were not a high profile concern for Parliament, with very few questions being raised in the House, and these were not in relation to the success or failure of the initiative.

#### *8.3.3.2 Controlling policy agenda*

The policy agenda was controlled by HEFCE, and there were some difficulties in agenda management, mainly in relation to the contested issues: what was meant by excellence, the award of 'commended' status and the competitive nature of the funding. The legacy of the CETLs, or lack of it, could have proved controversial, given the large funding envelope of £335m and lack of evidence that there had been impact across the sector, but these attracted little attention beyond the specialist press. As the CETL funding came to an end in 2010, the recession bit and a new coalition government came into power. As such, there was a shift in thinking around higher education funding, with the main focus now on passing the cost of HE to students and reduced state funding. Consequently, there was also a shift of focus for HEFCE, from funder to regulator. A focus on the CETL initiative and any possible continued funding was lost amongst these step changes in HE funding.

#### *8.3.3.3 Sustaining the broad values and direction of government*

The broad values and direction of the New Labour government were not harmed by the CETL initiative, but wider political and economic issues had an influencing effect on HEFCE's approach to funding learning and teaching initiatives, as did the change of government in 2010. With a greater focus on fees and less state funding, and a major global recession, there was significantly less money available for such initiatives, and indeed HEFCE did not launch any learning and teaching initiatives on this scale of funding throughout the remainder of its history. In 2013, The HEA commissioned The Centre for Higher Education Research and Evaluation to review HEFCE teaching and learning enhancement initiatives, and it found considerable weaknesses in '*pilot-based beacon project approaches, such as CETLs*' (Trowler et al 2013).

#### *8.3.4 Summary*

The policy *process* can be interpreted as one of conflicted success. The bottom-up policy approach led to some contested issues: defining excellence, competitive funding and a lack of co-ordinated monitoring meant that impact, particularly across the sector, was difficult

to assess. These characteristics were critiqued in both the formative and summative evaluations (Saunders et al 2008, SQW 2011) and in much of the CETL research by Gosling, Hannan and Turner. The project-based approach meant that sustainability of the policy was challenging, and was again one of the main criticisms of the approach in the evaluations. The coalition broadly remained intact through the initiative, although there was evidence of conflict at institutional level, particularly where CETLs came into conflict with prevailing cultures and managers not recognising the work of CETL staff (Gosling and Hannan 2007a). Beyond individual institutions, there was little evidence of cross CETL working and few examples of working with the HEA to embed good practice across the sector. There was evidence, however, of collaboration between CETLs and HEA Subject Centres for those CETLs with a discipline focus, and more than 56% of practitioners and pro-vice-chancellors perceived that the work of the CETLs was being disseminated widely (see Appendix D). There was no evidence that the policy initiative had learnt from other jurisdictions, where commentators observed that project based funding was problematic in learning and teaching enhancement initiatives, and that a lack of national co-ordination, such as that in the USA, made deepening effects difficult to achieve (Brawley et al 2009, Lemmens-Krug 2015).

The *programme* can be interpreted as a durable but conflicted success. The implementation was broadly in line with objectives, although there was a subtle change from the vision of the 2003 White Paper for CETLs to reward existing excellence, which was then out of step with research quality funding, a divide which the initiative was intended to address (HEFCE 2003/36). The project based approach and competitive nature of the funding meant that whilst there was much evidence of CETLs meeting their objectives at a local level, institutional impact was more sporadic and very difficult to evidence at sector level, partly due to the absence of national coordination. As such, the effects were not as widespread, or as deep, as intended and the broader sectoral objectives were not satisfactorily met. There is evidence that individual staff benefited from the initiative, but less evidence that the impact for students went beyond the provision of additional resources. These were also the main findings of the summative evaluation (SQW 2011).

The CETL initiative could be interpreted as a durable *political* success. There were no apparent effects on electoral prospects, but there were wider economic and political events and agendas which impacted significantly on the work of HEFCE, which went beyond the scope of the CETL initiative. These were an economic recession, which led to a tight

squeeze on public funding, and a shift in the HE policy agenda towards higher fees. As such, the role of HEFCE as a funder was reduced. These events led to a rethink of public spending on learning and teaching enhancement, which Gosling sums up best:





*'By 2010...the Government's confidence that public funding could deliver improvements to teaching had completely disappeared...students are no more satisfied with higher education than ten years ago' (Gosling 2013 p.1).*

In returning to the main research question, the application of the McConnell framework the the CETL policy episode suggests that the initiative was a conflicted process success, with some contestation. The programme was also a conflicted success, but durable, with many local successes, although less evidence of a sectoral success. The political success of the episode was durable, but overtaken by other events, such as a global recession, which led to shift in the political HE agenda away from funding learning and teaching enhancement.

## 8.4 Lifelong Learning Networks – mapping the policy episode to the framework

### 8.4.1 Policy as process

Table 22 – POLICY AS PROCESS (LLNs)

<b>Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Process success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Process failure</b>
Preserving government policy goals and instruments.	Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements. 	Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed.	Government's goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance.	Termination of Government policy goals and instruments.
<i>The policy goals were retained throughout the period with no change to the goal of widening participation to HE through vocational progression. The policy instrument was subject to few refinements, other than a widening of the programme beyond pilot LLNs and HEFCE overlooking the original funding requirement for all LLNs to engage with research intensive HEIs. However, the LLN initiative was operating in an overcrowded and constantly changing policy domain.</i>				
Conferring legitimacy on a policy. 	Some challenges to legitimacy, but of little or no lasting effect.	Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long term.	Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy.	Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy.
<i>There were no challenges to the legitimacy of the policy, as it sat well within government's goal to increase HE participation to HE, following the principles of the Wisconsin model.</i>				
Building a sustainable coalition.	Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement. 	Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation.	Coalition on the brink of falling apart.	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition.
<i>The clear support from government and HEFCE and the involvement of almost fully national, sector wide coverage and the engagement of nearly 33,000 staff in LLN activities show evidence of a sustainable coalition. However, there is some evidence of lack of full engagement on behalf of some elements of the sector, particularly research intensive institutions. The impact of higher fees policy led to some elements of competition between FEC and HEI partners.</i>				
Symbolising innovation and influence.	Not ground-breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive. 	Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading (at times) to criticisms from both progressives and conservatives.	Appearance of being out of touch with viable alternative solutions.	Symbolising outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues.
<i>The policy was not ground breaking in its innovation, since it was born out of a regard for the USA system in public universities and there are examples of successful progression arrangements in several European and non-European countries. However, for the English system, it was progressive in being a novel attempt to instigate a sector wide policy to put vocational progression on a par with academic progression.</i>				



#### *8.4.1.1 Preserving government policy goals and instruments*

The policy goal, widening participation to higher education through the aligning of vocational and academic qualifications, and creation of accessible pathways for vocational learners, was preserved throughout the period and there were no significant amendments to the policy goals.

The LLN initiative, as the policy instrument, was not subject to any significant changes throughout the period, other than a widening of the programme, such that instead of 'pilot' LLNs, there were 30 networks established, and a significant proportion of the SDF (Strategic Development Fund), £105m, was used to fund the networks. What was noteworthy about the LLN initiative was that, although it was subject to little change, there was considerable impact from other policy goals introduced and modified over the course of the programme. The publication of the 2004 Tomlinson Review and the development of the 14 – 19 qualifications framework, the development of higher apprenticeships and the 2004 Schwartz Review of Admissions, all had some impact on the policy goal of enabling progression to higher education from vocational education. In 2007, following the Leitch Review of Skills, government refocused its attention on employer engagement, such that this became a key strand of activity for many LLNs that were not in their original propositions. The introduction of variable fees as a result of the 2004 Higher Education Act created different and increasing competitions between FECs and HEIs, thus putting pressure on the sustainability of LLN partnerships, particularly with the research intensive institutions. Indeed, it had originally been a condition of grant that all LLNs engaged with at least one research intensive HEI, although this did not come to fruition in some cases. As Watson (2005) observed, LLNs had to operate in an already crowded field (p.187) in vocational progression and widening participation, as is evidenced by the somewhat complex diagram of organisational relationships in Figure 12 (Chapter 7, p.207). The capacity for the LLN initiative to survive throughout its funding period in the face of these other competing and influencing policy agendas and initiatives demonstrates its agility.

#### *8.4.1.2 Conferring legitimacy on the policy*

The policy, although originated by Sir Howard Newby within HEFCE, sat well within government goals to increase participation in higher education to 50% by 2010, and was endorsed by the HEFCE Board. Newby had already had first-hand experience of the Wisconsin model in the USA (Newby 2005b), which had proved successful in enabling academic and vocational learners' access to shared resources and pathways to higher

education. Newby argued that an approach which brought further and higher educational institutions together in partnership was necessary if the 50% target was to be achieved, through both increasing and widening participation. It is noteworthy that, unlike the other two case studies, there was no formal consultation with the sector on the LLN initiative, and so the sector had little opportunity to formally challenge the programme, other than through discussions with the HEFCE regional consultants, who were charged with developing the LLNs in partnership with institutions. This combination of factors meant that there were no public challenges to the legitimacy of the episode.

#### *8.4.1.3 Building a sustainable coalition*

The LLN initiative had the full support of government and HEFCE, since it met the conditions for increasing participation to HE as outlined in Section 8.4.1.2 (p.269) above. Although the policy episode was badged by HEFCE as being a bottom-up approach to ensure the engagement of the sector, this episode was unusual in being driven, not by institutions themselves, but by HEFCE regional consultants working with FECs and HEIs to develop the business plan and targets for the LLNs. As such, they were in a position to both influence the institutions' commitment to the initiative and provide a critical link between HEFCE and institutions that was lacking to a large extent in the other case studies. As such, and since there was near national LLN coverage with the involvement of 120 HEIs and 300 FECs, and almost 33,000 staff engaged across the sector with LLNs, it could be argued that the sector fully endorsed the policy.

The formation of the National Forum, as an entity which helped to sustain the coalition and share good practice, was also recognised as a worthwhile addition to the initiative, and was credited with enabling LLNs to cope with the shifting vocational and skills policy environments. The National Forum was commended by SQW (2010) in the summative evaluation as good practice for all such policy initiatives. A Foundation Forward research report into the importance of LLNs for apprenticeships also recognised the National Forum for encouraging LLNs to work together (FdF 2009 p.21). Although there was much praise for the National Forum, there was criticism, in both the formative and summative evaluations and Wise & Shaw (2011) that the provision of IAG and PAs were patchy across the networks, and would have benefited from national co-ordination. Equally, a perceived lack of national co-ordination by HEFCE was a key criticism of the summative evaluation (SQW 2010).

Despite the appearance of a strong coalition, the extent to which some parts of the sector were fully engaged could be challenged. For example, the summative evaluation found that buy-in from post-92 institutions was stronger, and some partners, particularly research-intensive HEIs, were not so pro-active in the networks. This is evidenced by only 10% of the LLN-engaged learners being registered at research intensive institutions. The introduction of higher fees, as a result of the 2004 White Paper, may also have had an effect on the coalition, particularly from the research intensive institutions, with many commentators expressing concern that higher fees might increase the competition between FECs and HEIs (Woodfield et al 2013, Newby 2005, Parry 2006).

It was also intended that LLNs should engage with other sector agencies, such as Centres of Vocational Excellence, New Technology Institutes, Aimhigher and The HEA, as well as regional and national organisations such as the SSCs. However, in the event, there appears to have been little engagement, and this strand of activity is not one that receives much attention in either the formative or summative evaluations. Engagement with employers was also a key objective, but both the interim and summative evaluations described such engagement as '*patchy*' (CHERI 2008 p.5), although SQW did observe that '*78.6% of curriculum developments included some form of employer engagement in the design or delivery*' (SQW 2011 p.34).

#### *8.4.1.4 Symbolising innovation and influence*




Vocational transition to HE has been a consistent policy theme for many countries and, along with the USA, many non-European countries have progression to HE systems that are 'culturally embedded', such as Singapore, Australia and New Zealand (Watson 2005 p.193). In Europe, it has been EU policy since 2002 to support lifelong learning (Nemeth 2010), although Muller et al (2015) suggest that, for many countries, '*the transition between vocational and academic still needs to be simplified*' (p.530). The models adopted by Nordic countries, such as Finland and Denmark, demonstrate the greater participation rates, although Hungary is perhaps the only other European country to have lifelong learning networks (Nemeth 2010).


Although the LLNs could not be said to be innovative within an international context, they could be described as influential in an English context, and certainly symbolically progressive, since this was an attempt at a new sector-wide partnership initiative between FECs and HEIs to put vocational progression on a par with academic progression. However,

commentators have questioned the extent to which LLNs were sufficient to be able to challenge the existing hierarchy and perception of vocational qualifications in comparison to academic qualifications (Leahy 2013, Watson 2005, Little and Williams 2009).

8.4.2 Policy programme

Table 23 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (LLNs)

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
Programme success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Programme failure
Implementation in line with objectives.	Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations. 	Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems.	Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend.	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives.
<i>Implementation was in line with objectives, and although there were some minor modifications, HEFCE was able to steer and control these through the regional consultants and regular progress reports.</i>				
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls. 	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high-profile instances of failure to produce results.	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
<i>Outcomes were broadly achieved, with much evidence of activity, particularly in curriculum developments, PAs and IAGs. However, the success of partnerships was variable and the timescale for funding did not allow those with weak partnerships to fully embed the work within institutional strategies. The sustainability of the LLNs beyond the funding period was a significant concern. However, the successes were not counterbalanced by substantial controversy.</i>				
Meets policy domain criteria.	Not quite the desired outcome, but sufficiently close to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria. 	Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high-profile examples, eg. on-going wastage when the criterion is efficiency.	A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention; eg. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency.	Clear inability to meet the criteria.
<i>In meeting the policy domain criteria, the LLNs were in a position to fulfil the requirement for a 'step change in vocational progression' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.1) and aid both vocational progression and widening participation and, despite a constantly changing policy environment, many were able to adapt. However, the timescale was not sufficient to show sufficient progress in being an agent for change in social mobility, which might have been achieved with a longer funding period.</i>				

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
Programme success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Programme failure
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.	Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended. 	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering.	Damaging a particular target group.
<p><i>There were some benefits for the target group, with vocational progression enabled for some learners. However, the learner constituency characteristics point to a failure to achieve widening participation to a great extent. This might have been mitigated by a longer, or more sustainable, funding period.</i></p>				

#### 8.4.2.1 Implementation in line with objectives

The implementation of the LLNs initiative was in line with that originally intended. HEFCE undertook a bottom-up approach, with loose objectives and no prescribed organisational structure and, initially at least, few monitoring and accountability requirements. Although implementation was in line with the objectives, this bottom-up approach was an area of contestation for the initiative, since both the interim and summative evaluations, and others such as Leahy (2013), questioned whether the approach provided sufficient direction on the policy instrument.

Whether this approach was truly bottom-up is open to debate, given the close involvement of the HEFCE regional consultants in the business plans of LLNs, and HEFCE's own assessment of sector impact (HEFCE 2007), where they conclude that the initiative was not genuinely bottom-up as there was an on-going process of negotiation between policy makers and providers. As such, HEFCE was better able to control implementation in line with the objectives, and indeed did make some minor modifications, such as the implementation of stronger monitoring requirements as a result of the recommendations of the interim evaluation, and improved identification and tracking of LLN learners from 2009-10 built into HESA data collections. The regular progress reports from HEFCE also allowed them to provide a greater steer to the LLNs, such as the 2008 report to guide LLNs towards greater employer engagement as a result of a change of focus in other policy domains.

#### 8.4.2.2 Achievement of desired outcomes

The desired outcomes, which were deliberately loose, are set out in Section 7.2.5.1 (p.209). In achieving the objectives, it is clear that LLNs were engaged in a very substantial amount of activity, in terms of the number of curriculum developments, PAs and IAG engagements across a large number of institutions, as set out in Table 14, Chapter 7 (p.214). As such, on the basis of the range and scale of activities, it could be argued that LLNs were successful in providing *'support for learners on vocational pathways* and *'developing the curriculum to facilitate progression'* (objectives 2 and 4).

However, much of the criticism in the evaluations, and from other commentators, centred around the extent to which LLNs focussed on 'quick wins' in order to show progress within the funding period, and the extent to which their own monitoring reports focussed on the descriptive, rather than a thorough evaluation of the impact and deepening effects of their work. In addition, there was some disquiet, from LLNs, institutions and through the evaluations, that the short-term project nature of the funding meant that the LLNs were not sufficiently able to embed their activities so that they were sustainable beyond the funding.

Whilst there was a considerable amount of IAG (Information and Guidance) activity, with 200,000 paper-based IAG resources, 15,000 1:1s, 530,000 group support activities, 900,000 website hits and 8,528 PAs (Progression Agreement) in place, the extent to which LLNs were able to *'bring greater clarity, coherence and certainty to progression opportunities'* (objective 3) was questionable. The summative evaluation and other commentators observed the variable quality of some of the progression agreements, and that the most common bi-lateral agreements actually restricted the range of progression opportunities, and many of the professional subjects, such as Law, were not available to vocational learners (May et al 2012, Woodfield et al 2013). Thus, LLNs' ability to meet objective 6, *'locate the progression strategy within a commitment to lifelong learning, ensuring that learners have access to a range of progression opportunities so that they can move between different kinds of vocational and academic programmes as their interest, needs and abilities develop'* is called into question.

One of the main difficulties with PAs was reviewing and establishing changes to admissions policies and procedures within institutions, and as Betts and Burrell (2011) observed, the bureaucracy involved in the development of PAs was a challenge to LLNs, partners, and particularly employers, and thus was not clearly articulated for learners. A further concern,

raised in both evaluations, was the extent to which institutions were sufficiently engaged at a senior level to embed the activities into their strategies beyond the funding period, particularly given the time and money required to support IAG.

Partnerships were praised for '*combining the strengths of a number of diverse institutions*' (objective 1) and there was support for the extent to which staff in institutions had sought to understand their partners and their courses. However, the evidence suggested that this was variable across the networks, particularly in regard to the engagement of some of the research intensive institutions, as noted above. Woodfield et al (2013) also observed that the end of the funding period would result in the breakup of many of the networks, as activities were not fully embedded.

It is questionable whether the sector was fully engaged, despite the national coverage of institutions, and all but a few being involved in at least one network. Evidence suggests that partnerships were often successful as a result of individuals rather than institutions and that, in some cases, HEI involvement was based on the financial incentive of ASNs rather than a genuine desire to put vocational progression on a par with academic progression. In addition, policy changes in relation to the skills agenda resulted in LLNs developing a wider range of work, often far beyond their original business plans, which led to some disconnect between LLNs, their partners and other stakeholders, such as employers.

#### *8.4.2.3 Meeting policy domain criteria*

HEFCE had advocated LLNs as being a catalyst for fulfilling a '*step change in vocational progression*' (HEFCE 12/2004 p.1) and helping government to achieve its aim of a 50% participation rate in higher education. The policy initiative was able to meet the policy domain criteria in this regard, to some extent through considerable activity in the development of curriculum, PAs and IAG. However, the short-term funding approach, which came in for much criticism, meant that LLNs were not able to show sufficient progress towards meeting the longer term aim of increasing social mobility or embedding culture change and, as May et al (2012) observed, the LLNs helped to enable progression for only a *small* number of students.

#### 8.4.2.4 Creating benefit to the target group

The data available reveals that in 2007-08, the profile of LLN learners was 64% female, 83% white, 40% 19 or younger and 12% from POLAR quintile 1. What is striking about this profile is that there was less than 1% change between this and the previous year. This profile also did not differ hugely from the profile of other undergraduate students, bringing into question the extent to which LLNs were able to *widen* participation as well as increase it.

The data does also reveal that the number of LLN learners entering HE with vocational qualifications rose, from 38% in 2006-07 to 46% by 2008-09 but, of the 5,880 LLN flagged learners, 28% were registered for first degrees and 39% for FDs. It is not possible to ascertain whether the 39% of FD students would have registered without the aid of the LLN or whether the Foundation Degree policy itself influenced them. The data also reveals that there was a significantly high proportion of LLN flagged learners who were entering with 'A' level qualifications, or already held HE level qualifications, and thus about a third of LLN students were outside the target group. This brings into question the extent to which LLNs had achieved objective 5, *value vocational learning outcomes and provide opportunities for vocational learners to build on earlier learning*'. Perhaps a more striking figure is that the 5,880 LLN flagged learners represented just 0.7% of the total undergraduate population for that year.



The analysis of this data led SQW to conclude that the LLNs were making a small, although still significant, contribution to vocational learning. As such, LLNs did create benefits for *some* of the target group, but these were only partial, and not as deep or widespread as intended.

Further, a number of observers question the extent to which LLNs were in a position to change the prevailing hierarchy of vocational and academic qualifications and thus enhance social mobility in such a short timescale (Watson 2005, Leahy 2013). It has been observed, and highlighted by the summative evaluation, that a longer timescale, or different funding regime, might have been beneficial in enabling LLNs to meet their social mobility objectives more fully.



### 8.4.3 Policy as politics

Table 24 – POLICY AS POLITICS (LLNs)

<b>Policy as politics: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<i>Political success</i>	<i>Durable success</i>	<i>Conflicted success</i>	<i>Precarious success</i>	<i>Political failure</i>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders.	Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks.	Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working both for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure.	Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability.	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit.
<i>No apparent effect on electoral prospects.</i>				
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing.	Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed. 	Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected.	Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue.	Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government's capacity to govern.
<i>The changing policy environment throughout the timescale of the LLN initiative demonstrates some difficulty in managing the agenda, but LLNs demonstrated remarkable resilience in adapting to changing agendas, perhaps as a result of HEFCE's agenda management through regular reports and the engagement of regional consultants with the sector.</i>				
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government. 	Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded.	Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has prompted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes.	Entire trajectory of government is being compromised.	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government.
<i>The broad direction of government in terms of meeting the 50% participation in HE target and widening participation agenda was sustained throughout the period.</i>				

#### 8.4.3.1 Effect on government's capacity to govern

There is no evidence to suggest that the LLN initiative damaged the electoral prospects of government, perhaps because government and HEFCE were able to demonstrate that the initiative represented a logical and legitimate justification for raising the status of vocational qualifications and widening participation in HE, since this was not dissimilar to models that had been adopted in many progressive countries. Equally, there appeared to be a sustainable coalition that represented almost the entire sector.

#### *8.4.3.2 Controlling policy agenda*

The policy environment was somewhat volatile throughout the LLN initiative, with a new 14-19 qualifications framework and a re-focus on employer engagement and advanced apprenticeships following the Leitch Review of Skills (2006). The LLN initiative was for the most part robust and adaptable to the fluctuations in other policy realms, perhaps because HEFCE was quite adept at managing the policy agenda through minor modifications and regular communications with the LLNs through progress reports, regional consultant engagement and the work of the National Forum.

#### *8.4.3.3 Sustaining the broad values and direction of government*

The broad values and direction of government were not harmed by the LLN initiative. Indeed, despite considerable fluctuation in the policy agendas for vocational education and skills, the government remained broadly on an upwards trajectory to meet the 50% participation in HE by 2010, rising from 42% in 2006-07 to 46% in 2010-11 and 49% in 2011-12 (although to date 50% has not quite been achieved) (source DfE SFR4/2017). Although the LLNs cannot claim to have been entirely responsible for this rise, they did make a contribution to a small number of learners.

#### *8.4.4 Summary*

The LLN policy *process* can be described as a durable success, despite operating in a complex and crowded vocational and skills policy environment during its lifetime, as demonstrated in Figure 12 (Chapter 7, p.207). Unusually, there was no formal consultation with the sector on the initiative, with consultation taking place ‘on the ground’ between HEFCE consultants and LLN partner organisations. Thus, contested issues could be resolved at a local level. HEFCE was deliberate in designing a bottom-up initiative with loose objectives, with little requirement initially for monitoring and accountability, as stated in the original circular to institutions (HEFCE 12/2004). However, despite the bottom-up approach, there was a strong connection between policy makers and implementations, as HEFCE regional consultants were critically engaged with partner institutions in designing the business plans for LLNs. The initiative, whilst not wholly innovative, was legitimised by echoing to an extent the progression approach taken in the USA in the Wisconsin model of access to HE, as articulated by Newby (2005a) in his Colin Bell Memorial Lecture, and many other countries that sought to align vocational and academic qualifications (Muller et al 2015, Watson 2005). The policy had broad support and, at face value, significant support

from across the sector, with almost national coverage. A significant number of staff were shown to have engaged with the LLNs, and many HEIs and FECs had some level of engagement, as concluded in the summative evaluation (2005). However, there is evidence that some elements of the sector were not fully engaged, such as some of the research intensive institutions, as noted in HEFCE's own summary reports and the summative evaluation (HEFCE 2009, HEFCE2009/29, SQW 2010).

The LLN *programme* was broadly a durable success, since its implementation remained in line with objectives, through HEFCE's engagement and communication with LLNs through regular progress reports, which allowed it to control the policy agenda to an extent. The objectives were broadly achieved, particularly in terms of the large number of activities and staff involved, with the summative evaluation finding that 39,000 institutional staff had engaged with LLN activities. However, the short-term nature of the funding meant that these were not as deep or as widespread as they might have been had a different funding approach been maintained, and this was one of the main criticisms of the summative evaluation (SQW 2010). There was some benefit to the target group, although the number of learners gaining from the initiative was small, with 5,880 LLN flagged learners representing just 0.7% of total undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year population. The impact on social mobility was less obvious, as observed by Little and Williams (2009), but might have improved with more time.

The LLN initiative could be interpreted as a durable *political* success. The policy had no effect on electoral prospects and HEFCE's close engagement allowed it to manage any difficulties in agenda management, despite the complex and changing policy environment. The LLN made a contribution, albeit small, to the broad values and direction of government in its aim to raise the participation rate to 50%.

Returning to the main research question, the application of the McConnell framework to the LLN initiative suggests that the LLNs were a durable success, in part due to a strong coalition and relationship between policy-makers and policy-implementers. The programme too was a durable success, with a large number of participants and some success for students. This might have been more widespread had there been longer term funding. The politics was equally a durable success, with government being able to control the agenda management, despite a turbulent policy arena.

## 8.5 Discussion: Characteristics, similarities, differences and policy learning

In this section, I seek to address the first supplementary research question, *'Does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in higher education?'*

Policy learning in this context is understood to be the way in which government uses knowledge of policy processes, programmes and outcomes to view problems and solutions to inform future policy decisions (IPP 2018), and policy learning completes the policy cycle, since it uses evaluation of previous policy episodes to inform future policy work. The work of May (1992) is particularly pertinent to this study, where he considers that instrumental, societal and political aspects of a policy can be operationalised, such that it is possible to learn lessons about the validity of the policy. There are some key aspects of his criteria on policy learning that are useful to this study, since they strongly reflect the process, programme and political dimension of the McConnell (2010) framework for articulating policy success and failure. Indeed, May argues that examining policy successes and failures is useful for formulating potential conditions for future success:

*'policy failures are useful to consider since failure serves as a trigger for considering policy redesign and as a potential occasion for policy learning... policy success might be said to provide a stronger basis for learning by making it possible to trace conditions for success'* (May 1992 p.341).

In articulating a position of success and failure in relation to each of the case studies above, I have examined each criterion on the policy process, programme and politics framework and sought to identify characteristics that were common between the case studies, or distinctly different. I conclude that there are five broad themes that arise from my interpretations, in relation to policy process and programme, which benefit further consideration. As well as articulating these broad themes, I have also considered where on the spectrum of success to failure I consider each of these to lie in relation to each case study, to ascertain whether there are lessons to be learned for either those elements that were a success, or a failure, in relation to policy learning. Then, using May's (1992) criteria for policy learning as a guide, I consider how lessons learned might be useful for future policy-making. May concludes that by focussing on particular aspects of policy instruments, or implementation design, it is possible to articulate an understanding of the source of policy failure, and how the policy instrument and design could be improved for

*instrumental learning*, which he describes as entailing ‘*new understandings about the viability of policy interventions or implementation design*’ (May 1992 p.335). Equally, focussing on the scope of the policy and its goals can help to change expectations or re-define goals, leading to *social policy learning*, which he describes as entailing ‘*a new or reaffirmation social construction of a policy by policy elites of a given policy domain*’ (May 1992 p.337). An examination of the political feasibility and policy processes can lead to *political learning*, which May describes as different to instrumental or social policy learning, since it

*‘is concerned with lessons about manoeuvring within and manipulation of policy processes in order to advance an idea or problem.... Political learning takes place within advocacy coalitions, leading to more sophisticated advocacy of particular proposals or problems’* (May 1992 p.340).

These aspects are fully demonstrated in Chapter 2, Table 4 (p.53). In this section, I will consider each of the five themes in turn, focussing firstly on the similarities and differences between each case study in relation to the theme and then, in examining aspects of instrumental, social or political learning, articulate possible future policy learning in relation to each theme.

It is important to note that each theme is not discrete, and there are strong connections between them, so some cross-referencing between the sections is necessary.

### **8.5.1 Theme 1: Enabling strong and sustainable coalitions (process)**

In all three case studies, the establishment of a sustainable coalition was vital to the success of the initiative. This relates not just to ‘who was on board’ but also a consideration of the relationship between the stakeholders within the policy context, and in accommodating each other’s prevailing cultures.

The e-University was a failure in terms of not establishing a coalition to enable the success of the initiative. It was the first time that HEFCE had engaged in a public-private enterprise on such a scale, and the expectation that it was possible to impose commercial protocols and culture on a publicly funded venture was perhaps naïve, as was evidenced by the controversy of the bonuses paid to UKeU’s directors. Although HEFCE believed that it had the support of the HE sector, with all but four HEIs signing up to HoldCo, in fact there was little commitment required from institutions, since there was no upfront requirement for engagement other than a £1 fee. Indeed, the HEI element of the coalition failed, in part due

to the reliance on individuals within institutions to carry the initiative forward, rather than having the strategic support of senior management and, in the end, due to the withdrawal of many institutions from HoldCo towards the end of the initiative. The private sector partnerships failed to come to fruition, perhaps because timescales for expressions of interest were so short, but also there was a lack of confidence in the venture itself, despite the PwC business model and its level of confidence in the initiative. The biggest failing in establishing a workable coalition related to the structure between the public-private organisations, HEFCE, HoldCo and UKeU. The complex organisational requirement to separate HEFCE from UKeU meant that HEFCE was one step removed from the agenda management, and thus it was unable to control the objectives and desired outcomes, as evidenced by UKeU's divergence from the business plan. The target group (both domestic students and international students) was, in my view, an important part of the coalition and, in the case of the e-University, UKeU failed to understand its target groups, notably ignoring a large part of the policy goal for enabling social inclusion. This led to a failure to benefit the target groups.

The CETLs had a conflicted success in establishing a coalition. Unlike the e-University and LLNs, the initiative did not require a formal level of engagement with either the private or FE sectors, and so it did not require an understanding of diverse cultural contexts. This should have made the process of establishing a coalition easier, and indeed the coalition *within* each CETL was evidently strong, but there were a number of process issues which resulted in the CETLs garnering conflicted success. HEFCE chose to adopt a competitive approach to the policy process, which resulted in some contested issues, particularly in relation to concerns that those institutions without a CETL would be disadvantaged. The competitive nature of the funding also meant that CETLs remained relatively insular to their institution and, although there were many instances of external engagement, the notion of a 'CETL network' did not come to fruition. Unlike the LLNs, which were praised for having a National Forum to share good practice across the sector, there was no national co-ordination of the CETLs, for which HEFCE was criticised, and the resultant impact across the sector was sporadic. Indeed, the summative evaluation (SQW 2011) concluded that it was difficult to assess CETLs' impact on genuine sectoral change in raising the profile of learning and teaching in line with research, which had been a key objective. One of the other issues to arise from the CETLs was related to engagement by senior management in institutions, which was a common theme throughout all three case studies. It was observed in each case that where elements of success could be demonstrated, be it the development of

e-learning programmes, devising learning toolkits with CETL funding or engaging with FEC partners in understanding vocational admissions in the LLNs, this was often through the commitment of individuals or groups of individuals, rather than as a strategic commitment to the initiative at institutional level. This was particularly noticeable in some CETLs, where the units were often marginalised within disciplines, did not fit within the prevailing culture of the institution, or were not valued by members of staffs' line managers. Their limited power to instigate change within the institution impacted on their ability to influence culture, for example in changing HR strategies such that learning and teaching was as equally valued as research in progression strategies, and success in this area was sporadic. Indeed, the success of the CETLs was mostly observed at the level of individual staff.

The formation of a coalition for the LLNs was a durable success and, perhaps, the most successful of the three episodes, despite the complexities of partnership arrangements between different sectors with different cultures: HEIs, FECs, employers and other agencies such as the HEA and SSCs. The LLNs also had to work within a crowded and complex policy environment, which involved policy realms outside of HE, which was not so evident for the other policy episodes. Although not all of these partnership relationships were completely successful (for example, the engagement with the HEA was limited and the engagement of the research intensive universities was variable), there was, however, almost national coverage of FEC/HEIs and engagement of 33,000 individual staff. Despite the policy process being labelled by HEFCE as bottom-up, the drive came not from institutions, but from HEFCE regional consultants, who worked with partners in the coalition to enable and develop the LLNs. Perhaps their engagement with the sectors and their strong links with, and knowledge of, the policy initiator, HEFCE (not observed so strongly in the e-University or CETLs), meant that it was easier to maintain the coalition and manage the policy agenda, which was particularly important in the changing policy environment. The summative evaluation also praised the work of the LLN National Forum, which it saw as instrumental in assisting with high levels of cross LLN working, and so was also able to maintain the coalition. Although the LLNs were not required to hold formal partnership arrangements with the private sector, unlike the e-University, they were required to engage in significant collaboration with employers. It was observed that this was inconsistent across the networks, but nevertheless 77.5% of new courses established by LLNs had some level of employer engagement, and thus engagement with the private sector that had proved so difficult to achieve in the e-University initiative.

### 8.5.1.1 Policy learning

The above analysis leads me to the conclusion that LLNs, which had complex coalition relationships across sectors with diverse cultures and an evolving policy environment, were more successful in building a coalition than the e-University, or more particularly the CETLs, where maintaining the coalition should have been relatively straightforward. In considering what *instrumental* policy learning (as described in the introduction to Section 8.5, p.280) there may be, it is important to focus on the design of the policy instrument in each case, and in particular on the organisational structures.

The organisational structure for the e-University was the point of failure, because HEFCE, as the policy initiator, was too far removed from the implementation (by UKeU) to control the agenda management and thus maintain a strong coalition. In the CETLs, the coalition was more fragmented, influenced by the competitive nature of the funding, and thus not every institution had a CETL connection; some CETLs sat uneasily within their institutional structures and thus successes tended to be at the level of the individual, and the lack of supportive national coordination meant that it was much more difficult to enable a sectoral coalition and thus enable change. In the case of the LLNs, the organisational structure entailed a stronger connection between the coalition and HEFCE through the HEFCE regional consultants, who had more ownership of the LLN business plans. The LLNs also benefited from the National Forum, which was well placed to maintain a strong coalition, since it was able to engage with all the LLNs and share good practice between them through publications and networking events.

The engagement of the institution at a senior level is also a potential point of instrumental failure. In all three episodes, the engagement of senior management at a strategic level appeared to be weak, and there was a strong reliance on individuals. However, senior management should be an integral part of the coalition, particularly to ensure that individuals not only have sufficient purchase to change the hearts and minds of other individuals within the institution, but also the tools to initiate a step change within institutional cultures and structures. The LLNs may have been more successful in this regard than the CETLs, because the HEFCE regional consultants would most likely have been in communication with those at a senior level.

The policy design in terms of the competitive approach to policy episodes was also a potential point of failure in sustaining a strong coalition. This is evident in the e-University, where institutions had to bid for funds and ASNs, and some institutions were concerned



that the e-University brand might be detrimental to their own quality brand. It is also evident in the CETLs where there was much concern that there might be reputational damage for institutions that were not awarded a CETL. Indeed, in both cases it was the view of the sector at the consultation stage that the initiatives should benefit all institutions. The e-University did not have sufficient longevity to determine any causal effects, but the competitive element to the CETL initiative resulted in less robust impact across the sector, as it was difficult to ascertain the impact on institutions that did not have a CETL. The LLNs, on the other hand, were not competitive and a good many HEIs and FECs were part of at least one LLN and, as such, maintaining a coalition across the whole sector was easier to achieve.

For future policy making, to establish and maintain a strong coalition, instrumental learning from this research project suggests that the policy design needs to be non-competitive, such that all institutions can benefit from the outset, which may lead to greater deepening effects across the sector. The organisational structure needs to be clear, such that the policy initiator maintains a strong link to the coalition and therefore ownership of the agenda. This may be through the establishment of a national co-ordinating organisation, on which the policy initiator has sufficient representation to control the agenda management. The engagement of senior management of institutions is also a critical part of the coalition, such that the policy is a part of the strategic thinking of the institution, not the responsibility of individuals, in order to provide sufficient purchase to embed change. To maintain engagement at a strategic level, policy-makers could introduce inducements or penalties for engagement or non-engagement with the policy as a condition of funding. This might avoid accusations of 'take the money and run', such as that levelled at institutions with a CETL (Ramsden 2012). There is an element of *social* policy learning (described in Section 8.5, p.280) in this regard, where institutions need to have an improved understanding of the causal relationships between the policy and their actions, such that the deepening effects of a policy can be observed at institutional and sectoral level.

### *8.5.2 Theme 2: The trajectory of policy-making between policy-makers and implementers (process)*

A top-down or bottom-up approach, whereby policy-makers might either impose the policy instrument (top-down), or loosely define it such that the policy evolves with implementation (bottom-up) could be described as the trajectory of policy-making. This trajectory is a key consideration in the policy process and, for each of these case studies,

the approach taken was influential in its success or failure. The e-University was the most 'top-down' of the initiatives, in which there was a clear business plan, and targets, set by HEFCE, for programmes to be developed, along with the e-China initiative. Institutions were able to bid for pre-determined development funds and for ASNs. Like the majority of HEFCE initiatives, there was a consultation process with HEIs, resulting in some changes to the initiative. The most notable change was the move from an exclusive 'elite' approach in which only a select number of institutions were involved, to a much more inclusive project for all institutions. Despite the top-down approach, the organisational structure with HoldCo and UKeU resulted in HEFCE having very hands-off engagement with the initiative, as they were removed from the implementation of the programme. Thus, UKeU was able to divert from the planned targets and objectives, resulting in a failure of the policy process, and hence the programme, in meeting its objectives or delivering to the target group.

The CETL initiative was a 'bottom-up' approach, where HEFCE was deliberately hands-off, with very loose definitions for what was meant by excellence and, whilst there was some guidance on the 'characteristics' of a CETL, proposed organisational structures were not defined. There was some guidance on size and shape of the CETL in terms of funding against the size of the student population, but little guidance on how the funding should be spent, other than a condition of grant to spend the capital funding within the first two years. There was consultation with the sector, which led to some contested issues being resolved, such as the abandonment of the 'commended' status. However, the loose definition of excellence meant that both bidders and the judging panel were able to impose their own value judgments of excellence on the award of CETLs, which was one of the most contested issues of the episode. Whilst the hands-off approach did allow the CETLs freedom to set up their own structures and control their internal and external activities, the lack of any nationally co-ordinated network meant that work beyond the CETLs was difficult to assess, particularly in non-CETL institutions, and thus sectoral change was less demonstrable. Whilst there was much evidence of success for individual staff as a target group, the evidence for students is less evidenced beyond the provision of additional resources. As such, the bottom-up approach led to a conflicted success for the policy process.

The LLN initiative was equally a bottom-up approach. There were no formal organisational structures proposed and the objectives for LLNs were kept fairly loose, although it could be argued that they were more defined than the CETLs, with some clear expectations set out

in the objectives. Unlike the other two episodes, the funding envelope was not defined, which meant the LLNs could be any size and shape, and there was no formal consultation process. However, despite formally being a bottom-up approach, HEFCE actually had greater control of the LLN initiative than the other two case studies. The formation of the LLNs was driven by the HEFCE regional consultants in consultation with the sector, so contested issues could be dealt with in a more informal manner at a local level. Despite an initial lack of close monitoring, LLNs were in the end required to complete annual monitoring templates, and HEFCE produced regular progress reports, which gave it the opportunity to provide greater guidance to the LLNs and the sector, particularly as other impacting policy realms evolved. The creation of the National Forum also meant that there was greater opportunity to control dissemination across the sector. As such, the LLN programme was better able to deliver on its objectives and benefit the target group (the limitations of which are discussed in 8.5.5 below) at both the level of the LLN and the sector, and thus was a durable success.

#### *8.5.2.1 Policy learning*

The discussion on the policy approach suggests that there is *instrumental* policy learning in considering the type of policy design. A top-down policy approach does not necessarily guarantee that policy-makers have sufficient control of the policy and other factors, particularly where it is structurally removed from the implementation, as this can have an effect on how the programme is delivered, as was the case with the e-University. Equally, a true bottom-up approach, where objectives are loosely defined, can leave the policy open to areas of contestation and institutions looking inwards to resolve contested areas, rather than a greater sectoral approach. This leads to objectives being met at a local level, but deepening effects across the sector not being achieved, resulting in conflicted success. Perhaps the most successful approach is one in which organisational structures and objectives remain relatively loose, and activity can be determined by the institutions themselves, but there is strong involvement from policy-makers in monitoring progress and controlling the policy agenda, by providing guidance to institutions on steering progress towards the desired outcomes, resulting in policy-makers having greater control over the sectoral impact of the policy. This might still lead to a durable, rather than an outright success, but policy-makers will have had greater influence over engaging institutions towards that success.

### *8.5.3 Theme 3: Approaches to ensure sustainability (programme)*

The long-term sustainability of a policy initiative is a key part of the programme design, if it is to be a worthy use of public funds, and able to endure a deepening effect across the sector. The e-University was the only one of the policy episodes in which the long term sustainability of the initiative was fully articulated by HEFCE, through the business model, which expected the initiative to be self-sustaining within 5-6 years, funded through student fees and with a small element of public funding through ASNs. What little public funding there was came in the form of development funding for programmes, and ASNs to support the social mobility aims of the initiative. In the event, the self-sustaining goals of the business model were not sustainable, but the failures were due not to the financial model itself, but to significant failings in the policy process and delivery of the programme. It is noteworthy that several witnesses to the Select Committee suggested that the final closedown of UKeU was too hurried, and that it might have been financially sustainable given more time.

Both the CETL and LLN initiatives were financed by time limited, project funding, although the significant difference was that CETL's funding envelope was set at £335m over 5 years, but the LLNs had no defined limit, as HEFCE did not want to limit LLN's plans; in the end, £105m of the SDF was spent over 6 years on LLNs. One difference between the two case studies was that LLNs had a small element of recurrent funding, through the allocation of ASNs to either the LLN itself or its partner institutions, although these were cut when public spending cuts were introduced during the 2008 recession. The CETL funding had few restrictions on how the money could be spent, although, crucially, capital spending had to be complete within the first two years. Some CETLs observed in their evaluations that the focus on spending within the first 2 years impacted on how they managed the CETL and its subsequent spending in the remainder of the period. Thus it could be concluded that the way in which funding is allocated and restricted can have a fundamental effect on the way in which the policy episode plays out in institutions.

The time-limited nature of the funding for both the CETLs and LLNs was one of the most contested issues in the evaluations of the episodes. The summative evaluation of the CETLs found that few institutions had a long term commitment to continuing CETLs, with only 20% committing funds to secure their existence beyond the funding period (SQW 2011). For SQW, this was a significant failing of institutions and HEFCE, whom, they argued, had let the legacy of the initiative lie with individuals committed to keeping the work going beyond

funding. As a result, although there was significant CETL activity, the lack of embedding the activity in institutions and the sector meant that the longer term legacy was not sustainable. This resulted in the programme being a durable but conflicted success. Gosling and Turner (2015) suggest that this is a typical weakness of short-term funding projects, that they are relatively powerless, with little purchase to instigate real change in the sector. Trowler et al (2013) in an HEA commissioned review of all HEFCE learning and teaching initiatives, concluded that there was no evidence that project funded initiatives such as CETLs had resulted in culture change across the sector.

Like CETLs, time limited funding for LLNs came in for much criticism in the evaluations, as few institutions had committed to funding beyond the initial funding period. The limited timeframe meant that LLNs tended to work towards 'quick wins' rather than focussing on the longer term need to embed vocational progression in the work of institutions. Like CETLs, the summative evaluation concluded that there had been insufficient focus on the long term sustainability of the LLNs, and although many LLNs had a strategy for continuing in some form or other, it was unrealistic to expect that all LLN activity would be embedded in institutions, and, without continued financial support, there would be an inevitable contraction of activities (SQW 2010). This was particularly problematic for achieving the aim of increasing social mobility, since whilst there had been some success for a small number of students, the effects were not widespread and needed more time to embed across the sector.

An observation that was common across all three episodes was that there was no upfront commitment required by institutions for the funding, or any requirement to commit to the continuation of the initiative at the end of the funding period. John Beaumont (Chief Executive of UKeU) had complained during the Select Committee enquiry into the e-University that institutions had little commitment to HoldCo, with only a £1 upfront payment. Trowler and Bamber (2005) considered that beacon projects like CETLs were '*Christmas Tree*' models of policy making, all shiny lights but with no lasting effect, because institutions were attracted by the large sums of funding involved, but not committed to the initiative in the longer term without funding. Equally, David Kernohan, Associate Editor for WONKHE, speculated that institutions had been attracted to the large sums of money involved, rather than an actual commitment to improving teaching (Kernohan 2015).

#### 8.5.3.1. Policy learning

The discussion on sustainability of the episodes highlights opportunities for both *instrumental* and *social* policy learning. An understanding of the consequences of short term funding policy design illustrates that the end of the funding period is a point of weakness in project-based initiatives, which gives them insufficient purchase to ensure a deepening effect across the sector, resulting in, at best, durable success. This effect is magnified when there is a lack of commitment within institutions at a strategic level to continue funding, and it is left to individuals, as observed with the CETLs. Social learning can be achieved through changed expectations of both the policy-makers and senior management in institutions, in ensuring that there is a commitment to continue beyond the funding period at a strategic level. This might be achieved through time limited project funding, to enable an initiative to get off the ground, and a longer term commitment from policy-makers, with smaller recurrent funding which rewards institutions who continue to progress deepening effects of the initiative across the sector. Institutions might also be required, as a condition of funding, to submit a plan at the bidding stage for how continuation of the project is enabled within their longer terms strategies, to ensure senior management commitment.

#### 8.5.4 Theme 4: The role of monitoring and evaluation to ensure value for money (programme)

Monitoring and evaluation are an important part of the policy programme: to complete the policy cycle; to demonstrate value for money; and for policy learning. Evaluation was not an explicit dimension on the McConnell framework, but it is a key implicit part of it.

The e-University initiative did not require formal monitoring, partly because the business plan produced by PwC meant that there should not have been sufficient reliance on public funds in the medium term to require extensive monitoring, and ASNs allocated to institutions would be monitored through the usual institutional annual monitoring mechanisms. However, UKeU was expected to report to the HEFCE Board, and it was its revision to the business model reported to the HEFCE Board that triggered its closure.

At the outset, both the CETL and LLN initiatives had very few monitoring and accountability requirements, as part of their bottom-up design approach. Gosling and Turner (2015) observed that when the CETLs were first established, the lack of strong accountability was a novel feature of the initiative. Due to the bottom-up approach adopted by HEFCE, both

CETLs and LLNs were expected to be self-monitoring and, in both cases, this approach was met with much criticism. Gosling (2016) noted of the CETLs that HEFCE had an over-reliance on institutions' managerial commitment to oversee the monitoring themselves, but as already observed elsewhere in this chapter, much of the implementation of these initiatives was left to individual staff, and there tended to be a lack of institutional level management. It was noted in Chapter 6 that Ramsden, then of the HEA, said of the CETLs, '*a classic case of weak management that magnified the flaws in policy...HEFCE should have found a way to make institutions accountable, not just to take the money and run*' (Ramsden 2012). However, despite the initial similarities, LLNs did become subject to closer monitoring, after much criticism of the approach by the interim evaluation. HEFCE set up a monitoring template and this was used to produce regular progress reports. This regular monitoring and reporting enabled HEFCE to steer LLNs in particular directions, which was necessary in such a challenging and changing policy environment, as noted in 8.4.2.1 above.

Like many HEFCE initiatives, both CETLs and LLNs were subject to a mid-term formative and an end-of-term summative evaluation, conducted by independent evaluators. In both cases, the evaluations were mostly desk-based activities, with self-evaluations from the centres and networks, and e-questionnaires. Some interviews were conducted, however, usually with centres' directors and senior institutional staff. Some individual CETLs and LLNs were independently evaluated, but this was not widespread. It is noteworthy that evaluating benefit to the target groups was often difficult, particularly in assessing the benefit to students and, in the case of the LLNs, the e-survey to learners resulted in only 269 responses, making it difficult to gauge the impact on learners with any authority.

One other area of commonality is that the self-evaluations from centres and networks for both initiatives came in for a good deal of criticism. They tended to vary in quality and be highly descriptive and one of the keys criticisms of the summative evaluations was that they were not evidence led. In both cases, the summative evaluations concluded that they were challenging to use and it was difficult to both assess value for money and evidence the deepening effects across the sector. In the case of the LLNs, the centres themselves observed that that it was often difficult to evidence LLN learners because the monitoring mechanisms outside of the LLN, in institutions and through UCAS, made it difficult to identify LLN specific learners.

#### *8.5.4.1 Policy learning*

A review of the monitoring and evaluation mechanism in each case gives rise to *instrumental* policy learning with regards to the implementation design. The above analysis has demonstrated that weak monitoring and evaluation design leads to poorly evaluated, insular, self-evaluations and an inability to evaluate both value for money and cultural change across the sector. It has also been observed that a poor response to the formal evaluations by target groups makes it challenging to evaluate impact with authority. SQW, following the summative evaluation of the LLNs, recommended to HEFCE that the design of any such policy initiatives should have time for a full programme of evaluation built in (SQW 2010 p.59). I would suggest that time and funding for a fully articulated and designed evaluation is always built into future initiatives, such that there is an evaluative template which requires regular evidence of meeting targets and objectives, demonstrable benefit to the target group and the impact on the institution. It might be the case that some funding is held back until the full monitoring and evaluation requirements have been met.

Full consideration of the evaluation requirements in advance should also include any system design revisions, to mitigate such instances as observed with the LLN initiative, where existing systems, through UCAS and institutions for monitoring student numbers, made monitoring of LLN learners problematic. In addition, this should be centrally co-ordinated such that the impact of the initiative across the sector as a whole can be evaluated. Regular monitoring would allow refinements to the evaluation to be made during the lifetime of the initiative, which worked well for the LLNs. This will become particularly important in the future, as one of the duties for the OfS under the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) is to monitor and promote value for money as one of the priorities of the regulatory framework.

#### *8.5.5 Theme 5: The role of policy-makers in preserving the policy goals and agenda management (process and politics)*

A key part of the McConnell framework is the success or failure of a policy to retain the broad values of government, and for it to successfully manage the policy agenda. Consideration of how this was achieved in relation to these policy episodes is particularly relevant to this study, since HEFCE held a unique position between the sector and government, and played a pivotal role in all of the case studies. It is noteworthy that in all three cases, despite the large sums of money involved, none received particularly adverse



publicity, beyond the specialist press. Although the e-University was probably the most politically 'hot' episode, in that its failure was the most publicly aired in the form of a Select Committee inquiry and there was much disquiet in relation to the waste of public funds, it actually represented the smallest in value, at almost half the expenditure of the LLNs and only a fifth of the CETLs.

Despite the absolute failure of the e-University policy instrument to deliver the government's broader goals, these were not adversely affected by the policy failure. It could be argued that, although HEFCE was criticised by some for closing down UKeU too quickly and not giving it a chance, HEFCE's quick reaction saved further public funding from being consumed. In addition, the quick turnaround in reviewing its strategy for e-learning, enabling it to appease institutions by putting the remaining £12m into institutionally based e-learning programmes with mixed modes of delivery, may have also contributed to retaining the broader policy goals. In this case, HEFCE was able to control the agenda management, such that it did not damage either the government or its policy goals.

The CETLs are noteworthy for their potential to have become politically hot, since they only partially met the policy goals and domain criteria, and as a result were a conflicted success. Yet, the conflicted success was at a cost equal to the total cost of all other learning and teaching enhancement initiatives at that time. The evidence for these shortcomings at such a cost could have resulted in greater scrutiny, either from government or the media, and indeed Kernohan (2015) questioned why, with hindsight, there was not a select committee inquiry. Part of the reason for CETLs being a conflicted success was HEFCE's policy approach, which left some parts of the process open to contestation, and absence of national co-ordination meant that the effects were modest and mostly local, and there was little evidence of sectoral change. In this case, the bottom-up approach meant that HEFCE was less able to control the agenda management.

The LLN initiative was the episode in which control over the policy goals and agenda management had the potential to be the most problematic, given the volatile and complex policy environment at that time. However, the initiative was able to deliver a durable success, which I would contend was due, in part, to HEFCE's ability to manage the agenda with the LLNs through the regional consultants, regular monitoring and progress reports, in which they were able to steer LLNs through some challenging policy domains impacting on

their work. For example, HEFCE was able to steer LLNs towards greater engagement with employers, as a result of the change in government focus following the Leitch Review of Skills.

#### *8.5.5.1 Policy learning*

An analysis of how the policy agenda was managed in each case offers both *instrumental policy learning* and *political learning* (as articulated in Section 8.5, p.280) opportunities. In instrumental terms, the agenda management is a critical part of the policy process, particularly when the policy environment is complex and volatile, and requires policy-makers to retain some agility over the policy, and steer changes and re-direct quickly to ensure at least a durable success. In process terms, it is helpful to have policy-makers to have advocates 'on the ground' to help manage the policy agenda with the coalition. In the case of the LLNs, the close involvement of HEFCE regional consultants and the National Forum were instrumental in this role. As such, it would be helpful for future higher education policy-makers to establish networks of advocates at the policy design stage.

In terms of political learning, the focus rests with May's (1992) political flexibility, in that policy processes and programmes are sufficiently robust to accommodate changes in government and other policy initiatives which might impact on the likely success of the programme, as was the case with the LLNs. In the case of the e-University, the policy process and the programme were insufficiently successful to accommodate flexibility, primarily due to the weaknesses of the organisational structure and coalition. However, HEFCE was sufficiently aware of the difficulties in the agenda management at the point that UKeU offered a revised business plan (which relied almost entirely on public funds) to close down the initiative and re-direct remaining funds to a revised e-learning policy. As such, this suggests that future policy-makers need to have both a strong relationship with the coalition to enable policy agility and also a close relationship with government, such that they have sufficient purchase to take control of the agenda management when required, to avoid a political disaster.

### *8.6 Discussion: understanding the locus of policy making*

In this section I consider understandings of the locus of HE policy-making as articulated in Chapter 4, Table 9 (p.141), and the lessons learned from the above analysis, to address the

second supplementary research question, *'What can an analysis of HEFCE policy-making reveal about the locus of power in policy-making in higher education?'*

In Chapter 4, I observed that higher education was perhaps unique in having an intermediary body between government and the sector, and in Table 9 (p.141) I articulated how the position of that intermediary body has changed since the inception of UGC in 1919, where higher education policy was 'inside out' (Shattock 2012), with universities determining their own policies and UGC operating as a 'buffer' to mitigate between the potential policy conflicts of universities and government. There was little change in this situation until the 1980s, when there was greater state intervention and UGC's role began to morph into a mediator, as policy-making became more 'outside in' (Shattock 2012), as state funding of the sector continued to increase. With the advent of HEFCE in 1992, the role changed once more to that of 'agent' acting on behalf of government as the funder, where universities had to become more accountable for state funding. Over the next 25 years, HEFCE's position continued to change, from agent and funder to 'broker' between the opposing sides of government and the sector, as successive governments increased accountability, whilst reducing funding, and shifting policy goals towards the marketisation of higher education. In 2010, HEFCE formally became the regulator of higher education, with a much reduced funding role and, upon its demise in 2018, the OfS has become the principle regulator for HE, with a regulatory framework agreed under the Higher Education and Research Act (2017).

Central to this study is the consideration of the locus of policy-making during the HEFCE period, and what this might mean for future higher education policy-making. Successive governments have held neoliberal policy ideals for higher education over the last 25 years, where neoliberalism is understood to refer to a preference for market-orientated policies, driven by strong state orientation towards the market (Mirowski 2014). Such an approach can be observed in HE, with increased marketisation of the sector, moving funding from the state to the consumer, but with notably increased requirements for accountability.

From an analysis of the three case studies, it has been demonstrated that HEFCE played a pivotal role in managing the agenda of policy-making. In all three cases, the impetus seems to have come from HEFCE, and the knowledge and expertise of its chief executives, all of whom had experience of the HE sector. Sir Brian Fender, Chief Executive of HEFCE in 2001, took responsibility for the idea of the e-University, claiming that HEFCE had put forward the idea prior to the spending round, and that it had been subsequently taken up by ministers.

The CETL initiative was initially envisioned in the 2003 White Paper *'The Future of Higher Education'*, but, according to Taggart (2003), HEFCE had already included the idea for CETLs in their 2003 strategic plan, and in fact the White Paper was essentially a copy of HEFCE's plan. In 2003, the Chief Executive of HEFCE, Sir Howard Newby, laid claim to the LLN initiative, announcing it in the 2004 Colin Bell Memorial Lecture.

From the analysis of the case studies against the McConnell framework, it is my view that there is a direct relationship between the involvement of HEFCE in the process, implementation and agenda management, and the success of the policy initiative. For the e-University, the organisational structure removed HEFCE from the process and the programme, resulting in organisational weaknesses in the coalition and the failure of the initiative. It was possibly HEFCE's agenda management in closing down UKeU and diverting the remaining funding to a revised e-learning policy that averted a political failure. The CETLs were a conflicted success, and many of the issues that made it so related to HEFCE's bottom-up approach. This approach meant that its deliberately vague definitions of excellence, together with weak monitoring and accountability processes, left the initiative open to contestation. The competitive nature of the funding and lack of central co-ordination for the initiative meant that its successes were localised and effects were not as deep as intended across the sector. The LLN initiative, although ostensibly bottom-up, actually had the most HEFCE involvement of all three episodes, being driven by HEFCE regional consultants in dialogue with the sector. Despite a complex and changing policy environment, HEFCE's monitoring and regular progress reports meant that it was better able to control the agenda management. Although the LNNs were a durable, rather than an outright, success, this was due to the inability of the programme to sufficiently embed cultural change within the timescale, and so was only able to reach a small number of learners. In my view, this last point represents a generic weakness in the English political system, whereby policy appears to often only be thought of in the medium term, driven by the election of governments and corresponding changes in political parties' agenda manifestos every four to five years, resulting in the funding of such initiatives not being considered over the longer term.

I would argue that HEFCE was not just hugely influential as a policy-maker, but also had at its disposal the power to shape, influence and steer policies in action, and has thus been a key part of Ball's (2006) *'policy context of practice'* (see Chapter 2). This brings the thesis back to Ball's point that policy is not just a legislative moment, and that it is the *agency* of

policy that is important. HEFCE positioned itself such that it was very influential in managing that agency in higher education. In terms of the locus of power for future higher education policy-making, this discussion brings the thesis back to the questions raised in Chapter 4, and the role of the OfS, where the initial plan for OfS was that it '*would not do policy*' (Kernohan 2018), and has not been set up, as Evans (2018) notes, to actively engage with other sector agencies. As such, the locus of power for policy-making would lie with ministers, who, in my view, do not have the time, expertise or purchase to engage with the agency of policy in the context of practice. As such, it will be more difficult for them to actively engage in securing a strong coalition and preserve the policy goals through effective agenda management, which are critical for ensuring policy success, as articulated above.

### *8.7 Discussion: critique of the framework*

In this section, I offer a critique of the theoretical framework, in order to address the final research question, '*to what extent is the chosen theoretical framework sufficient or inadequate in analysing policy success and failure in the context of contemporary theoretical approaches to policy analysis?*', with observations on its appropriateness and limitations in the context of higher education, and relating back to the discussion in Chapter 2 on contemporary understandings of policy and policy analysis.

It is my view that the McConnell framework (2010) has served to provide both a sound methodological approach and a useful operational tool for a systematic examination of the process, programme and politics dimensions of the chosen case studies. The 10-point framework that McConnell suggests to guide researchers in examining particular aspects of policies, as described in Table 5 (p.60), proved useful in devising the codes for seeking out particular aspects of the case studies from the chosen texts. The framework has enabled me to articulate an interpretative position of success and failure along the spectrum of the framework and helped identify that, in all three case studies, aspects of the policy process, programme and politics were more successful than others. This, in turn, has enabled me to identify some distinctions and commonalities from the case studies and, in recognising what aspects were more successful than others, informed a discussion on future policy learning, aided by the work of May (1992) in policy learning.

However, use of the framework has also highlighted some limitations, particularly in relation to contemporary understandings of policy analysis and higher education policy-

making in England. I have identified three main limitations and will offer some possible solutions to address each of these shortcomings.

### 8.7.1 Dynamism over time

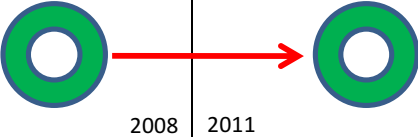
McConnell suggests that the researcher should identify the time period which they wish to address in relation to the policy. The framework lends itself well to addressing a particular timeframe, particularly given the static nature of the matrix, and I sought to address this by identifying case studies which concluded within an articulated timeframe. However, this does not acknowledge, even within the chosen timeframe, that a policy may, for example, succeed initially, but fail later on, and the framework not does have sufficient fluidity to articulate this position. This would be particularly beneficial in analysing how well the policy met its objectives or benefitted the target group on the programme dimension, which may well change over time. The CETLs are a good example of this, where, at the point of the interim evaluation, there was much evidence of success, and the interim evaluation concluded that there was

*'an overall positive narrative for the development of CETLs as 'nodes' of teaching and learning-focused activities... the data points to a range of positive effects the existence of the CETL programme had enabled...these effects tend to be circulating around the direct beneficiaries of CETL resources but there is growing evidence that effects are beginning to move out from the enclaves of practice within CETLs and, in some cases, are being used to strategic effect within institutions'* (Saunders et al 2008 p.4).



However, by the summative evaluation, it was clear that the deepening effects across the sector had failed to come to fruition, and so what appeared to be a durable success became a conflicted success by the end of the time period under investigation. As a result, the CETLs failed in the overarching aim to bring teaching and learning excellence on a par with research excellence. Equally, the LLNs could be an example of a policy that both succeeded and failed over the time period. To enable the framework, the analysis for LLNs stops at the end of the funding period, and it was observed that whilst there had been success, this had only been evident for some learners, and so the effects were not as deep or as widespread as intended. Had the analysis been extended beyond the funding period, it might have been the case that many more learners had benefitted and so the deepening and widening effects may have been more apparent. In both cases, it might have been possible to represent this shift in a more dynamic way on the framework, and to articulate possible reasons for the shift, which might have been, for example, further revisions to the policy realm, a further injection of funding or a change of government. Two examples are given in

Tables 25 (p.299) and 26 (p.300), the first articulating a change between the two evaluations of the CETLs, and the second a fictitious example of what could have been articulated had the timeframe of the LLNs been extended. In each case, the notion that the granularity of success has changed over time is represented by the arrow demonstrating a shift from one characteristic of success to another, with the dates indicating the period of time. For the CETLs, this visualisation demonstrates that the achievement of the desired outcomes declined over time, and for the LLNs, the benefits for the target group (could have) improved over time. Such a representation would demonstrate the dynamism of policies to change over time.

**Table 25 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (CETLS) – ADDING DYNAMISM TO THE FRAMEWORK**

<b>Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Programme success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Programme failure</b>
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls.	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high-profile instances of failure to produce results.	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
				
<p><i>At the interim evaluation stage, the programme was a durable success, such that outcomes for individuals were being achieved and there was some evidence of working towards all outcomes being achieved. By the summative evaluation, in the broadest terms, objectives were achieved, with more than 90% of the CETLs reporting that they had achieved what they set out to do. However, the summative evaluation concluded that the evidence for success was limited to descriptions of actions, and failed to demonstrate qualitative impact, particularly at institutional level and across the sector. There was, however, no evidence of unwanted results leading to controversy.</i></p>				

**Table 26 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (LLNs) – ADDING DYNAMISM TO THE FRAMEWORK**

Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure				
Programme success	Durable success	Conflicted success	Precarious success	Programme failure
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.  date	Partial benefits realised, but no as widespread or deep as intended.  2010	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering.	Damaging a particular target group.
<p><i>There were some benefits for the target group by the end of the funding period, with vocational progression enabled for some learners. However, the learner constituency characteristics point to a failure to achieve widening participation to a great extent. By (fictitious date) there had been greater engagement of the research intensive universities and more learners had benefited in line with the intended targets.</i></p>				

### 8.7.2 Lack of investigation of the agency of policy

It is my view that the framework does not allow for sufficient *agency* for the policy under investigation, and therefore does not take sufficient account of how the policy might have been interpreted or implemented differently by policy receivers. Contemporary views of policy analysis consider that policy formation and implementation is not a linear construct of the process, programme and politics, and analysis needs to take account of the dynamic, cyclical and chaotic nature of policy, considering notions of power and discourse and how these are received. Drawing on Foucault’s theories of knowledge and power and how the relationship between them is used by government or other institutions to control policy implementation, and the related work of Ball (1993) and Fairclough (2014) on discourse, such that language and power are intrinsically connected is, in my view, missing from the McConnell (2010) framework, and it is insufficient in encouraging the researcher to examine the language of policy texts, how these are received and interpreted and the power relationships between policy-makers and implementers. As observed in Chapter 2, Ball (2006) emphasises the importance of the ‘*policy receivers*’ and the ‘*policy texts*’ in making sense of policy: ‘*implementation may be driven by different interpretations of change*’ (Ball 2006 p.9), and such notions are not considered by the rather linear and static nature of the framework. Newman (2014) also suggests that the framework is lacking in not taking account of the different interpretations of policy receivers and he suggests re-framing the dimensions into four categories: ‘*process, goal attainment, distributional*



*outcomes and political consequences'* (see Figure 7, p.50), in order to better account for the agency of the policy.

*'By evaluating these aspects of a policy separately, it is possible to provide an assessment of policy success that can account for different aspects of success and differing interpretations'* (Newman 2014 p.203).

I support his view that these categorisations might allow the researcher to better articulate how the policy was received and interpreted within the 'distributional outcomes' dimension, and an analysis of the discourse of policy texts, and the power relationships of the policy implementers and receivers, might be better articulated within this dimension.

### 8.7.3 *The invisibility of sub-units*

For me, one of the key criticisms of the McConnell framework is the one-dimensional view it has of government, and its failure to take account of 'sub-units', such as HEFCE, or other sub-units in education such as the Skills Funding Agency or Young people's Learning Agency or, more generally, local education authorities. As I have already articulated, HEFCE, as a sub-unit, was critical in both the formation and agency of higher education policies, and so this omission is critical to this study. This omission is also linked to the weakness of the framework in failing to sufficiently recognise the power relationships and agency of policy. Gore (2011) is equally critical of this omission and sums this up well in his criticism of the framework. He says it

*'ignores the key role of sub-national units and inclusive partnerships in influencing and implementing policy.....little attention is paid to how policy filters between different tiers in a national (or even supranational) policy'* (Gore 2001 p.48).

More recent conceptualisations of policy analysis have focussed on what Lipsky (1980) termed the street level '*policy making community*'. Ayres and Marsh (2013), Newman (2013), Lowndes and McCaughie (2013) and Van der Steen et al (2013) have all considered that the *local* is an important notion within the context of practice. The emphasis by McConnell on 'government' misses an important point in the power and influence of sub-agencies, such as HEFCE, in being able to affect higher education policy and its success or failure.

It is my view that the politics dimension on McConnell's framework is particularly difficult to apply in terms of higher education policy, when the sub-unit, HEFCE, was such a key influencer. The framework assumes a position where the policy is of such critical importance that its success or failure will determine the future prospects of government.

However, the majority of higher education policies, with the exception of the current high profile debates on fees and vice chancellors' pay, rarely reach the attention of the general public, as was the case with all three of the case studies, and so had little, if any, effect on government's electoral prospects. However, in all three cases, HEFCE held a critical position in controlling the agenda management on behalf of government and thus influenced the direction of the policy such that any failures in process, programme or politics had little effect on the overall ability to govern. In order to make this particular dimension more meaningful, it might be a useful addition to consider who or what sub-unit is controlling the policy agenda, its power and discourse relationship with government, and its position in influencing the broad values and directions of government.

Chapter 9 brings this thesis to a conclusion in addressing the main research question, by firstly summarising the key findings for each case study against the McConnell framework and summarising the five key areas where there were particular characteristics, commonalities and differences between them, as identified in Section 8.5 (p.280). This analysis is then used to consider some implications and recommendations arising from the policy learning.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions













### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis, firstly by summarising the key findings of the case studies, and articulating them together against the McConnell (2010) framework. Section 9.2 (p.303) then goes on to draw the analysis of each case study to a conclusion, articulating success or failure in each case and summarises the five key areas where there were particular characteristics, commonalities and differences between them. Section 9.3 (p.308) considers the implications and recommendations for future policy design arising from the analysis of the case studies, using the construct for '*policy learning*' devised by May (1992). These findings are then related back to contemporary understandings of policy and policy analysis. Section 9.4 (p.312) then re-addresses the main and supplementary research questions, summarising the conclusions reached in Chapter 8. Section 9.5 (p.315) considers the original contribution that the thesis makes to understandings of policy in the field of higher education studies. Section 9.6 (p.316) considers the limitations constraining the research and finally, Section 9.7 (p.318) articulates some possible future directions, which would further enhance the research work.

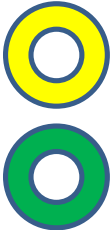

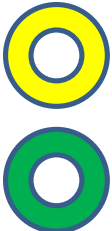




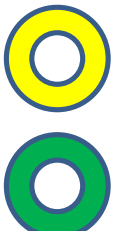

### 9.2 Summary of key findings

The thesis considered three case studies of HE policy initiatives from the learning and teaching strand of HEFCE policies during the New Labour period of governance. Using the theorised framework from McConnell (2010), I undertook an analysis of each to enable an interpretative position in regards to the nuances of success and failure in terms of the '*policy process, programme and politics dimensions*' (McConnell 2010). All three cases revealed elements of success and failure in each dimension, and none was a complete success or an outright failure, although the e-University came closest to being a failure in all dimensions. The analysis in these cases concurs with McConnell's assertion that '*success is not an 'all or nothing' phenomenon*' (McConnell 2010 p.55). My conclusions in relation to each case and each dimension are summarised in tables 27-29 below.





**Table 27 – POLICY AS PROCESS (SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES)**

<b>Policy as process: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<i>Process success</i>	<i>Durable success</i>	<i>Conflicted success</i>	<i>Precarious success</i>	<i>Process failure</i>
Preserving government policy goals and instruments.	Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements. 	Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed. 	Government’s goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance.	Termination of Government policy goals and instruments. 
Conferring legitimacy on a policy. 	Some challenges to legitimacy, but of little or no lasting effect.	Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long term. 	Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy.	Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy. 
Building a sustainable coalition.	Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement. 	Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation. 	Coalition on the brink of falling apart.	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition. 
Symbolising innovation and influence.	Not ground-breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive. 	Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading (at times) to criticisms from both progressives and conservatives.	Appearance of being out of touch with viable alternative solutions.  	Symbolising outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues.

**Table 28 – POLICY AS PROGRAMME (SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES)**

<b>Policy as programme: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<b>Programme success</b>	<b>Durable success</b>	<b>Conflicted success</b>	<b>Precarious success</b>	<b>Programme failure</b>
Implementation in line with objectives.	Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations. 	Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems.	Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend.	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives. 
Achievement of desired outcomes.	Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls. 	Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy.	Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high profile instances of failure to produce results. 	Failure to achieve desired outcomes.
Meets policy domain criteria.	Not quite the desired outcome, but sufficiently close to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria. 	Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high-profile examples, eg. on-going wastage when the criterion is efficiency. 	A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention; eg. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency.	Clear inability to meet the criteria. 
Creating benefit for a target group.	A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits.	Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended. 	Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering. 	Damaging a particular target group.

**Table 29 – POLICY AS POLITICS (SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES)**

<b>Policy as politics: the spectrum from success to failure</b>				
<i>Political success</i>	<i>Durable success</i>	<i>Conflicted success</i>	<i>Precarious success</i>	<i>Political failure</i>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders.	Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks.	Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working both for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure.	Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability.	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit.
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing.	Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed. 	Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected.	Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue.	Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government’s capacity to govern.
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government. 	Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded. 	Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has prompted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes. 	Entire trajectory of government is being compromised.	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government.

The e-University was, overall, a process and programme **failure**. The weakness of the organisational structure, whereby HEFCE was far removed from the operational aspects of the public-private venture, was a significant reason for that failure, which resulted in destabilising the legitimacy of the policy, such that UKeU could deviate so substantially from the original business plan. As a result, the programme failed to meet the policy objectives or deliver results for the target groups, particularly in meeting government’s

social inclusion agenda. The coalition deteriorated as UkeU failed to satisfactorily engage the sector or private investors. Overall, the policy instrument failed, which resulted in a failure to preserve government policy goals. Government was able to contain the episode, through the actions of HEFCE, and close down UKeU, thus realising a **durable**, although **conflicted**, political success, with a change in HEFCE strategy and movement of funds to support a revised e-learning policy.

The CETL policy process can be interpreted as a **conflicted** process success; the bottom-up policy approach led to some contested issues, with some of the coalition interpreting excellence in different ways, and the competitive funding approach resulted in less deepening across the sector than anticipated. One of the weaknesses of the approach was having a strong coalition at the level of the CETL itself, but a weaker coalition at institutional level, and an even weaker one at sector level, due to a lack of national coordination. The programme can be interpreted as a **durable** but **conflicted** programme success, with much evidence of success at a local level, but institutional impact was more sporadic and very difficult to evidence at sector level. The CETL initiative could be interpreted as a **durable** political success, with no apparent effect on the ability to govern, but some difficulties in agenda management at sectoral level. However, the impact of wider economic and political events (a change of government, the advent of higher fees and a global recession), led to a rethink on public spending for teaching and learning initiatives, and the CETL initiative was not continued in any form.

The LLN policy process and programme can be described as **durable** successes. Despite the bottom-up approach, there was a strong connection between policy-makers and receivers through HEFCE regional consultants, and strong coalition across the sector, with almost national coverage, and a national co-ordinating body, the National Forum. The objectives were broadly achieved, particularly in terms of the large number of activities and staff involved, although the short-term nature of the funding meant that these were not as deep or as widespread as they might have been. There was some benefit to the target group, although the number of learners gaining from the initiative was small, but might have improved with longer term funding. The initiative could be interpreted as a **durable** political success. The policy had little effect on electoral prospects, and HEFCE was able to manage any difficulties in agenda management, despite the complex and changing policy environment, through a high level of engagement with the LLNs, with regular monitoring and evaluation, and progress reports, which enabled HEFCE to influence the direction of the

policy. The LLN made a contribution, albeit small, to the broad values and direction of government in its aim of raising the participation rate to 50%.

The analysis of the case studies identified five key areas where there were particular characteristics, commonalities and differences, and an articulation of success or failure in each case enabled some aspects of policy learning, as identified in Section 8.5 (p.280):

- a) Enabling strong and sustainable coalitions (process)
- b) The trajectory of policy-making between policy-maker and implementers (process)
- c) Approaches to ensure sustainability (programme)
- d) The role of monitoring and evaluation to ensure value for money (programme)
- e) The role of policy-makers in preserving the policy goals and agenda management (process and politics).

### *9.3 Implications and recommendations arising from policy learning - related to contemporary understandings of policy*

As noted above, five themes arose from the analysis of the characteristics, commonalities and differences between the case studies. Using the construct devised by May (1992), I concluded that there were possibilities for policy learning that might be applied to future policy design. These are articulated in Chapter 8, but are summarised here and related back to contemporary understandings of policy as considered in Chapter 2.

#### *9.3.1 Enabling a strong and sustainable coalition (process)*

I concluded that the design of the policy instrument was key in enabling a strong and sustainable coalition, and concur with Ball's (2006) view of the importance of '*policy receivers*' as part of the coalition, and Lipsky's (1980) street level '*policy-making community*'. The policy design should ensure that there are strong associations between policy-makers and receivers at all levels of the coalition, in Ball's (2006) terms, *the context of practice*. In HE in particular, the relationship between policy-makers (HEFCE), senior management of institutions, and staff with a vested interest in implementation of the initiative, are part of the context of practice. Without a strong association between all elements of the coalition, there is greater chance of unintended policy effects, as observed by Margetts, 6 and Hood (2010) (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3, p.20), and Dery's '*policy by the way*' (1999 p.165-6); for example, the weakness of the coalition of the e-University, where HEFCE was far removed from the policy programme, led to UKeU being able to deviate so



far from the programme that the objectives and benefits to the target groups were not met.

A strong coalition is more likely to result in more durable policy success across the sector, and not just small pockets identifiable in individual institutions. A strong coalition between policy-maker and institutions, either through regional consultants with close institutional relationships, or national forums, is crucial in enabling the steer of policy, particularly when it might be open to elements of contestation, or a greater steer due to the impact of other policy realms. The LLN coalition was stronger in this regard than the CETLs, and was a more durable sector-wide success.

The importance of the *local* (Lipsky 1980, Ayres and Marsh 2013, Newman 2013, Lowndes and McCaughie 2013, Van der Steen et al 2013), and the agency which individuals and local leadership have for influencing and changing policy in practice, is equally an important element in the policy design. A strong association among HE senior management of institutions within the coalition is necessary to engage policies at an institutionally strategic level, and to embed policy work beyond the funding period. This ensures that policy successes are embedded and institutionalised, rather than being reliant on enthusiastic individuals, which was a criticism of both the e-University and CETLs.

There is also greater opportunity for sector-wide success of policy initiatives where the policy design is inclusive of the coalition, such that the policy design does not introduce an element of competition between institutions. Competition leads institutions to be more reticent to share their successes beyond their institution, which leads to fewer opportunities for deepening effects across the sector, as observed with the CETLs. More inclusive policy initiatives, such as the LLNs, demonstrate more durability in sector-wide benefits.

### *9.3.2 The trajectory of policy-making between policy-maker and implementers (process)*

The trajectory of policy-making, either as a top-down or a bottom-up approach in the policy instrument design, also plays a key part in determining how Ball's (2006) context of practice plays out in policy implementation. A top-down approach, whilst appearing to give policy-makers greater control over the agenda management (useful in policy contexts where there is a crowded and rapidly changing policy landscape), needs to be designed such that the

organisational structure is sufficiently robust, and does not remove policy-makers so far from implementation that the policy objectives can be re-focussed by receivers. This was particularly observed in the e-University which, whilst top-down, had a weak organisational structure, leaving HEFCE too far removed from the agenda management. Conversely, a bottom-up approach gives more freedom for the *local*, as identified in 9.3.1, to interpret and influence policy implementation. Whilst such an approach was highlighted by HEFCE to be beneficial, because it allowed the policy to be sector driven, in fact such an approach can leave the policy open to greater contestation. This is particularly true where the policy texts provide sufficiently loose discourse for policy to be re-interpreted, misinterpreted and transformed in policy spaces by receivers to suit their own agendas and meaning, as was the case with the CETLs. In such cases, policy '*is both contested and changing*' (Ball 1993 p.11). The case of the CETLs also highlights a phenomenon observed by Taylor (2004), where the language of the policy texts, particularly in relation to defining the meaning of 'excellence' for the CETLs, highlighted *competing* discourses between HEFCE, the panel reviewing business cases, and the bidders themselves in defining excellence. In a bottom-up policy design, weakly constructed policy texts and poorly defined objectives can result in Ball's (2006) context of practice being more open to areas of contestation, and thus objectives being met locally, but less widespread success across the sector. I concluded that the most successful approach is one in which the policy design leaves the objectives relatively loose, such that interpretations can be best suited to individual institutions, and therefore have more currency at institutional level, but with strong involvement from policy-makers in monitoring progress and controlling the agenda, steering progress towards the desired outcomes. This results in policy-makers having greater control over the sectoral impact of the policy. Such an approach worked well with the LLNs, where there were regular progress reports, which helped steer certain aspects of the policy implementation in the light of other, competing, policy domains impacting on the LLNs, in what Hill (2009) refers to as a '*crowded policy space*' (p.16). In this respect, such an approach sits well with Ball's (1993) assertion that policy is not just a legislative moment, but a dialogue and a continual process, '*in which the loci of power are constantly shifting as various resources implicit and explicit in texts are re-contextualised and employed in the struggle to maintain or change views*' (Ball 2006 p.13). This also sits well with the work of Fairclough (2014), who argues that language and power are intrinsically connected, and thus the discourse of the regular monitoring of LLNs, and provision of progress reports, gave HEFCE the power to maintain the policy agenda.

### 9.3.3 Approaches to ensure sustainability (programme)

I argued in Chapter 8 that the end of the funding period is a point of weakness in project-based policy initiatives, since there is insufficient purchase to ensure a deepening effect across the sector in the timescale, resulting in, at best, durable success. This observation concurs with the work of Trowler et al (2013), who undertook *'a review of the role of HEFCE in teaching and learning enhancement'*, and concluded that

*'a project-based approach is probably not the most effective for multiple reasons (including the difficulty in 'scaling up' from the project base, which is often left unaddressed and the issue of effective planning for the post-funding continuation)'* (p.12).

In this respect, the end of the funding period represents a breaking point in the policy cycle, such that there is no further impetus for policy implementation to continue, and the power relationship within the context of practice (Ball 2006) is concentrated with the policy receivers. As such, there is greater opportunity for unintended consequences (Margetts, 6 and Hood, 2010), and the policy initiative may fail. To maintain a balance of power in the context of practice, I argued that this might be achieved through changing expectations of both the funder and senior management in institutions, in ensuring that there is a commitment to continue beyond the funding at a strategic level. This might be achieved through time-limited project funding, to enable an initiative to get off the ground, and a longer term commitment from policy-makers with smaller recurrent funding, which rewards institutions who continue to progress deepening effects of the initiative across the sector.

### 9.3.4 The role of monitoring and evaluation to ensure value for money (programme)

Nachmias (1983), and Howlett and Ramesh (1995), considered that evaluation was a critical element of the policy cycle. I would concur with this view, and argued in Chapter 8 that any policy design should include the provision for monitoring and evaluation, since this could lead to policy-learning (May 1992). This view also concurs with the recommendation of SQW, following the evaluation of the LLNs, suggesting that all such policy initiatives should have a full programme of evaluation built in (SQW 2010 p.59). This is particularly important for higher education in the current climate, where demonstrating value for money is a key principle of the regulatory framework for the OfS.

The analysis of the case studies demonstrated that weak monitoring and evaluation design leads to poorly evaluated, insular, self-evaluations and an inability to evaluate both value

for money and cultural change across the sector. I suggested, therefore, that time and funding for a fully articulated design evaluation is always built into future initiatives, which requires regular evidence of meeting targets and objectives, demonstrable benefit to the target group, and the impact on the institution. In addition, this should be centrally coordinated, such that the impact of the initiative across the sector as a whole can be evaluated. Regular monitoring would allow for refinements to the policy to be made during the lifetime of the initiative, which worked well for the LLNs.

### *9.3.5 The role of policy-makers in preserving the policy goals and agenda management (process and politics)*

Concurring with Ball's (1993) view that policy is not just a legislative moment, I have argued that for a policy to be successful, policy-makers play a key role in ensuring the success of the policy, as the agenda management is a critical part of the policy process. This enables policy-makers to maintain a successful power relationship, particularly in relation to the communication of the policy. This is particularly true when the policy environment is complex and volatile, and requires policy-makers to be able to steer policy changes and re-direct quickly to ensure at least a durable success. In practical terms, I argued that it is helpful for policy-makers to have advocates 'on the ground', to help manage the policy agenda with the coalition. In the case of the LLNs, the close involvement of HEFCE regional consultants and the National Forum was instrumental in this role.

I have argued for an element of political flexibility, as observed by May (1992), such that policy processes and programmes are sufficiently robust to accommodate changes in government and other policy realms which might impact of the likely success of the initiative, as was the case with the LLNs, where the evolving skills agenda after the Leitch Review of Skills, and the introduction of variable fees, impacted greatly on the work of the LLNs. As such, this suggests that future policy-makers need to have both a strong relationship with the coalition to steer policy, and also a close relationship with government, such that they have sufficient purchase to take control of the agenda management when required to avoid a political disaster.

## *9.4 Addressing the research questions*

The thesis uses the McConnell (2010) theoretical framework to address the main research question: *'How can policy success and failure be understood, from the study of three policy*

*episodes in the context of contemporary higher education in England, by applying criteria from an existing framework for success and failure?’*

The thesis has taken a post-positivist design approach to three HEFCE policy episodes, chosen from field of learning and teaching, with research methods appropriate for case study research, and used documentary sources to produce thick descriptions of those episodes. Using the theoretical framework developed by McConnell (2010), I have taken an interpretative approach, to produce a nuanced interpretation of success and failure in each episode in relation to the policy process, programme and politics. This research concluded that none of the episodes could be categorised as an outright success nor, equally, an outright failure, but that elements of the process, programme and politics in relation to each episode demonstrated some degree of success or failure in accordance with the framework, as summarised in Section 9.1 (p.303) above.

This analysis led me to be able to address the first supplementary research question, *‘does the evaluation of particular policy episodes reveal any common characteristics and distinctions in relation to policy that could usefully be considered in relation to future policy setting in higher education?’* The analysis of the case studies suggested a number of characteristics, distinctions and commonalities in relation to each episode, which further raised a range of issues and questions in relation to the policy design, implementation, evaluation, and the role of policy-makers. I concluded that there were five main issues to be addressed and, using the construct devised by May (1992), I articulated how there might be some elements of future policy learning in relation to each of these, as described in 9.2 above.

In Chapter 4, I provided an historical account of how the higher education intermediary bodies have changed from that of ‘buffer’, in the early part of the nineteenth century, to that of ‘regulator’ in the present day. I also used an account of policy-making during the HEFCE years to articulate how HEFCE itself changed from that of ‘agent’ in its early years, to regulator, as neoliberal preferences for market-orientated policies (Mirowski 2014) came into effect, with increased requirements for institutional accountability whilst moving funding from the state to the consumer.

Using this historical account, and the analysis of the case studies against the McConnell framework, I have been able to address the second supplementary research question, *‘what can an analysis of HEFCE policy-making reveal about the locus of power in policy-*

*making in higher education?* It is my view that it is no coincidence that, in all three of the chosen case studies, HEFCE had a strong influence in both the articulation of each episode, and in its implementation, and there is a direct relationship between the involvement of HEFCE in the process, implementation and agenda management and the success of the policy initiative. I argued that HEFCE was not just hugely influential as a policy-maker, but it has also had at its disposal the power to shape, influence and steer policies in action, and has thus been a key part of Ball's (2006) '*policy context of practice*', bringing the thesis back to Ball's point that policy is not just a legislative moment, and that it is the *agency* of policy that is important.

The five key policy-learning themes that I identified as a result of the case studies' analysis all indicate that policy-makers play a critical role in the agency of policy, if policies are to be at least a durable success. These are in

- designing and maintaining a strong coalition,
- designing a policy approach which ensures the currency of the policy at a local level,
- enabling policy-makers to steer the policy through complex policy agendas, thus preserving the policy goals and agenda management,
- enabling the sustainability of the policy goals and outcomes to ensure sector-wide deepening and longevity of the policy,
- ensuring value for money through effective evaluation and policy-learning.

This discussion brings the thesis back to the role of the OfS, which asserted that it '*would not do policy*' (Kernohan 2018), and hence raises questions about whether the locus of power for HE policy remains at government level or within OfS, and what that might mean for government's ability to successfully guide policy within the HE '*context of practice*' (Ball 2006).

Finally, I concurred with the work of other scholars in addressing the final supplementary research question through the lens of higher education studies: '*to what extent is the chosen methodological framework sufficient or inadequate in analysing policy success and failure in the context of contemporary theoretical approaches to policy analysis?*' It is my view that the McConnell framework (2010) has served to provide both a sound theoretical approach, which, as noted previously, Tight (2012, 2018) argues has been less obvious in higher education research (see 9.4 below), and a useful operational tool for a systematic

examination of the process, programme and political dimensions of the chosen case studies. Although the framework allows for an interpretative approach, it gives the researcher a structure in which to frame their assertions, more so than the framework approach taken by Newman (2014), which adopts a similar success/failure framework, but is less descriptive in defining the nuances of success and failure. However, I concurred with Gore (2011) that the matrix approach does give the framework a rigidity which makes some elements of policy analysis more difficult. I suggested that the framework is insufficient in three areas.

Firstly, the framework does not allow the researcher to show how a policy might succeed or fail over time, and I would suggest that it should be possible to build more dynamism into the framework, to better articulate how time might be a factor for success and failure (Chapter 8, Section 8.7.1, p.298). I also argued that the framework is insufficient in addressing the agency of policy, and in particular does not sufficiently acknowledge competing discourses (Taylor 2004), and the discourse of policy texts (Ball 2006, Fairclough 2014), and their role in the context of practice. I am in agreement with Newman (2014) that re-framing the dimensions into four categories – *‘process, goal attainment, distributional outcomes and political consequences’* (see Figure 7, p.50) - might allow the researcher to better articulate how the policy was received and interpreted within the ‘distributional outcomes’ dimension, and an analysis of the discourse of policy texts might be more feasible under this dimension. Finally, I concurred with Gore (2011) that the framework does not account for the role of sub-units of government, such as HEFCE, which, as I have argued in this thesis, held a key position in determining the success or failure of elements of the process, programme and political dimensions.

### *9.5 Original contribution to knowledge*

The thesis sits within the ‘*system policy*’ strand of HE research, as defined by Tight (2012 p.7, 2018 p.95), and in particular in Tight’s sub-categories of ‘*policy context, national policies [and] historical policy studies*’ (Tight 2012). Tight argues that historical case studies are a useful way to examine policies, but that they offer little in the way of policy learning (Tight 2012 p.120). This study has sought to address that criticism by using the case studies to illuminate particular characteristics, similarities and differences in relation to particular policy episodes and, further, to provide some insight into policy learning from those particular characteristics, using May’s (1992) construct for policy learning. Thus, this thesis

has contributed to the field of '*system policy*' research (Tight 2012, 2018) by using case studies and a theoretical model to offer some insight into policy learning.

Tight (2012) contends that many higher education researchers do not engage explicitly with theory, although it is increasing (Tight 2018) and the inter-disciplinary nature of higher education studies lends itself well to importing theories from other academic disciplines. Likewise, although Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) contend that there is a growing interest in the use of political science in the study of education, they argue that it, too, is under-theorised. This thesis has sought to address these deficits by using a theoretical framework, imported from the study of political sciences and applied to the field of higher education studies. Thus, this thesis has made a theoretical contribution to the study of educational research.

Section 2.2 (p.13) observed that there are increasing examples of theoretical frameworks devised and adopted in higher education studies, such as Kogan and Hanney (2000), Bacchi (2009), Taylor (2004), Hyatt (2013) and Jungblut (2015). However, none of these theoretical frameworks have been specifically applied to the study of a nuanced examination of policy success and failure in English higher education, and so I would attest that my use of McConnell's (2010) framework approach is a novel application in English higher education studies. Equally, although there are critiques of McConnell's framework, I have not been able to identify any that critique it through the lens of higher education, and so I would argue that my critique is novel in this respect.

Thus, this thesis makes three contributions to knowledge:

- 1) The application of a chosen theoretical framework to the field of higher education policy studies, which has hitherto been under theorised;
- 2) A systematic assessment of the success and failure of three policy episodes, as informed by the framework, which have not previously been examined in terms of their success and failure using the McConnell (2010) framework and thus contributing to understandings of those policy episodes;
- 3) A critique highlighting the merits and demerits of the framework, through its application to English higher education.



## 9.6 Limitations constraining the research

The research was principally constrained by three main factors. The first was my position in full-time employment, without the funds or capacity to undertake a scheme of work that was beyond desk-based research. Whilst I have acknowledged in Chapter 3 that interviewing key actors in each policy episode would bring its own difficulties, such as the practicalities of undertaking interviews, and the length of time in which their memories would have been clouded and swayed by other actors and other policy events, interviews would nevertheless have offered an interesting perspective and degree of triangulation with other research methods. Interviewing actors in the policy process may well also have helped to identify 'non-actions', Hecló's (1972) '*non policy*' (p.85), or consequential events which went beyond the scope of the policy episode itself, which are not articulated in the policy texts available, such as the formative and summative evaluations.

Secondly, the desk-based nature of the research meant that it was only possible to analyse episodes for which there was extensive text-based evaluation with which to support my interpretations. This meant that the choice of case studies was constrained to those where there had been either substantial formative and summative evaluations or, in the case of the e-University, an in-depth Select Committee review and report. There were a number of policy episodes which I consider would have offered equally fascinating insights, but for which there was limited data available. For example, in 2008, HEFCE began phasing out the ELQ funding, but relaxed this for some STEM subjects in 2014. The process and consequences for implementing this policy, and the subsequent change of heart, would, in my view, been an illuminating case study, but might have required more time-consuming and costly research methods. Equally, a study of the National Scholarship Programme would have been of significance in articulating an understanding of its benefit to the target group and widening participation.

Finally, the McConnell (2010) framework, and the need to constrain the limitations of the data for the research, meant that project-based policy episodes, with clearly defined end points, were apposite for this research. This meant that policy learning has been constrained to these particular types of policy initiatives. Longer term policy initiatives, such as those with recurrent funding over a long period of time, would equally have offered fascinating insights into the higher education policy world, and would likely have offered very different opportunities for policy learning. An analysis of one such episode, Foundation Degrees, would have also strongly highlighted a particular weakness in the McConnell

framework, in that it does not lend itself well to demonstrating the dynamism in a policy over time, such that it can succeed in one timeframe and fail in another. My original research proposal did include Foundation Degrees as a fourth case study, but it became evident that the sheer volume of material available for the case study meant that it was not possible to do justice to it in the limiting constraints of a PhD thesis, along with the other three episodes. One of the key observations of this case study was that, by 2010, FDs had overshot their initial 2010 student number target and therefore been a programme success but, just three years later, by 2013, entrants to FDs had fallen by 46%, and thus success could be durable at best in a longer timescale.

### *9.7 Directions for future research*

This research was narrowly defined in examining three distinct policy episodes in the learning and teaching strand of HEFCE's policy work. I believe that I have demonstrated that the theoretical framework approach adopted for this study is useful in articulating a nuanced position of success and failure in policy episodes, and so there would be scope for using this approach to examine other aspects of HEFCE's policy work, as an approach to policy learning. Widening participation, for example, although not initially a key strand of HEFCE's work in 1992, as observed in Chapter 4, became an increasingly important focus for HEFCE, particularly as the funding environment changed, and its role as principal funder was reduced. As such, it would be interesting to conduct an analysis of widening participation policy episodes from early on in HEFCE's history, and to compare its approach in later policy episodes, when its role in funding was much reduced.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine HEFCE's policy approaches to research, which had a very different funding environment, with dual funding from HEFCE for research quality, and from the research councils for funding future research in line with government research priorities. It would be particularly informative to examine how HEFCE's policy approaches differed from those of the research councils, and how the framework might identify successful and less successful process approaches and programme designs, as well as the role of the research councils in preserving the policy goals and agenda management.

With the demise of HEFCE and the advent of the OfS, which has stated that it will '*not do policy*' (Kernohan 2018), it would be interesting to use the framework to examine future episodes of higher education policy in relation to learning and teaching. I would be curious to examine whether any of the policy learning identified in the HEA-commissioned

evaluation to review HEFCE teaching and learning enhancement initiatives (Trowler et al 2014 p.12), had been observed in the articulation of future policy episodes. It would also be particularly illuminating to examine the locus of policy making under the new regime, and whether the OfS is true to its word and does not do policy, suggesting therefore that policy will come directly from government. This would be of particular interest to me, given the findings identified here, in that the position of the policy initiator is key if the policy agenda is it to be successfully managed and steered in complex policy environments.

Finally, although the McConnell (2010) framework has proved to be valuable in articulating a nuanced position of success and failure in relation to policy process, programme and politics, it does have its limitations, as discussed in Section 8.7 (p.297). It would be a worthwhile test of the framework's usefulness to adopt other contemporary policy analysis frameworks, such as Newman's (2014) re-framing of the dimensions into four categories, to determine whether an interpretation of success and failure using this framework would determine similar interpretative outcomes. It could also be beneficial to adopt other frameworks to examine other aspects of the chosen case studies, such as Hyatt's (2013) *'framework for critical analysis of higher education policy texts'*, and Bacchi's (2009) discourse analysis approach to examine *'What's the Problem Represented (WPR)'*, and to compare the policy learning from these analyses to those in this study. Such an approach would concur with Bobrow & Dryzek's (1987) view, in which they advocate a post-positivist multi-disciplinary frames approach, using more than one framework in order to ensure that there is a range of insights.

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## Appendix A: CASE STUDIES SOURCE TEXTS

### e-University

#### *Primary:*

Original proposal and consultation circulars released by HEFCE:

Launch of the e-University: HEFCE 04/00 (14<sup>th</sup> February 2000)

e-University business model: HEFCE 00/43 (October 2000)

Update on e-University project: HEFCE EP05/00 (21<sup>st</sup> June 2000)

e-University: invitation to nominate directors and committee members: HEFCE 02/01 (15<sup>th</sup> January 2001)

e-University: invitation to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes: HEFCE 06/01 (21<sup>st</sup> March 2001)

e-University: invitation to higher education institutions to become members of the holding company: HEFCE 07/01 (12<sup>th</sup> April 2001)

eUniversity: Invitation to bid for additional student places to meet public service objectives: HEFCE 08/02 (26<sup>th</sup> March 2002)

e-University: invitation to express interest in a project to develop in-service teacher training programmes for teachers in China: HEFCE 14/02 (14<sup>th</sup> June 2002)

Original business model for the e-university, devised by PWC: HEFCE 00/44a (October 2000)

David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, landmark speech to the University of Greenwich, 23th February 2000

Select Committee. (2005). *HC205: UK e-University Third Report of Session 2004-05*, House of Commons, London: HMSO. Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmeduski/205/205.pdf>

HEFCE strategy for e-learning (2005/12 March 2005)

#### *Secondary:*

Literature on the policy climate around New Labour:

Laurillard, D. (2008). *Digital technologies and their role in achieving our ambitions for education*, London: Institute of Education.

Rumble, G. (2001). Just How Relevant is E-education to Global Educational Needs?, *Open Learning*, 16(3), 223-232.

Selwyn, N. (2002). E-establishing an inclusive society? technology, social exclusion and UK government policy making, *Journal of Social Policy*, 31(1), 1-20.

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Smith, J. (2005). From flowers to palms: 40 years of policy for online learning. *ALT-J Research in Learning Technology*, 30(2), 93-108.

#### Literature from research and commentaries on the e-university and UkeU:

Bacsich, P., Frank Bristow, S. (2004). *The e-University Compendium Volume One*. London: Higher Education Academy.

Bacsich, P. (2005). Lessons to be learned from the failure of the UK e-university. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.87.3662>

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Cinar, B. (2012). E-University: British Experience. Available at: <http://bjes.beder.edu.al/uploads/arch-201311271520385187.pdf>

Conole, G. (2007). *Distilling lessons from across different types of e-learning interventions*, Milton Keynes, UK: The Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University.

Conole, G., Carusi, A., de Latt, M., Wilcox, P., Darby, J. (2006). Managing differences in stakeholder relationships and organizational cultures in e-learning development: lessons from the UK eUniversity experience, *Studies in Continuing Education*, 28(2), 135-150.

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Garrett, R. (2004). The Real Story Behind the Failure of U.K. eUniversity, *Educause Quarterly*, 4, 4-6.

Greener, I. Perriton, L. (2005). The political economy of networked learning communities in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(1), 67-79.

Peters, G. (2011). *How to ensure partnerships go wrong, 25th AAOU Conference: Transforming Asia through Distance Learning (ODL)*, Penang, Malaysia: Open University.

Wilcox, P. Dexter, H., Petch, J. (2004). *e-universities: Towards a Case Study of the UK e-universities (UKeU)*, Presented at ECEL2004 - 3rd European Conference on E-learning France.

#### Comparisons with other e-universities globally:

Bacsich, P., Frank Bristow, S. (2004). *The e-University Compendium Volume One*. London: Higher Education Academy.

Christie, M. F., Jurado, R. G. (2007). UKeU and Sweden's NET University: A Comparative Study, *International Conference on Engineering Education and Research 2-7 December*, Melbourne, Australia.

#### Newspaper articles:

Guardian: 4<sup>th</sup> March 2004 (MacLeod), 21<sup>st</sup> March 2004, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004 (Naughton), 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004 (MacLeod), 1<sup>st</sup> November 2005 (Hoare)

The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington: 14<sup>th</sup> May 2004 (Carnevale)

THES: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2000, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2000 (Goddard), 12<sup>th</sup> April 2002, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2005 (Wainwright)

## CETLs

### *Primary:*

The Dearing report: National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) (1997). *Higher Education in the Learning Society: report of the National Committee*, Norwich: HMSO

White Paper on excellence in schools: Department for Education and Employment. (1997). *Excellence in Schools*, London :DfEE, HMSO.

Learning and teaching: strategy and funding proposals (consultation): HEFCE 98/40 (August 1998)

Learning and teaching: strategy and funding (report): HEFCE 99/26 (April 1999)

Funding arrangements for the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund; HEFCE 99/48 (July 1999)

White Paper on higher education: Department for Education and Skills. (2003). *The Future of Higher Education*, London: DfES, HMSO.

Formal consultation on CETLs: HEFCE 2003/36 (July 2003)

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Invitation to bid for funds: HEFCE 2004/05 (January 2004)

CETL Outcomes and funding allocations: HEFCE 2005/17 (April 2005)

Saunders, M., Matchell, J., Williams, S., Allaway, D., Spencer, A., Ashwin, P., Trowler, P., Fanghanel, J., Morgan, L.A., McKee, A. (2008). *2005-2010 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: formative evaluation report to HEFCE*, Centre for Study in Education and Training/ Institution of Educational Technology  
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/data/year/2008/2005-2010,CETL,programme,formative,evaluation/> (accessed 14.12.2018)

SQW Consulting Ltd. (2011). *Summative evaluation of the CETL programme: final report by SQW to HEFCE and DEL*. Bristol: HEFCE

### *Secondary:*

#### Development of professionalisation of teaching in higher education:

Gosling, D. (2001). Educational development units in the UK - what are they doing five years on?, *The International Journal for Academic Development*, 6(1), 74-90.

Mills, D., Huber, M. T. (2005). Anthropology and the Educational 'Trading Zone': Disciplinary, pedagogy and professionalism, *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 4(1), 9-32.

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Allan, K.L. (2007). Excellence: a new keyword for education?, *Critical Quarterly*, 49(1), 54-78.

Barnett, R. (2000). *Realising the University in an age of Supercomplexity*, Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press

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Little, B. Locke, W., Parker, J., Richardson, J.(2007). *Excellence in teaching and learning: a review of the literature for the Higher Education Academy*, York: Centre for Higher Education Research and Information.  
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Mieg, H. (2014). The Organisational Embedding of Expertise: Centres of Excellence, *Talent Development and Excellence*, 6(1), 71-93.

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Taylor, I. (2007). Pursued by Excellence: Rewards and the Performance Culture in Higher Education, *Social Work Education*, 26(5), 504-519.

CETL research and commentaries:

- Bluteau, P., Krumins, A. (2008). Engaging academics in developing excellence: releasing creativity through reward and recognition, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32(4), 415-426.
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- Gosling, D. (2013). Quality Enhancement in England: from funded projects to student-led demand, in G. G. R Land, (ed.), *Enhancing Quality in Higher Education: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1-26.
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- Gosling, D., Turner, R. (2015). Responding to contestation in teaching and learning projects in the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the United Kingdom, *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(9), 1573-1587.
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#### International perspectives:

Brawley, S., Mills, K.T., Timmins, G. (2009). SoTL and National Difference: Musings from three historians from three countries, *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 8(1), 8-25.

Lemmens-Krug, K. (2015). *Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) as governing instruments in universities in England and Germany*. Netherlands: Center for Higher Education Policy Studies.

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#### Newspaper articles and on line media:

THES: 8<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Orsmond), 19<sup>th</sup> December 2003 (Leon), 13<sup>th</sup> July 2007(Newman), 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007 (Beaty), 10<sup>th</sup> July 2008 (Attwood), 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012 (Gill, Gove, Ramsden), 29<sup>th</sup> March 2012 (Fenton-O'Creevy)

WONKHE: 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (Kernohan)

## LLNs

### *Primary:*

Partnerships for Progression: HEFCE 01/73 (December 2001)

Lifelong Learning Networks: HEFCE 12/2004 (3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004)

Lifelong Learning Networks: progress report and next steps: HEFCE Spring 2005

Update on Lifelong Learning Networks: HEFCE April 2008

Analysis of 2009 LLN monitoring reports by HEFCE

Attributes of students and networks, 2006-07 and 2007-08: HEFCE 2009/29 (July 2009)

HEFCE response to 'Summative evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Network programme: A report to HEFCE by SQW': HEFCE 2010

Newby, H. (2005a). Colin Bell Memorial Lecture: Doing widening participation: Social inequality and access to higher education, in G. Layer, (ed.), *Closing the equity gap: the impact of widening participation strategies in the UK and the USA*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE).



Formative evaluation: Centre for Higher Education Research and Information. (2008). *Interim evaluation of Lifelong Learning Networks*, Milton Keynes: CHERI, The Open University.

Summative evaluation: SQW Consulting Ltd. (2010). *Summative evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Network programme*. London: SQW.

Office for Fair Access. (2015). *2015/02 OFFA Strategic Plan 2015-2020*, Bristol: OFFA.

### *Secondary:*

#### Vocational, skills education and progression:

Layer, G. (2005). Closing the equity gap: Is it sustainable?, in G. Layer, (ed.), *Closing the equity gap: The impact of widening participation strategies in the UK and the USA*. Leicester, England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Little, B., Connor H. (2005). *Vocational ladders or crazy paving? Making your way to higher levels*, London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.  
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May, S., van der Sluis, H., Woodfield, S. (2012). *Promoting social mobility by creating pathways to the professions and vocational careers: the role of progression agreements*, York: HEA.  
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National Audit Office. (2007). *Organisations in Partnerships involved in the delivery of the Government's skills agenda*, London: HMSO.

Parry, G. (2006). Policy-Participation Trajectories in English Higher Education, *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60(4), 392-412.

#### LLN research and commentary:

Betts, S., Burrell, K. (2011). *The Progression Story*. London: Linking London, Lifelong Learning Network.

Foundation Forward (2009). *Apprenticeships and the role of Lifelong Learning Networks*, Staffordshire: fdf.

Leahy, S. M. (2013). *An investigation into partnership working to widen participation in higher education in the south-west of England, with particular reference to Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)*, PhD submission to the University of Bath, Bath: University of Bath

Little, B., Williams, R. (2009). Higher education policy initiatives and their implementation - the case of Lifelong Learning Networks in England, *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, 6(2), 97-115.

May, S., van der Sluis, H., Woodfield, S. (2012). *Promoting social mobility by creating pathways to the professions and vocational careers: the role of progression agreements*, York: HEA.  
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Newby, H. (2005b). Lifelong learning networks in higher education, *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, 2(2), 176-186.

Ward, J., Rout, A., Elliott G. (2012). Introduction: Lifelong Learning: an introduction to the special issues, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 17(1), 1-4.

Watson, D. (2005). Will lifelong learning networks work? A perspective from higher education, *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, 2(2), 187-205.

Williams, R. (2008). Evaluating lifelong learning networks, in R. L. Duffy, (ed.), *Bringing Higher Education Within Reach*. Brighton, UK: Falmer, 194-197.

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#### International perspectives:

Muller, R., Remdisch, S., Köhler, K., Mar, L., Repo, S., Yndigegn, C. (2015). Easing access for lifelong learners: a comparison of European models for university lifelong learning, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 34(5), 530-550.

Nemeth, B. (2010). The Accelerating Roles of Higher Education in Regions through the European Lifelong Learning Initiative, *European Journal of Education*, 45(3), 451-465.

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#### Newspaper articles:

THES: 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 (Ward)

## Appendix B: CODING ESTABLISHED FROM THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

(adapted from McConnell 2010 p.96-101)

	Question	Code
1	Do you want to assess process, programme and/or politics?	Identification of element in relation to: Process [met objectives/failed/adapted?] Programme [met objectives/failed/adapted?] Politics [met objectives/failed/adapted?]
2	What time period do you want to assess?	Policy episode first declaration End date of policy (usually end of funding) Note extensions to policy episode Note curtailing of policy episode
3	What benchmark will you use to ascertain success? Government objectives, Benefit to target group, Before-and-after, Policy domain criteria, Who supports the policy, Another jurisdiction, Balance sheet, Newness and innovation, Ethics, Morality and the law	Ideological position in line with government preserved/failed/adapted? Stated policy objectives Targeted benefit groups Changes to policy objectives as a result of consultation Data in evaluations to support meeting target Data in evaluations to support failing to meet target Where/by whom policy was initially supported (government/HEFCE)? Where/by whom there was support for policy Where/by whom policy was contested Policies in other countries being replicated Cost against targets Claims of innovation/replication
4	Are you confident that sufficient and credible information is available in order to reach a conclusion?	Existence of formative and summative evaluation reports Independent evaluation reports Evidence of consultation with institutions Data in meeting or failing target Data satisfying target group Media reports [positive/negative] Academic commentaries
5	Are you confident that you can isolate the policy outcomes from all other influences on these outcomes?	Identification of policy outcomes in line with intended outcomes Identification of other outcomes Support for continuation of policy identifiable at the end of the episode Media reports [positive/negative] Existence of other competing/complementing policies
6	To the best of your knowledge and/or instincts, do you consider a hidden agenda to be at work?	Evidence of consultation with institutions Media reports [positive/negative] Academic commentaries [support/criticism]
7	Does the sphere of policy you are assessing (process, programme, politics) have more than one goal?	Stated policy objectives Targeted benefit groups Data in meeting or failing target Data satisfying target group Changes to policy objectives as a result of consultation
8	Are there any unintended consequences, including success being greater than planned?	Known effect on electoral prospects Data in meeting/failing/exceeding target Media reports [positive/negative]
9	Does the policy fall short of meeting the targets that were set?	Stated policy objectives [met/failed] Data in meeting or failing target Data satisfying target group Media reports [positive/negative]
10	Are you assessing more than one policy realm (process, programmes and politics)?	Existence of other competing/complementing policies in HE Existence of other competing/complementing policies in other realms (eg. skills and training)

*Note: some codes are repeated where the coding addresses more than one question*

## Appendix C: TIMELINE OF HEFCE POLICIES AND INITIATIVES AND THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

Source documents are available in the National Archives, via the HEFCE website (circulars are number followed by year (01/07) and reports and other publications are year followed by number (28/2004). These were accessed on-line between 2012-2018.

Category	1991	1992	1993	1994
<b>Sir Graeme Davies Chief Executive (1992–1995)</b>				
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>White paper on Higher Education – <i>a New Framework</i> (May 1991).</p> <p>Student Loan Company founded 1990/91.</p>	<p>Conservative Government elected.</p> <p>Department for Education and Science becomes Department for Education.</p> <p>Further and Higher Education Act - HEFCE created (June 1992).</p> <p>Higher Education Act 1992 gives polytechnics status as universities and hence the abolition of the binary system.</p> <p>Research Councils assumed by OST and science budget moved to OST.</p>	<p>Science, Engineering and Technology White Paper: Realising our Potential.</p> <p>Fielden Report on libraries review.</p>	<p>UCAS replaces UCCA, PCAS, SCUE.</p>
<b>HEFCE</b>		<p>HEFCE mission statement released July 1992.</p> <p>DFE/ HEFCE memorandum of understanding on funding HE.</p>	<p>HEFCE assumes responsibility for funding HE (April 1993).</p> <p>HEQC/HEFCE joint statement on quality assurance.</p>	
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>		<p>The funding of teaching policy (1/92) released - core plus margin method continuing arrangements of UFC/PCFC.</p> <p>Quality and Assessment Committee established and PIs introduced.</p>	<p>Continuing education policy (18/93).</p> <p>Development of sector wide funding method (greater efficiency as numbers increase).</p> <p>Policy on quality assessment method (self-assessment by discipline, provision of data sets</p>	<p>Additional student numbers and special initiatives policy (2/94, 10/94).</p> <p>Policy on organisation of academic year (M6/94).</p> <p>Policy on length of degree courses</p>

Category	1991	1992	1993	1994
			<p>(3/93).</p> <p>Continuation policy to provide recurrent funding for minority subjects outside formula funding.</p> <p>Policy to convert most non award bearing education to award bearing courses, thus included in core funding (from 1995-6) instigated.</p> <p>MaSN introduced to control student numbers during a period of funding consolidation from 1993-1996.</p>	<p>(C1/94).</p> <p>Policy on no additional marginal funding except p/t and sub degree level, CSN, and control of MASN (2/94) maintaining intake levels.</p> <p>Policy on funding continuing education (p/t provision now eligible) and CVE activity (9/94) and £60m funding over 4 years.</p> <p>Agreement on units of assessment for quality monitoring (14/94, 39/94).</p> <p>Non formula funding of minority subjects - institutions can bid (29/94).</p> <p>Framework for quality assessment for 1995-96 (33/94).</p>
<b>Widening participation</b>				<p>Introduction of revised policy on access funds (ug, pg, FE) (29/94). £3m for projects to support access for SEN students in 93/94, 94/95 (8/94).</p> <p>Changes to how p/t are counted in funding method for teaching (38/94).</p>
<b>Research</b>		<p>RAE 1992 (changes to greater selectivity in research funds introduced. Specific guidance on definition of quality. Number of UoAs reduced).</p> <p>RAE funding methodology continues from UFC.</p>	<p>Development of sector wide funding method. Policy on funding for research (dual funding principle 7/93) – funding methodology includes QR (quality), GR (generic), DevR (development).</p>	<p>Policy on allocation of GR grant (16/94).</p> <p>RAE 1996 policy (1/94).</p> <p>Policy to reduce differences in units of funding in similar subjects. Policy on convergence to continue to 96/97 (2/94).</p>

Category	1991	1992	1993	1994
				Continuation of transitional funding (31/94).
<b>Economy and society</b>			HEFCE commitment to build on regional, national and international HE.	
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>		Financial memorandum with HEIS established.	<p>Financial memorandum with individual institutions released.</p> <p>Capital allocation policy and estate formula funds (36/93).</p> <p>Non-formula funding for museums continuing but under review (5/93).</p>	<p>Policy on cost centres for statistical returns (6/94).</p> <p>Funding capital equipment and estate formula funding (13/94).</p> <p>Libraries review implementation for research in humanities (17/94).</p> <p>Library capital projects bid (18/94, 35/94).</p> <p>Bids for backlog of estate maintenance projects (22/94).</p>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>				

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
	<b>Sir Graeme Davies Chief Executive (1992–1995)</b>	<b>Sir Brian Fender Chief Executive (1995–2001)</b>		
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>Disability Discrimination Act 1995 introduced.</p> <p>Severe reduction in capital funding by Secretary of State for Education.</p> <p>Department for Education becomes Department for Education and Employment.</p>	<p>National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing) established to consider funding sustainability in mass HE system (reduce costs, maintain high participation, find alternative funding structures).</p> <p>Publication of report on review of postgraduate education (Harris report).</p> <p>Student Loans Act.</p>	<p>New Labour Government elected.</p> <p>Dearing 1997 - recommends students contribute to cost of university education - £20b funding gap identified.</p> <p>New Government implements many Dearing recommendations.</p> <p>50% participation in H target by 2010 introduced.</p> <p>Harris review of postgraduate education.</p> <p>QAA established - HEFCE no longer does quality assurance in house.</p>	<p>Dearing Report published – <i>Higher Education in the Learning Society</i>.</p> <p>Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 – introduction of means tested tuition fees (£1k per year).</p> <p>Student maintenance grant abolished and replaced by loans.</p> <p>The Learning Age Green Paper (inc. development of regional structures and links between HE and regional communities, and Graduate Apprenticeships).</p> <p>Government’s comprehensive spending review – additional funding for HE announced.</p> <p>Regional Development Agencies created.</p> <p>Government announces an additional £1.4billion over 3 years for research (HEFCE and Research Councils).</p> <p>AHRB set up.</p>

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
				<b>Announcement of the University Challenge Fund.</b>
<b>HEFCE</b>	<p>Funding for ITT students now the responsibility of the TTA (apart from access funds) as well as data collection. Provision of in-service training INSET, to fall to TTA from 1996-7.</p> <p>Government informs HEFCE to ensure student numbers do not exceed planned numbers (participation rate at 30%).</p>	<p>Sector required to deliver efficiency gains of 7.5% over three years due to grant reduction in real terms of £263m to 1999-00.</p> <p>MASN target remains unchanged.</p>	HEFCE no longer does quality assurance in house.	
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>Funding relationship of HE in FE colleges (1/95).</p> <p>Additional places for core proposals initiative (2/95).</p> <p>Policy on consolidation of MASNs continues but can over-recruit by 1.5% - up by 0.5% (6/95).</p> <p>Funding for p/t student numbers weighted in favour of science, engineering and technology (6/95).</p> <p>Revision of approach to calculation of AUCFs for p/t students (19/95).</p> <p>Consolidation on some non-formula funding into core funding: colleges within Uni of London, mainstreaming funding for cont. ed., funding for accelerated and intensive routes (3/95).</p> <p>Funding for provision of non-award bearing cont. ed. continues to 1998-99 (4/95, 16/95).</p> <p>Development funding policy for CVE to 1998-99 (11/95).</p>	<p>Policy statement on equal opportunities in quality assessment (M2/96).</p> <p>Revised quality assessment method.</p> <p>Policy on consolidation of MASNs continues but can over-recruit by 2% - up by 0.5% (2/96).</p> <p>Changes to method of calculation of holdback to exclude separate monitoring of core proposal initiatives or Diploma in Social Work places sponsored by the home office (13/96).</p> <p>Changes to funding method for teaching from 1998-9: similar activities to be funded at similar rates (4 price groups) additional funding for p/t, mature and non-</p>	<p>An extra 2089 MASNs allocated (16/97).</p> <p>New quality agency to be set up (QAA) following final report of Joint Planning Group for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (3/97).</p> <p>Introduction of £3.5m of funds over three years for the Teaching and Learning Technology programme (TLTP) (14/97).</p> <p>Changes to policy on holdback of HEFCE grant to measure student load rather than headcount (19/97).</p>	<p>Transfer of responsibility for funding some healthcare profession courses from HEFCE to Department for Health (97/31).</p> <p>New teaching funding method introduced with effect from 1998-99 (10/97, 98/09).</p> <p>Weighted standard recourse based on HEIs existing FTE and compared with recourse from previous year. Tolerance band introduced. Standard price for FTE in 4 re-named price bands. And takes into account higher cost of types of students such as mature and p/t.</p> <p>Changes to allocation of education and sports related provision to price bands (38/98).</p>



Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
	<p>Institutions asked to identify allocation of teaching funding to ug and pg separately (27/95).</p> <p>Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning phase 1 (29/95).</p> <p>Institutions invited to give up student numbers in exchange for retaining part of corresponding grant (31/95).</p> <p>Review of provision in former soviet and East European Studies, 3 year policy to part fund academic posts (32/95).</p> <p>Unified system introduced for banding courses (previously UFC/ PCFC) (18/95).</p>	<p>traditional, institutions to bid for ASN 21/96).</p> <p>Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning phase 2 (22/96).</p>		<p>New funding method to take account of funding specialist institutions as a result of recommendations from the Specialist Institutions Advisory Panel (98/10).</p> <p>Funding method takes account of recommendations in Harris report.</p> <p>Additional student numbers - 6000 additional FTEs including 1000 places on sub-degree level (20/97) (2932 were allocated at sub-degree level).</p> <p>Changes to holdback of funding process due to new funding method (98/38).</p> <p>Allocated a further 2354 MASNs (98/41).</p>
<b>Widening participation</b>	<p>Continuation of £3m for projects to support access for SEN students (2/95).</p>	<p>Requirement to publish institutional disability statements (8/96).</p> <p>£6m initiative to 1998-9 to expand quality provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to 1998-9 (9/96, 23/96).</p>	<p>Minor amendments to terms and conditions for allocated of access funds (18/97).</p> <p>Marginal funds for additional p/t numbers of 5000.</p>	<p>£1.5m (1 year) to widen participation in HE (regional partnerships (98/35).</p> <p>DfEE increases funding available for access funds - amendments include funding for all p/t and f/t students inc. students with disabilities (98/45).</p>

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
				Institutions to produce disability statements as a result of Disability Discrimination Act and as a condition of core grant (98/66).
<b>Research</b>	<p>RAE 1996 guidance on criteria for assessment, submissions and panel membership (1/2/3/95).</p> <p>CR funding phased out and transferred to QR (6/95, 10/95).</p> <p>UK pilot site licence initiative set up and piloted.</p>	<p>Adjustment in the way changes in QR income are moderated (4/96).</p> <p>Joint research equipment initiative (JREI) bids for funding (9/96).</p>	<p>New funding method for research established (4/97) in relation to QR/ GR based on RAE score and non-formula funding initiatives. UOAs assigned to bands for funding and introduction of policy factor. DevR dropped from formula.</p> <p>FE institutions specifically excluded from QR funding.</p>	<p>£20m Joint Research Equipment Initiative (4/97) (revised to £23.5m).</p> <p>PGR students funded through research funding model, not teaching.</p>
<b>Economy and society</b>		Sino-UK Higher Education programme of collaboration with China begins.	Restructuring and Collaboration Fund (£10m per annum) to support regional restructuring of institutions.	Restructuring and Collaboration Fund (£15m per annum) to support regional restructuring of institutions.
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>Libraries review non-formula funding for research in humanities (5/95, 14/95).</p> <p>Museums, galleries and collections non-formula funding policy (9/95).</p> <p>Equipment and estate formula funding models combined (7/95).</p>	<p>Programme of investment in local and metropolitan area networks MANs) to 1997-98 (2/96).</p> <p>Revised model Financial Memorandum – increased decision making responsibility for institutions (5/96).</p>	<p>Incorporation of capital funds within recurrent grant as 1996 budget statement allocates single grant undifferentiated between recurrent and capital sums (6/97).</p> <p>Revision to financial memorandum between HEFCE and institutions – in relation to short term borrowing (15/97).</p> <p>Amendment to policy on cost centres – new categories introduced (97/25).</p> <p>Guidance on Private Finance Initiative</p>	<p>£30m initiative for improving poor estate (97/22).</p> <p>£30m initiative for refurbishing research laboratories (97/23).</p> <p>Introduction of requirement for 3 year corporate plans with financial strategy for institutions to replace annual strategic plans to reduce information requests (98/13).</p> <p>Additional MANs funding £7.5m</p>

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
			<p>(PFI) for procurement (97/28).</p> <p>Severance pay for senior staff - following The Committee of Public Accounts report (7/97).</p>	<p>for 2 years 98/17).</p> <p>Introduction of strategy for costing and pricing (JCPSG).</p> <p>Audit code of practice amended (98/28).</p> <p>£2.5m available over 3 years to help institutions implement strategies for costing and pricing activities (98/32).</p> <p>Publication of environment workbook to improve performance on environmental issues (98/62).</p> <p>Policy on use of HEFCE funds in connection with overseas operations (33/98).</p> <p>Publication of HEFCE accounts direction to higher education institutions (34/98).</p>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>				

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
	<b>Sir Brian Fender Chief Executive (1995–2001)</b>			<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>Fee level £1,025.</p> <p>Establishment of Institute for Learning and Teaching (to set up accreditation scheme for HE teachers).</p> <p>Report of the Performance Indicators Steering Group (Dearing recommendation).</p> <p>Technology Integration Centre funded by JISC provides support to academics.</p> <p>Government sets up Transparency and Accountability Review of Research.</p> <p>Introduction of the Euro.</p> <p>Bologna Process launched.</p>	<p>Learning and Teaching Support Network introduced (generic and 24 subject centres) – managed by the ILT (£6.2m per annum) to 2004 (99/20).</p> <p>Freedom of Information Act 2000.</p> <p>Science and Innovation (Excellence and Innovation) White paper published.</p> <p>Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000.</p> <p>Opportunity Bursaries announced by DfEE (£2k per student from low income families).</p> <p>David Blunkett Greenwich speech on HE - announcement of e-University and Foundation Degrees.</p> <p>Universities UK formed (replaces CVCP).</p>	<p>New Labour Government re-elected.</p> <p>Fee level £1,075.</p> <p>Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.</p> <p>Equality Challenge Unit (funded by UK funding bodies) founded.</p> <p>Aimhigher campaign launched by Government.</p> <p>Department for Education and Skills replaces DEE.</p>	<p>Task Group (chaired by Sir Ron Cooke) reports in quality and standards of learning and teaching (02/15).</p> <p>Tuition fee level £1,100.</p> <p>Government Spending Review 2002 announced additional funding to support science, engineering and technology.</p> <p>Think Tank – Higher Education Policy institute established.</p> <p>HEFCE proposes to Government that MaSN is abolished.</p> <p>DES states young homeless people are priority for support funds.</p> <p>HEFCE sets target to reduce special funding and concentrate on block grant.</p>
<b>HEFCE</b>	HEFCE introduces regional consultants	HEFCE introduces national co-ordination team: National Disability Team and Action on Access Team, National Co-ordination Team, Innovations Team		<p>HEFCE introduces Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team</p> <p>Re-structure of HEFCE to include 4 directorates based on strategic themes</p>

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
		HEFC E receives nearly £1b in additional funding over three years, 10% in real terms (additional funding for pay, expanding student numbers and increase access.		Government Spending Review 2002 announced additional funding to support recruitment, retention and development of staff (£167m over 2 years).
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>Transfer of responsibility for funding HE provision by FE colleges from FEFC to HEFCE (98/59).</p> <p>Ug college fees for Oxford and Cambridge now part of HEFCE recurrent grant, not DfEE (99/13).</p> <p>Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (£26m 1 year) (99/26) merged from FDLT and TLTP – allocated by formula (FDLT continue with phase 3 in 1999-2000).</p> <p>Funding scheme to recognise and reward individual academics launched (99/26).</p> <p>£1m per annum over 5 years to expand provision for teaching and research in Chinese studies (99/35).</p> <p>Options for funding HE in FE</p>	<p>Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (£26m 1 year) (99/26).</p> <p>National Teaching Fellowships introduced.</p> <p>Special funding to support minority subjects to 2004 (to include former Soviet and Eastern European subjects) £5m per annum (99/47).</p> <p>£9.5m fund to help FECs develop HE (00/09).</p> <p>Performance Indicators in HE issued: access, progression &amp; completion, efficiency of L&amp;T and research outputs (00/40).</p> <p>E-University project launched - £62m over 3 years (00/43, 00/44).</p> <p>Funding of specialist higher education institutions (00/51).</p> <p>Funding of students in some private institutions through Dance and Drama Awards Scheme.</p> <p>Code of practice for franchise and consortia</p>	<p>Greater links between HEFCE and LSC to build HE/FE relations – to increase participation in HE to 50% target.</p> <p>National framework of qualifications based on national standards (Dearing recommendation) – new QA system from QAA.</p> <p>Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (£32m 1 year) (99/26).</p> <p>Foundation degree launched – bids for ASNs (10m) (00/27).</p> <p>52,000 additional student places (31,900 funded) (01/12).</p> <p>Hold back of funding for over-recruitment to MaSN above 4%.</p> <p>Changes to funding for HE qualifications awarded by external bodies introduced.</p> <p>AHRB takes over responsibility from HEFCE for museums and galleries funding.</p>	<p>ASN for w/p, deliver foundation degrees, support new Tech Institutes ((01/54).</p> <p>New Technology Institutes (consortia of HEIs and FECs) £25m capital funding over 2 years (01/47).</p> <p>Student premiums in funding allocation confirmed as: part-time, mature, long courses. Institutional premiums confirmed as: London, pensions, specialist institutions, small institutions, old and historic buildings (02/18).</p> <p>Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund - £31m per annum for 3 years for all institutions (not bid for) (02/24).</p> <p>Report on teaching and learning infrastructure in higher education published (2002/31).</p> <p>New framework for quality assurance brings system of subject review to a close and replaced by independent audits conducted by QAA. QAA publishes Benchmark statements for each subject.</p>

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
	<p>colleges – encourage partnerships with HEIs and development fund (99/36).</p> <p>Premium funding introduced for specialist performing arts institutions (99/41).</p> <p>Allocation of additional medical student numbers increasing to 2005 (99/42).</p> <p>Code of practice on in directly funded partnerships - HE in FE colleges (99/63).</p> <p>Performance Indicators in HE in the UK introduced (99/66/67).</p> <p>Conditions applied to HEFCE grant in relation to charging a fee of &lt; or &gt; than £1,025, imposed by Secretary of State (c11/99).</p>	<p>arrangements - indirectly funded partnerships (FECs and HEIs) (00/54).</p> <p>All FE colleges networked to JANET.</p> <p>Two new medical schools set up-first for many years. Access to Medicine programme set up at Kings College, London. HEFCE working with NHS and Department for Health to recruit additional 1,100 student places annually.</p> <p>25000 ASNs to bid for, 20743 allocated (99/56, 00/26).</p>	<p>Third phase of Teaching and Learning Research programme £10.5m.</p> <p>Additional data requirements introduced to understand how background effects progression (01/02).</p> <p>New indicators added to performance indicators – employment of graduates 6 months after graduation.</p> <p>Approach adopted by HEFCE and FEFC (to become Learning and Skills Council) in advising on applications for transfer between FE and HE published (01/05).</p> <p>Changes to student support funding: Provision for funding admin costs, changes to management of funds following introduction of Childcare Grant, early notification of minimum allocations for Hardship and Bursary funding (01/15, 01/49).</p> <p>Set of PIs about the employment outcomes of HE produced (01/21).</p> <p>Funding available for the development of Graduate apprenticeship Frameworks (01/41).</p> <p>Changes to recurrent grant: increased formula funding for wp, revisions to funding ASNs, transfer of student</p>	<p>Performance indicators amended to include an indicator of disability (c 13/2002).</p> <p>Review of indirect funding agreements and arrangements between HE and FECS (c25/2002).</p> <p>JISC introduces plagiarism advisory service.</p> <p>Second phase of funding for FECs to develop HE programmes (£18.5m to 2003-04 (02/02).</p> <p>23,000 ASNs. Dept. for Education and Skills agree no maximum student number for each institution. Funding method still limits student numbers (02/11).</p> <p>ASN bids to prioritise: foundation degrees, New Technology institutes, new programmes in social work education and training, summer schools, foundation years and Ufi activity £22m (2002/39).</p>

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
			numbers between HEIs and FECs (01/57).  DFLT phase four 2002-05 (01/60).	
<b>Widening participation</b>	<p>£6m to develop high quality provision for students with disabilities over 3 years (99/08).</p> <p>Funding of wp for under-represented groups in re-current grant (99/13), premiums for p/t and mature students, fee remission for p/t – disadvantaged determined by neighbourhood types.</p> <p>35,000 ASNs to bid for (44928 allocated) (98/56).</p> <p>Disabled students to be included in formula funding once data returns are robust (99/24).</p> <p>£7.5m (1 year) to widen participation in HE (regional partnerships (99/24).</p> <p>Institutions to develop OFFA plans (99/24, 99/33).</p> <p>New guidance on access funds (99/50).</p>	<p>Former Access Fund now three discrete funds: Access bursary fund for mature students (£14.69m in bursaries) Hardship fund Fee waiver fund for part-time students (00/28).</p> <p>Mainstream disability funding – recognition of increased costs (£5m) (c 7/00).</p> <p>Funding for University for Industry places (c 28/00).</p> <p>Policy statement on diversity in higher education (00/33).</p> <p>Amendments to recurrent teaching grant: increased allocations for wp, transfer of student numbers and funding between institutions where FECs funded directly through HEIs (00/34).</p> <p>Foundation Degree qualification introduced £5m (c 13/00).</p> <p>ASNs and funds to bid for:- Widen access to HE – postcode premium and state schools Support expansion of high quality in L&amp;T Deliver foundation degrees</p>	<p>Funding for recruitment of students from neighbourhoods with low rates of participation increased (01/29).</p> <p>Additional fund stream for 3 years to raise aspirations in institutions with less than 80% of students from state schools (01/29).</p> <p>Additional funding for summer schools (01/29).</p> <p>Changes to bursary/ hardship funds for students with partners on low incomes and students with a previous qualification applying for fee waiver, unemployed students taking taster modules (c17/01).</p> <p>Opportunity Bursaries made available following broadening of Excellence Challenge and Excellence in Cities (01/15).</p> <p>National Mentoring Pilot Project initiated by DfEE and co-sponsored by HEFCE Education Access Zone.</p>	<p>Improving infrastructure provision for disabled students funding initiative £5.4m over 3 years - supported by national team (02/21).</p> <p>First publication of data on students receiving Disabled Students Allowance.</p> <p>Partnership for Progression: Rationalisation of existing wp policy allocation of funding by postcode. Target setting for wp condition of grant from 2003-04. £60m over 3 years jointly with LSC (02/22, 2002/49).</p> <p>Pilot Excellence Fellowships Awards Scheme introduced - teachers working in schools and FECs to improve access (c 04/02).</p> <p>W/p strategies and action plans become a condition of grant.</p>

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
		<p>Support graduate apprenticeships (00/39).</p> <p>5,000 summer school places funded by DfEE for summer 2000 as part of Excellence in Cities Initiative (EiC), administered by HEFCE.</p> <p>Fee waiver fund (12.36m) for students who qualify for benefits or become unemployed during studies (c 20/00).</p>		
<b>Research</b>	<p>Third round of Joint Research Equipment Initiative (JFEI) (£22m).</p> <p>HEFCE and welcome Trust work together to develop more strategic approach to infrastructure funding (3m over 2 years in matched funding for equipment over £200k (c2/99).</p>	<p>Revision to RAE to focus on applied research and ensuring equality of opportunity for researchers. 75% of panels to involve representatives from industry, to review research outputs other than publications. More women on panels (20%), RAE to take account of circumstances such as maternity leave.</p> <p>Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) portal and website introduced.</p>	<p>Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) funding available £600m to be allocated by formula (01/11) (joint initiative HEFCE, DfES, Wellcome Trust) – replaces JIF and JREI (c 26/2002).</p> <p>New style PhDs introduced in 41 courses at 10 HEIs.</p>	<p>End of GR funding policy for departments rated 1, 2, 3a or b. Reduction in funds for 5, 4,3a and 2.5% increase for 5*.</p> <p>Report on arts and humanities research infrastructure published (2002/35).</p>
<b>Economy and society</b>	<p>Initiation of third stream of core funding through Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund up to £22m per annum to be made permanent (99/16) (HEROBC).</p> <p>Restructuring and Collaboration Fund (£15m per annum) to support regional restructuring of institutions.</p>	<p>Target funding of £100m per annum to support links with business and communities (HEROBC).</p> <p>£5m to support employees of SMEs to participate in HE as Graduate Apprenticeships (ASNs, development funds, fee waivers) (c 22/00).</p>	<p>20 Business Fellowships introduced (01/06, 01/25) funded by HEFCE and DTI.</p> <p>Policy on collaboration between HE providers in each region published (01/18).</p> <p>Higher Education Innovation Fund (HIEF) building on HEROBC sits alongside teaching and research as third stream grant, £80m over 3 years (0/22, 0/34).</p>	<p>Benchmarking tool introduced for assessing contributions to region (02/23).</p>



Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
	<p>First set of maps and data on regional profiles of HE.</p> <p>Extension of international collaborations includes partnership with USA on sharing policy objectives.</p> <p>Principles for international activity published (c8/99).</p> <p>Guiding principles for international activity published (c 8/99).</p>		<p>Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) announced (£27m for 3 years) for 14,000 student volunteering opportunities (01/42, 01/65).</p> <p>Additional £10m for Restructuring and Collaboration Fund.</p> <p>Regional Mission: regional contribution of HE launched with series of reports.</p>	
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>£105m initiative for improving poor estate over 3 years (98/50).</p> <p>Key Estate Ratios and Estates data Matrix established (99/18).</p> <p>Capital infrastructure fund for learning and teaching at £90m 1999-2002 – allocated by formula (99/26).</p> <p>Capital funding for 1999-2002 £150m research capital projects (99/52 – allocated by formula).</p> <p>Annual corporate plans for institutions replaced by three yearly plan (c3/99).</p>	<p>Value for Money Steering Group reports on facilities management and improving the managements of support services in HE (00/14).</p> <p>Review of burden of accountability for institutions leads to streamlining requests for information and data.</p> <p>Framework for institutional reporting arising from Transparency and Accountability Review published and TRAC implemented (c17/00).</p> <p>Pathfinder initiative contributes to cost of exploring procurement through public-private partnerships.</p>	<p>Guidance on risk management introduced following review of accountability measures (01/24).</p>	<p>Project capital funding round 2 - £214m to improve capital and IT infrastructure to support I&amp;T (£56m to improve provision for students with disabilities) 2002-04 (01/48).</p> <p>Audit code of practice revised (2002/26).</p> <p>New web facility to return HESA data launched (2002/38).</p>

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>		<p>HEFCE seeks annual operating statements from institutions on annual basis.</p> <p>Development and implementation of good management practices in HE: Good Management Practice Programme (£10m to 2003) (99/54).</p> <p>Spending Review announces £50m for investment in staff – Equal Opportunities Action group set up with sector representatives’ bodies, funding councils and trade unions.</p>	<p>Funding for development of human resource strategies (allocated in proportion to basic recurrent grant (01/16 £330m over 3 years).</p>	<p>HEFCE Race Equality Scheme introduced (2002/29).</p> <p>Management of security services in high education report published (2002/30).</p> <p>Advice on severance payments to senior staff amended (c 21/2002).</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>Government publishes White Paper 'The Future of higher Education – allowing for fees of up to £3,000.</p> <p>White Paper - <i>The Future of Higher Education</i> - proposes creation of Office for fair Access.</p> <p>Lambert Review on business-university collaboration published - recommends 50% increase in funding third stream activities.</p> <p>Tuition fee level £1,125.</p> <p>Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE, Learning and Teaching Support Network and National Co-ordination Team for Teaching the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund merge to become Higher Education Academy.</p> <p>250,000 ASNs required to keep 50% participation rate on target. Current participation rate 43%.</p>	<p>Higher Education Act 2004 - variable fees up to £3,000 per year introduced by Government from 2006.</p> <p>Maintenance loans re-introduced.</p> <p>Leadership Foundation created (UUK, SCOP, CUC) 0 pump primed by HEFCE.</p> <p>Tuition fee level £1,150.</p> <p>Schwartz Admissions to Higher Education Review group reports.</p> <p>Office for fair Access (OFFA) established.</p> <p>Arts and Humanities Research Council established (transition from AHRB).</p> <p>Establishment of Lifelong Learning Networks.</p> <p>Government Spending review 2004 – focus on achieving efficiencies in the public sector.</p> <p>Publication of ten-year Science and Innovation Investment framework (commits to permanent third stream funding and 25% increase in funds compared to HEIF2).</p>	<p>New Labour Government re-elected.</p> <p>Tuition fee level £1,175.</p>	<p>Tuition fee level £1,200.</p> <p>Leitch Review of Skills report.</p> <p>OFFA makes £300m per annum available for HEIS to provide bursaries.</p> <p>Supporting Professionalism in Admissions report.</p> <p>Charities Act 2006.</p> <p>White Paper 'Further Education: Training Skills, Improving Life Chances' published.</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
		<p>Foundation Degree Forward (national body) established.</p> <p>Gershon review of efficiency of Government spending departments published.</p> <p>Davies report from Higher Education Research Forum reports (relationship between teaching and research).</p>		
<b>HEFCE</b>	<p>Better Regulation Review Group recommends merging several special initiatives into block grant.</p> <p>HEFCE revises international strategy.</p>	<p>HEFCE role to secure public interest following introduction of variable fees – announced by Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive. Need to address STEM and other strategically important subjects.</p> <p>Growth in student numbers exceed planned growth – financial consequences.</p> <p>Equality Challenge Unit funding extended to 2006.</p> <p>HEFCE and Sector Skills Development Agency establish memorandum of understanding.</p>	<p>Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team ends and work passed to Higher Education Academy.</p>	
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>Policy for supporting higher education in FECs published (2003/16).</p> <p>Fund for Development of Learning and Teaching phase 5 announced £7m (2003/46).</p>	<p>First National Student Survey results published.</p> <p>Creation of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning - £315m to fund CETLs over 5 years in response to White paper's intentions to reward and enhance excellence</p>	<p>National Student Survey launched as part of revised quality assurance framework and package of new public information on teaching quality – published on HERO.</p> <p>HERO goes live to the public.</p>	<p>New condition of grant required by Secretary of State for Education and Skills: tuition fees charged to qualifying persons on qualifying courses do not exceed certain amounts, institutions comply with provisions of any access agreement in force as approved by</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>				
	<p>First pilot of National Student Survey of recent graduates. A second pilot was also agreed due to need for external scrutiny.</p> <p>E-University technical platform in place with portfolio of courses developed for launch in Autumn 2003.</p> <p>Review of recurrent teaching funding method. MaSN abolished (2003/42).</p> <p>Transfer of dance and drama award scheme to mainstream funding (900 places) (c 09/2003).</p> <p>National Teaching Fellowship Scheme expanded as proposed in White Paper. Additional £1.5m to support expansion from 20 to 50 Fellowships per year (Board minutes 87<sup>th</sup> mtg).</p> <p>Agreement on relationship between OFFA and HEFCE (88<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Supplementary grants agreed</p>	<p>in teaching (2004/05).</p> <p>HERO - National Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website launched for annual information on quality and standards of teaching and learning (2003/51).</p> <p>Extension of Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund for further year to 2006 (2004/18).</p> <p>Changes to core teaching funding method to include compensation for increase on employers' contributions to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme and funding for rewarding and developing staff incorporated, plus some subject and price band changes, 10% premium for p-t and foundation degrees (2004/24).</p> <p>UK e-Universities wound up. Remaining £62m to be used to support e-learning policy through the HE Academy (94<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Additional funded places for social work programmes – additional 500 (c 24/2003).</p> <p>Continuation of transitional funding for Higher Education Academy.</p> <p>600 places on private providers of dance and drama funded through HEFCE, not DfES.</p> <p>Additional funding of £4.4m to contribute to</p>	<p>E-Learning policy and strategy announced, inc. £33m capital formula funding to support investment in e-learning (2005/12).</p> <p>Pathfinder projects to embed e-learning £8m.</p> <p>Review of funding method for teaching to be implemented in 2007-08 (2005/21).</p> <p>Roberts review of strategically important and vulnerable subjects – HEFCE role not to be prescriptive but manage interventions (2004/24).</p> <p>Funding for minority subjects and some inherited leases absorbed into mainstream teaching grant.</p> <p>Substantial revisions to HERO site (c 04/2005).</p> <p>CETLs launched.</p> <p>Streamlined twin track approach to distribution on ASNs introduced – regional managed growth and through SDF.</p> <p>£100m for awards scheme from HEFCE and Department for Health for 200 new senior lectureships over next 10 years.</p>	<p>Director of Fair Access (c 15/2006).</p> <p>Changes to institutional audit by QAA following review of the quality assurance framework introduced (2005/35).</p> <p>Teaching Quality and Enhancement Fund (158.5m over 3 years: consolidates funding for learning &amp; teaching strategies, supporting professional standards, staff and student volunteering. Support development of CETLs, HEA, national Teaching fellowship Scheme (2006/11).</p> <p>Review of teaching funding method: implement national framework for costing of teaching based on TRAC methodology, use TRAC to establish full costs of WP, keep funding of part-time under review (2006/12).</p> <p>Additional capital funding for learning and teaching 2006-08 £95m by formula (2006/27).</p> <p>Review of the Quality assurance Framework evaluates TQI and NSS. Re-focus of TQI site on needs of applicants and advisers and removal of qualitative materials provided by institutions (2006/45).</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
	for new medical schools from 2002-03 to 2007-08 (88 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).	costs of new consultants' contract for clinical academic staff (92 <sup>nd</sup> Board mtg).  QAA contract renewed to deliver revised quality assurance framework (94 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).	Price group changes for media studies and sports sciences (98 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).  26,000 ASNs for 2005-06 (2005/14).	FECs to publish data on TQI website (c 09/2006).  Additional dental student numbers announced (c 09/2005).  Additional medical student numbers announced (c 25/2005).  HEIs to consult with HEFCE when considering closure of strategically important and vulnerable subjects to replace formal notice period (c 17/2006).  £18m partnership programme to support STEM initiatives announced.  £4.5m programme to promote language studies.  Professional Standards framework for teaching and supporting student learning published (104 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).  Train to Gain pathfinders agreed (109 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).  30,000 ASNs for 2006-07 to be allocated using new funding method.
<b>Widening participation</b>	Revision to method for calculating wp funding which will take into account prior educational achievement and	New w/p approach by HEFCE to focus on embedding w/p in strategic plans rather than submission of strategies as condition of grant. (96 <sup>th</sup> Board mtg).	Disability funding becomes part of core funding and enhanced funding for 2005-6 (c 02/2005).	Uplifted part-time premium and additional £40m over 2 years to reduce deterrents for financially disadvantaged students (103 <sup>rd</sup> Board mtg).

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
	<p>geodemographics (2003/14).</p> <p>Additional summer schools funding confirmed for 3 years at £4m per annum (2003/14).</p> <p>Additional funding for specialist summer schools (£1.5m) (c 13/2003).</p> <p>HEFCE is successful in bid for £9.4m European Social Fund under ESF Objective 3, Lifelong Learning. HEIs invited to bid under Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression initiative for additional 4,500 summer school places (2003/18).</p> <p>Foundation degree Forward established – national body to support development and validation of foundation degrees.</p> <p>Special funding £5.5m over 2 years to support teaching disabled students.</p> <p>End of ‘aspiration funding premium’ to HEIs with &lt;80% of students from state schools.</p>	<p>Partnerships for Progression and Excellence Challenge merged to form Aimhigher.</p> <p>Summer schools funding integrated with Aimhigher.</p> <p>Additional full-time and part-time foundation degree places and development of new programmes £5.5m (2003/48). Greater emphasis on allocation by region.</p> <p>20,000 ASNs for 2004-05 (2004/12).</p> <p>7,185 new places at foundation degree level funded as special initiative for 2 years (2004/15).</p> <p>Changes to funding method for w/p – inc. students already holding a degree given zero weighting (ELQ).</p> <p>Funding for wp changed to be based on method that weighs ug new entrants according to young HE participation by ward and average educational achievement by ward. Formula funding split 20% for wp, 80% improving retention.</p> <p>New price group weightings introduced.</p> <p>£1m over 5 years available to Aimhigher to support regional health specific strands (c</p>	<p>HEFCE announces equality in funding part-time students and additional £40m with DfES over 2 years.</p> <p>Rubin report on impact of variable tuition fees on part-time students.</p>	<p>Funding guarantees for Partnerships for progression and Excellence Challenge programmes end, Aimhigher partnerships at area and regional levels become responsible for allocation and distribution of funds to partners (2006/02).</p> <p>Funding for Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme.</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
		<p>06/2004).</p> <p>£7m for national dissemination of innovation and good practice in w/p (c 07/2004).</p> <p>W/p strategies no longer a condition of grant due to additional requirements from OFFA (c 21/2004).</p>		
<b>Research</b>	<p>SRIF round two funding - £845m (2003/06).</p> <p>£20m Research Capability Fund to support research in specific emerging subject areas such as social work, art &amp; design, media, dance &amp; performing arts and sports-related studies.</p> <p>Roberts report on review of future of research assessment published. Recommendations: expert judgement, frequency of assessment, research competencies, assessment burden, quality profiles, panel structure, best fir for subjects, PIs, joint submissions (2003/22).</p> <p>Additional £20m provided to support 'very best' departments with 5* ratings in 1996 and 2001 RAEs.</p>	<p>Additional funding provided to support 'very best' departments with 5* ratings in 2001 RAE.</p> <p>Capacity funding £17.5m to support research in emerging subject areas: nursing, subjects allied to medicine, social work, art &amp; design, communication, cultural and media studies, drama, dance, performing arts, sports related subjects.</p> <p>Format on next RAE announced as a result of Roberts Review of research assessment.</p> <p>Science and Innovation Awards launched – funded by EPSRC and HEFCE.</p> <p>Research Libraries Network established.</p> <p>Promising Researcher Fellowship Scheme - £10m over 2 years, allocated as part of core grant – restricted dependent upon RAE success (2004/03).</p> <p>SRIF round 3 £500m a year from 2006-08</p>	<p>Changes to the funding of postgraduate research students introduced – not included in teaching funding method but in new single support stream within funding for research.</p> <p>Research capability fund (established 2003) to continue to 2008-09 (c 29/2005).</p> <p>Special funding stream allocated as research libraries 'access strand' discontinued and funds returned to mainstream QR (98<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>38 new Clinical Senior Lectureship Awards announced for 2006 up to 200 posts over 5 years.</p> <p>Third round of SRIF announced - £903m over 3 years.</p> <p>New element of recurrent funding for research introduced to provide additional money to institutions undertaking research funded by charities. £135m in 2006-07 and £180m in 2007-08 (c 16/2005).</p> <p>Research Information Network operational.</p> <p>Simplified process for Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (c 15/2005, 21/2005).</p> <p>Policy to publish research degree qualification rates (c 10/2006, 2007/29).</p> <p>Science and Innovation Awards third</p>



Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
	<p>Review of research funding method and agreement that a formulaic approach would be preferable. Funding for 4 rated departments to focus on improvement (2003/38).</p> <p>Publication of recovering the full economic cost of research and other activities (c 05/2003).</p> <p>Continuation of £4.4m for 'access' strand of Research Support Libraries Programme.</p>	<p>announced (c 15/2004).</p> <p>£2m provided for veterinary research in joint initiative with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.</p> <p>Revision on QAA code of practice on postgraduate research degree programmes to link minimum standards of provision to grant (95<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>		<p>round with EPSRC (£31m).</p> <p>Language Based area Studies Initiative launched with AHRC.</p> <p>Veterinary Training Research Initiative extended for 2 years to 2008 through partnership with Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.</p> <p>Introduction of metrics to monitor sustainability of research base.</p> <p>Revision to QAA code on practice to include minimum standards for postgraduate research degree programmes (c 18/2004).</p> <p>Criteria and working methods for RAE 2008 announced.</p>
<b>Economy and society</b>	<p>HEIF consolidated as permanent third stream of funding. HEIF2 £187m over 3 years – collaboration between institutions a major feature (2003/34).</p> <p>HEIF2 initiates network of 20 Knowledge exchanges funding for 5 years (2003/34).</p> <p>Strategic Development Fund launched, replacing the</p>	<p>Second Round of Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF 2) launched - £10m over 2 years (2004/19).</p> <p>Knowledge Transfer Capability Fund £12m over 2 years (2005/05).</p>		<p>HEIF 3 £238m over 2 years – formula funding allocation (including continuation of centres for Knowledge Exchange to be informed by annual survey of interaction between HE, business and the community (2005/36, 46, 2006/30).</p> <p>Changes to SDF introduced in application, approval and monitoring process (2006/15).</p> <p>Pilot Beacons for Public Engagement</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>			
	Restructuring and Collaboration Fund £30m per year over 3 years (2003/28).			<p>Initiative launched - £8m over 4 years (2006/49).</p> <p>Early work on demonstrating improvement of knowledge exchange interactions towards demonstrating improved impact.</p> <p>Move towards predictable funding allocations for third stream activities – substantially formula based.</p> <p>HEFCE Olympics Strategy agreed (107<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>Annual Monitoring Statement and Corporate Planning Statement replace Annual Operating Statement (2003/19).</p> <p>£494m allocated to improve capital and IT infrastructure to support L&amp;T (£117m of which is to improve provision for students with special needs and £60m for improvement of science and engineering labs - capital project round 3 for 2004-06(2003/26).</p> <p>Model financial memorandum between HEFCE and HEIs revised and new model published (2003/54).</p>	<p>Private Finance Initiative guidance revised (2004/11).</p> <p>Costs of accountability substantially reduced from £250m per annum in 2000 to £211m in 2004. New Code of Practice for audit and accountability comes into effect.</p> <p>International report jointly sponsored between HEFCE and OECD suggests more collaborative approach is needed between institutions and policy makers – ‘On the edge: securing a sustainable future for higher education’.</p> <p>Reimbursement of inherited lease liabilities reviewed and will cease within 5 years.</p> <p>Income reported under TRAC as well as</p>	<p>Launch of HEFCE sustainable development initiative (2005/01). Institutions to provide a framework setting out long term sustainability management (c 28/2005).</p> <p>Space Management Group reports on efficient and sustainable space management, inc. space costs and drivers (2005).</p> <p>Proposal to collect accountability information in a ‘single conversation’ with HEIs – piloted in 2006 and role out in 2007 (2006/07).</p> <p>Changes to way in which grants are paid for Project capital and SRIF funding introduced to combine funding for</p>	<p>Capital funding for learning &amp; teaching, research and infrastructure funds 2006-08.</p> <p>Space Management Group reports on promoting space efficiency and impact on space of future HE changes (2006).</p> <p>HEFCE grant adjustments: withholding of grant to institutions that exceed contract range, do not deliver growth in student numbers, under-recruit against CFTEs for medicine and dentistry (2006/19).</p> <p>Changes to the model financial memorandum introduced: a new system for protecting the exchequer interests to provide greater accountability and reducing administrative burden,</p>

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Sir Howard Newby Chief Executive (2001–2006)</b>				
	<p>Changes in HEFCE approach to promoting Public/ Private Partnership (PPP) and Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects (c 07/2003).</p> <p>£400k 3 year research project to help HEIs understand business benefits for effective management of space.</p> <p>Revision to TRAC methodology to activity and project level (88<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>costs.</p>	<p>learning &amp; teaching and research (c 03/2005).</p>	<p>accounting for impact of Financial Reporting Standard (retirement benefits) come into effect (c 12/2006).</p> <p>HEIs receive formal risk assessments.</p> <p>Capital funding for directly funded FECs (£22m) allocated (c 11/2005).</p> <p>HEIs asked to consider use of shared services (c 20/2006).</p>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<p>HESA staff data used as basis for calculating 'golden hello' allocations 2003/04 – aimed at shortage subject areas (c 19/2003).</p> <p>Race equality monitoring introduced (89<sup>th</sup> Board Mtg).</p> <p>Advice on severance payments to senior staff amended (c 15/2003).</p>	<p>Consolidation of rewarding and developing staff funding into core teaching grant (2004/03).</p> <p>Leadership, Governance and Management Fund - £10m over 3 years (2004/26).</p> <p>Supporting Professional Standards Fund (for 2 years) launched.</p> <p>Guidance on mergers published (2004/09).</p> <p>HEFCE Institutional Support Strategy agreed (90<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>New JISC Strategy 2004-06 agreed (91<sup>st</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>Policy statement on sustainable development in HE (2005/28).</p> <p>Self-assessment tool for people management in HEIs implemented – to be phased in over 3 years to 2008. To be used to mainstream funding under Rewarding and Developing Staff Initiative (c 17/2005).</p>	<p>Issue of the higher education workforce framework (2006/21) – with a view to mainstream funds from Rewarding and Developing Staff initiative. Role of HEFCE will become less directive.</p> <p>Equality Challenge Unit reviewed with a new remit to include students as well as staff for embedding equality in the sector.</p> <p>Single Equality Scheme published.</p>

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
	Prof David Eastwood Chief Executive (2006–2009)			Sir Alan Langlands Chief Executive (2009–2013)
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>Sainsbury Review of Science and Innovation.</p> <p>Variable fees introduced - £3,070.</p> <p>HEIDI database launched.</p> <p>Burgess report Beyond the Honours degree published.</p> <p>Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills replaces some of DES functions.</p> <p>Further Education and Training Act</p>	<p>Government's Public Sector Agreement workforce qualification target announced.</p> <p>Government White Paper – <i>Innovative Nation</i></p> <p>Government policy framework set out in 'A New University Challenge'</p> <p>Government launches £200m matched funding scheme for voluntary giving.</p> <p>Global financial crisis.</p>	<p>Browne Review launched (review of HE funding and student finance in context of global recession).</p> <p>Higher Education Framework "<i>Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in the knowledge economy</i>" published.</p> <p>Spending review - Secretary of State announces efficiency savings of £180m required to be delivered in HE.</p> <p>Global financial crisis continues.</p> <p>Unleashing Aspiration: Panel on fair access to the professions report</p>	<p>New Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition Government.</p> <p>Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Browne Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance published.</p> <p>University Modernisation Fund announced by Secretary of State (£270m) – to increase access and increase efficiency/ reduce costs.</p> <p>Government Coalition Programme published – intention to publish more information on costs, graduate earnings and student satisfaction on individual courses.</p> <p>BIS announces National Scholarship Programme (student premium).</p> <p>Local Enterprise Partnerships established (to replace RDAs).</p> <p>Adrian Smith report: <i>One step beyond: making the most of postgraduate</i></p>

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
				<i>education.</i>
<b>HEFCE</b>	<p>HEFCE becomes principle regulator for HE under the Charities Act 2006.</p> <p>HEFCE International Collaboration team dissolved.</p>	<p>HEFCE regional teams replaced by three institutional teams</p>		<p>Spending Review 2010 - HEFCE funding reduced by £180m and then a further £135m.</p> <p>HEFCE becomes principal regulator of HEIs that are exempt charities.</p>
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>33,000 ASNs + 16,000 (foundation, co-funded) over 2 years (2007/06).</p> <p>Policy on performance indicators – transfer of indicators to HESA (2007/14).</p> <p>Changes to HESA survey – required to report students on non-standard years, monitoring ASN targets, monitoring contract range (c 15/2007).</p> <p>Funding to sustain chemistry, physics, chemical engineering and mineral, metallurgy and materials engineering - £75m over 3 years (c 13/2007).</p> <p>Flexible learning pathways pilots introduced – 2 year fast track honours degrees, part-time study options.</p> <p>Allocation of funding for teaching reviewed: introduction</p>	<p>Policy published on phasing out of funding for ELQs (with exemptions for: those in receipt of DSA, ug medicine, dentistry, nursing, veterinary science, all teacher training, foundation degree). Additional funding available for part-time (2008/13).</p> <p>Funding method adjusted to take account of ELQS (2008/12, c 07/2008).</p> <p>10,000 ASNs (half of which for foundation degrees) (2008/12, c 04/2007).</p> <p>5,000 ASNs on a co-funded basis with employer engagement (c 03/2007).</p> <p>Allocation of ASNs to be through processes of the SDF (40,000 places) 119<sup>th</sup> Board mtg.</p> <p>Increased funding for under-represented groups most at risk or non-completion and additional medical and dental student numbers (2008/12).</p> <p>Phase 3 of the Quality Assurance Framework policy – revisions to methods used by QAA for auditing collaborative provision,</p>	<p>40,000 ASNs for 2009-10, 2010-11 – to meet policy areas: to meet SDF plans, foundation degrees, strategically important subjects, STEM, healthcare priorities, areas for new HE provision (and cross cutting themes) – distribution through SDF (c 05/2008).</p> <p>ASN for 2009-10 amended to 10,000 following Secretary of State statement in Parliament (c 32/2008, 130<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>10,000 ASNs on a co-funded basis with employer engagement (c 03/2007).</p> <p>Institutions instructed to retain 2008-09 recruitment levels + 10,000 ASNs or else over recruitment will result in claw back of HEFCE funds to the Treasury to meet consequent unanticipated student support costs (2009/8).</p> <p>Destination of leavers’ survey extended to FECs.</p> <p>Institutions to report on use of Diploma Supplement in annual monitoring</p>	<p>10,000 ASN places – priority given to SIVS and health (c 22/2009).</p> <p>Student number control specifications published – setting specific numbers for institutions (2010/08).</p> <p>Policy guidance for HEIs that over-recruit to ensure that there is no overall fee income advantage to institutions (c 11/2010).</p> <p>Teaching grant reduced through withdrawal of funding for: old and historic buildings, accelerated and intensive taught postgraduate provision in price group D, phasing out additional support for foundation degrees (2010/08, 131<sup>st</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>HEAR introduced.</p> <p>Policy on strategically important and vulnerable subjects reviewed and aligned in light of government’s New Industry, New Jobs, Higher Ambitions, and Skills for growth agendas (2010/09).</p>

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
	<p>of targeted allocations to contribute towards additional costs of foundation degrees, old &amp; historic buildings and part-time study, counting modules completed to support flexible study patterns, use data from TRAC to understand cost of teaching (2007/23).</p> <p>Recurrent grant changes introduced: revisions to funding ASNs, w/p, transfer of student nos. and funding between institutions, changes to additional funding for high cost and vulnerable science subjects (2007/32).</p> <p>Implementation of new method of review for HE in FECs (Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review with QAA.</p> <p>New policy on funding HE in FECs announced with pilot scheme (c 27/2007, 115th Board mtg).</p> <p>Re-launch of TQI (HERO) site to take into account improvements as a result of feedback (c 08/2007).</p> <p>Re-profiling of learning and</p>	<p>improved communication between QAA and other reviewing agencies (2008/21).</p> <p>New credit framework and guidelines published by QAA.</p> <p>Policy on approach towards strategically important subjects: STEM, Middle Eastern, former Soviet Union and Central Asian studies, Japanese, Chinese and other Far eastern languages, Eastern Europe and Baltic Region studies, MFL, quantitative social science (2008/38).</p> <p>NSS results published on new Unistats website (replaces TQI website) and developed by UCAS (c 19/2007).</p> <p>NSS extended to include students studying at FECs (c 28/2007).</p> <p>Small and specialist premiums of less than 10% added to institutions mainstream grants – some institutions to recruit more to remain within contract range.</p> <p>Land based studies no longer considered vulnerable subject.</p> <p>Pilot for open educational content £5.7m (123<sup>rd</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>statements as part of Bologna Process.</p> <p>£5.7m pilot programme established to develop digital repository of learning materials – start of major project to creative digital bank of open educational material by 2013.</p> <p>Publication of policy on supporting higher education in further education colleges (2009/5).</p> <p>£25m for very high cost laboratory-based subjects become permanent recurrent target allocation in recurrent grants (2009/8).</p> <p>Revision of approach to e-learning strategy and policy – enhancing learning and teaching through the use of technology published (2009/12).</p> <p>Policy for engaging with institutions that demonstrate unsatisfactory management of quality of learning opportunities and/or academic standards as established by QAA audit published (2009/31).</p> <p>Policy in funding partial completion through introduction of flexible study measure published (c 12/2009).</p> <p>Online Learning Task Force established to help HE sector maintain and extend position as world leader in online</p>	<p>New policy on quality assurance system for institutional audit published (2010/17).</p> <p>£10m to support movement of 3000-6000 students provision to SIVS (science, technology, engineering, maths and MFLs) through University Modernisation Fund (c 06/2010).</p> <p>20,000 ASNs provided for through University Modernisation Fund. Funded for first year but HEIs expected to fund remaining 2 years of study through efficiency savings (£250m (which includes £10m for students noted above (c 08/2010).</p> <p>University Modernisation Fund reduced from £270m to £152m. Reduction in baseline of £82m – found through reduction in teaching block grant and teaching capital (c 14/2010).</p> <p>Institutions to develop employability statements for Unistats website (c 12/2010).</p> <p>Changes to conditions of grant for co-funded ASN places to align with ASNs though mainstream teaching funding method (c 20/2010).</p> <p>Changes to HESES and HEIFES</p>

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
	<p>teaching grant to take account of tuition fees from Student Loans Company to be paid in two tranches in Feb and May (c 07/2007).</p> <p>High cost laboratory based subjects to receive £75m time limited funding to support strategic and vulnerable subjects (111<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>HEFCE funding of Prime Minister's Initiative on International Education £750k for 4 years (114<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>£1m support for Islamic Studies support (116<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>		<p>technology.</p> <p>HEFCE, HEA, NUS joint funding of student engagement project.</p> <p>Changes to funding method with targeted allocation to support teaching enhancement and student success (125<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Graduate internships scheme introduced - £13.6m, 8,500 places (131<sup>st</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>introduced: inclusion of information to monitor student number control, co-funded employer provision, amendment to definition of student completion (c 10/2010).</p>
<b>Widening participation</b>	<p>Guidance on higher education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners (2007/12).</p> <p>Summer Schools' programme extended to 2010.</p> <p>With DFE, implemented programme to assist institutions with engaging with new diplomas for 14-19 year olds.</p> <p>Aimhigher funding extended to 2011 to target lower socio-</p>	<p>Policy published on widening participation and fair access research strategy. Themes to include: better links with schools and colleges, partnerships between HEIs and communities, HEIs to submit wp strategic assessments (2008/10).</p> <p>£1m over three years to fund projects to disseminate good practice in student retention (c 08/2008).</p> <p>£21m Aimhigher Associates Scheme announced.</p>	<p>Policy on HEFCE support for disabled students published. Will continue to fund additional costs through mainstream disability allocation and fund specialist disability support services through Action on Access, HEA and Equality challenge Unit (2009/49).</p> <p>Framework for the submission of w/p strategies published (2009/01).</p> <p>Changes to funding method to improve support for teaching enhancement and w/p. Combined funding for improving retention, learning, teaching and</p>	

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
	economic groups, areas of deprivation, care leavers, SENs.		assessment strategies, teaching informed and enriched by research to create new targeted allocation to support teaching enhancement and student success (TESS). Increased funding to recognise costs of working with schools in most disadvantaged areas. Incorporated into funding methods from 2009-10 (2009/30).	
<b>Research</b>	<p>Recurrent grants methodology revised to include business research and charity elements (2007/06).</p> <p>Review of Research Information Network leads to additional funding of £2.4m to 2011.</p> <p>£6m transitional funding for 8 medical schools to build research capacity.</p> <p>New arrangements for Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (c 12/2007).</p> <p>Policy on open access to research publications agreed (112<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Policy on encouraging research collaboration at strategic level between HEIs agreed (114<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>RAE 2008 to use quality profile.</p> <p>RAE 2008 results published.</p> <p>Announcement of framework for REF as a single unified framework for assessing and funding research across all disciplines using bibliometric techniques and assessing impact (c 13/2008, 34/2008).</p> <p>Funding terminated for the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme from 2010.</p> <p>HEFCE and Research Councils launch revised UK Concordat and Code of Practice for researchers.</p> <p>Policy on purpose and funding of QR revised (120<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>£25m of SRIF funding from 2010-11 brought forward due to pre-budget measures (c 35/2008).</p> <p>Recurrent grant for research based on quality profile outcomes of RAE2008 (125<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Funding element for 'best five star' departments discontinued (125<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>ORSAS funding ceases (c 18/2008).</p> <p>Recurrent research grant weightings for activity amended to favour more research concentration. Enhanced funding for geography and psychology to fit with STEM disciplines (2010/08).</p> <p>Publication of REF design – configuration of panels, method for assessing impact, weightings between outputs, impact and environment (c 04/2010).</p>



Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Economy and society</b>	<p>Policy on HE education-business and community interaction produced (2007/17).</p> <p>Strategic Development Fund processes and operation of the fund revised (2007/22).</p> <p>Publication of strategy on employer engagement to support flexible learning in the workplace.</p> <p>Beacons for Public Engagement funded from 2007 for 4 years.</p>	<p>HEIF 4 announced (from 2008-11 £396m) (2008/02).</p> <p>HEIF funding to be incorporated into recurrent grant allocations to support all forms of knowledge exchange (2008/12). Programme for development and employer co-funding. Move towards performance as basis for allocation of funds (£100m).</p> <p>SDF funding re-focussed to prioritise employer engagement, New University Challenge (c 18/2008).</p> <p>Announcement that there will be no more funding for employer engagement activities (c 36/2008).</p>	<p>Final allocation of £8m for Centres for Knowledge Exchange for 2008-09 (2008/02).</p> <p>Publication of policy on sustainable development in higher education (2009/3).</p> <p>Economic Challenge Investment Fund announced – as part of employer engagement programme - £25m of matched funding as a reprioritisation of SDF for one year (c 03/2009, 109<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>Guiding principles for international activity amended as a result of allegations of irregularities in the use of funds for international travel and published (c 21/2010).</p> <p>Review of funding for museums and galleries (134<sup>th</sup> board mtg).</p>
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>Space Management Group guidance published (2007/30).</p> <p>New capital investment framework published – moves away from project based methods to evaluation of longer term sustainability (c 11/2007, 21/2007).</p> <p>HEFCE assurance review launched – every 5 years (c 25/2006).</p> <p>Funding for Proc-HE ceased. Procureweb continued funding with management transferred</p>	<p>Single conversation process implemented for all institutions following pilot (2008/31, c 15/2008).</p> <p>New accountability framework comes into effect linked to assessment of institutional risk (2007/11).</p> <p>Framework of VAT partial exemption methods becomes operational.</p> <p>Capital Investment Fund (by formula) - £1,085m as Learning &amp; Teaching Capital Investment Fund and £1,276m Research Capital Investment Fund for 3 years (permanent mainstream) (2008/04).</p>	<p>Capital funding for directly funded FECs put on hold (c 12/2008).</p> <p>Revolving Green Fund £5m to support carbon saving projects (c 04/2009).</p> <p>Institutions asked to re-examine capital investment plans to bring forward further expenditure to 2009-10 to enable HEFCE to bring forward £200m of capital funding (c 05/2009).</p> <p>£9.8m support for HE libraries for Phase 2 of UK Research Reserve launched.</p>	<p>Policy on carbon reduction target and strategy for higher education published (2010/01).</p> <p>£20m to deliver efficiency and value for money through shared services through University Modernisation Fund (c 07/2010).</p> <p>£5m of above funding to establish an e-Procurement Fund and £1m to develop e-Marketplaces (c 16/2010).</p> <p>Capital Investment Framework assessment arrangements published. New areas to be addressed – reducing carbon emissions and improving space</p>

Category	2007	2008	2009	2010
	to JISC (c 05/2007).	<p>Capital Investment Framework: securing value for money guidance issued (c 09/2008).</p> <p>Matched funding scheme for voluntary giving to run for 3 years and administered by HEFCE (c 11/2008).</p> <p>HECFE introduces new KPI and to include reduction in carbon emissions as factor in capital funding allocations.</p> <p>Revolving Green Fund announced - £30m for carbon saving projects (c 20/2008).</p> <p>Following pre-budget report by the Chancellor to address current economic position, HEIs asked to bring forward capital spending from 2010-11 (c 35/2008).</p>		<p>usage (c 19/2010).</p> <p>Revisions to HEFCEs Accounts Direction introduced (c 19/2010).</p> <p>Changes to the Financial memorandum with HEIS introduced (c 18/2010).</p>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<p>Policy on Equality Scheme launched to promote race, disability and gender equality (2007/1).</p> <p>Further funding of Leadership Foundation until 2012 (4.5m).</p> <p>Leadership, Governance and management Fund extended to 2010 with £10m (c 26/2007) in partnership with Leadership Foundation (funding for Foundation extended to 2012).</p>		<p>Publication of policy and process for developing new HE centres or university campus – in the light of Government policy framework set out in ‘A New University Challenge’ published March 2008 (2009/ 7).</p> <p>Amendments to policy on severance payments to senior staff in HEIs published (c 06/2009).</p> <p>Announcement of additional access to Leadership, Governance and Management Fund to support projects to deliver ‘leading transformational change’ in current economic climate (c 07/2009).</p>	<p>Leadership, Governance and Management Fund ends (c 13/2010).</p> <p>HE Workforce Framework (revised guidance) published (2010/05).</p> <p>Equality Challenge Unit funding extended for 5 years.</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
	<b>Sir Alan Langlands Chief Executive (2009–2013)</b>			<b>Prof Madeleine Atkins Chief Executive (2014–Present)</b>
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>White Paper '<i>Students at the Heart of the System</i>' published (shift in funding from HEFCE, introduction of competition through dynamism, core and margin and AAB, HEFCE as lead regulator and promotion of interests of students).</p> <p>Regulatory Partnership group established by HEFCE and Student Loans Company.</p> <p>Subject centres in LTSN close.</p> <p>Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility published.</p> <p>Charities Act 2011.</p>	<p>Participation rate 49%.</p> <p>New tuition fee levels allows institutions to charge up to £9,000.</p> <p>Very significant reduction in the number of new part-time entrants.</p> <p>Regional Development Agencies abolished.</p> <p>Changes to HEFCE organisational structure in light of new funding arrangements.</p> <p>New framework between HEFCE and BIS introduced.</p> <p>JISC becomes an independent organisation.</p>	<p>Participation rate drops to 43%.</p> <p>Spending Review 2013.</p> <p>Introduction of EU VAT directive implemented by Finance Act 2012 to allow for establishment of cost sharing groups to provide VAT-exempt services to member organisations – HEFCE guidance for HEIs.</p> <p>Government announces changes to National Scholarship Programme.</p>	<p>Government Science and Innovation Strategy announced.</p> <p>Government announces £200m in match capital funding for science and engineering.</p>
<b>HEFCE</b>	<p>BIS-SLC-HEFCE forum established for joint policy interests.</p>	<p>HEFCE announces change of focus to invest on behalf of students costs that cannot be covered by tuition fees alone and to provide opportunities for participation.</p>	<p>HEFCE asked to take on regulatory oversight role as part of programme of higher education funding and regulatory reform.</p> <p>HEFCE given responsibility for operating new system of specific course designation for alternative</p>	<p>Launch of data maps of higher education provision.</p> <p>New student number control system introduced.</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
			<p>providers and extending SNC to alternative providers.</p> <p>HEFCE produces strategic statement on its role in the student interest.</p> <p>Government asks HEFCE to review participation at postgraduate level.</p>	
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>20,000 ASNs on a co-funded basis with employer engagement - part of Workforce development programme (c 03/2007).</p> <p>10,000 FTE additional places agreed (138<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Changes to HESES and HEIFES introduced: clarification of treatment of foundation years (c 10/2010).</p> <p>All elements of teaching grant (with exception of w/p and improving retention) subject to 4.28% cash reduction. UMF withdrawn (2011/07).</p> <p>Further allocation of funding to support moving FTEs to SIVS (2011/11).</p> <p>Policy on provision of information about higher</p>	<p>New funding regime comes into practice – HEFCE T mainstream funding begins to decrease and publicly funded loads introduced.</p> <p>Policy on allocation of margin places published (portfolio/ performing arts subjects can opt out of AAB+ and core/ margin process, exclusion of SIVS from calculation of margin, student number limit to be equal to at least 20% of limit for 2011-12 (2011/30).</p> <p>Students with entry qualifications = or &gt; that AAB no longer included in SNC.</p> <p>Margin of 20,000 places created by reducing 'core' residual SNC – only redistributed to institutions charging less than £7,500.</p> <p>Focus on supporting MFL as part of SIVS policy.</p> <p>First set of KIS data publically available.</p> <p>NSS to introduce question on student satisfaction with Students' Union (25/2011).</p>	<p>More student places freed from control, 5,000 margin places available. Students with entry qualifications = or &gt; ABB (high grades policy) no longer included in SNC, Revised list of exempt qualifications, top up students from foundation no longer count towards SNC (12/2012, 30/2012).</p> <p>NSS introduces new survey asking for student intentions following graduation (24/2012).</p> <p>Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey in further education colleges – colleges to fund survey themselves from 2014-15 after transition year of funding (28/2012, 08/2013, 26/2013).</p> <p>Funding for new-regime students in high cost subjects extended to more subjects in price group C and consolidates funding for PGT (2013/05).</p>	<p>New allocation of funding for students taking study abroad (in our out of Erasmus Scheme) to support participation in exchange programmes (14/2013).</p> <p>Changes to SNC: HEIS recruiting significantly below SNC loose places and will be re-allocated, application process for new publicly funded providers to apply for student numbers from 2015-16, high grades policy extended to include certain combinations of qualifications (2013/20).</p> <p>£20m reduction In recurrent teaching funding grant- but balanced by increase in capital L&amp;T grant of £20m (04/2014).</p> <p>Recurrent grant to support an increase of up to 30,000 full-time places, absorption of the Access to Learning Fund and support for a National Collaborative Outreach Network (£25m) so reduction of 5.85% in most teaching grants with the exception of high costs, wp and specialist institutions. Recalculated funding</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
	<p>education: establishment of KIS and provision of data available from NSS and DLHE surveys, institutions to provide wider information sets (2011/18).</p> <p>Student number control policy for 2011-12 published, maintained SNC level at 2010-11, deduction of UMF places (c 02/2011, 26/2011).</p> <p>Subject level graduate salary information to be provided on Unistats website (c 03/2011).</p> <p>HESES and HEIFES surveys merged (17/2011).</p> <p>KIS methodology approved (104<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Publication of KIS technical guidance (23/2011).</p> <p>New quality assurance arrangements come into force.</p> <p>Guidance on definitions of 'old regime' and 'new regime' students announced (24/2011).</p>	<p>Funding for co-funding with employers phased out.</p> <p>Workforce development no longer a policy priority.</p> <p>Revision to policy on KIS data – now to be provided on new UNISTATS web-site, not on institutions web site (16/2012).</p> <p>Changes to HESES and HEIFES data collection to no longer account for non HEFCE funded students (15/2012).</p> <p>Final policy on KIS and Unistats published (2012/15).</p> <p>Conformation of policy for SNC funding from 2013-14, inc: support for high cost subjects, transitional approach to support PGT provision, TACT approach to inform future funding, part-time support only in high cost subjects, SIVs support . Calculation of reduction in grant due to excess recruitment (2012/17, 19).</p> <p>Changes to SIVS policy to support any discipline considered to be vulnerable (144<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>New risk-based approach to QA agreed to target QAA efforts, tailor external review to provider, and ensure transparency (2012/27).</p>	<p>Amendments to ILR funding calculation method for FECs (06/2013).</p> <p>Transitional arrangements for financial arrangements for students taking year abroad with new financial arrangements from 2014-15 – new regulated fee limit of 15% of fee in Erasmus scheme or 30% outside scheme (14/2013).</p> <p>Revision to HEFCE policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions in line with start of risk-based Higher Education Review method (15/2013, 29/2013).</p> <p>Update to the KIS 'widget' (17/2013).</p> <p>£25m for pilot projects to test options for finance and activity aimed at stimulating progression into PGT (2013/13).</p> <p>Introduction of HEAPES, survey of students on courses provided by alternative providers (2013/14).</p> <p>Modified version of TRAC(T) methodology introduced.</p>	<p>allocations for old-regime students and revised scaling factor (04/2014, 2014/27).</p> <p>Funding for national facilities and initiatives (special funding) reduced by £13m (04/2014).</p> <p>Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) rolled out (04/2014).</p> <p>Student Opportunity Fund reduced by 5.85% (04/2014).</p> <p>Institutions to provide more transparent information on income and expenditure to students as part of Government's supporting public accountability initiative (06/2014).</p> <p>Institutions given increased flexibility to recruit above SNC by 6%. Exceptions list expanded (2014/05).</p> <p>Guidance on providing information for prospective postgraduate taught students ((10/2014).</p> <p>NSS results dissemination web-site changed and is managed by Texuna Technologies Ltd (16/2014).</p> <p>£50m in matched funding to enable 10,000 PGT students to receive £10k contribution to cost of studies as part of Postgraduate Support Scheme (32/2014).</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
		<p>20,000 margin places agreed for 2012-13 and policy for applications to the margin agreed (142<sup>nd</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>High cost funding for media and sports studies discontinued (144<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>		<p>Quality Assessment Review initiated.</p> <p>ELQ policy relaxed for some STEM subjects (154<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Institutions with &lt;1000 STEM FTEs can enter competitive element of STEM teaching and capital fund (161<sup>st</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Agricultural technology and some sports science to be included in STEM classifications (161<sup>st</sup> Board mtg).</p>
<b>Widening participation</b>	<p>Grant letter to HEFCE requests top priorities for target funding are supporting wp and fair access and ensuring adequate provision for strategically important and vulnerable subjects.</p> <p>National Scholarship Programme allocations announced – to be matched funding by institutions (£300m over 3 years) to support students with household income &lt;£25k (13/2011).</p> <p>Aimhigher funding ends.</p> <p>‘Opportunity, choice and excellence in HE’ published</p>	<p>Changes to widening participation strategic assessments (WPSAs) to interim wp strategic assessments to identify key priorities for 2012-13 - in preparation for new approach where strategies will need to provide a framework of accountability for funding (11/2012).</p> <p>National Scholarship Programme as ‘student premium’ to benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds (£50m in 2012, £100m in 2013 £150m in 2014. Institutions expected to match funding to 100% if charging &gt;£6k fee, or 50% if less (2011/10).</p>		<p>Joint guidance from HEFCE and OFFA on production of integrated WPSSs and access agreements (31/2013).</p> <p>Funding allocations for National Scholarship Programme calculated by new method focussed on institutions with higher proportion from low-income backgrounds, institutional financial contributions will only be required from those with an access agreement, part-time students eligible (2013/02).</p> <p>National Scholarship Programme reduction in funding to £50m – rules relating to use of funds amended accordingly (32/2013).</p> <p>£25m funding of National Outreach Network (called National Networks for</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
	(2011/22).			Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) for FE and HE – £22m over 2 years - £3m for a national tracking system (20/2014).
<b>Research</b>	Recurrent research grant reduced by 1.1% (2011/07).	<p>Discontinuation of research activity survey – calculation of funding of QR in relation to research degree programme supervision fund and charity support provision – using HESA data to inform funding elements (c 10/2010, 19/2011).</p> <p>Institutions to submit code of practice on fair and transparent selection of staff for REF submission (27/2011).</p> <p>Shift from mainstream QR to RDP supervision funding of £35m. 2* RAE research no longer funded (03/2012).</p> <p>£120m to support PGT.</p> <p>£240m to support PGR with investment targeted on the basis of quality of research.</p> <p>New approach to measuring rates of qualification from research degree study published (2012/10).</p> <p>Additional allocation of research capital fund (£100m) over 3 years to support research facilities (research infrastructure fund) (2012/12).</p> <p>Publication of statement on standards and integrity in UK research by HEFCE,</p>	<p>UK Research Partnership Investment Fund (additional allocation of research capital funding (£80m) (2012/31).</p> <p>HEIs eligible for HEFCE research funding to comply with research integrity concordat published by Universities UK (2012/32, 21/2013).</p> <p>Compliance with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity made condition of HEFCE grant (153rd Board mtg).</p> <p>Implementation of an open access framework in post-2014 REF (2013/16, 2014/07).</p>	<p>First REF.</p> <p>Publication of intended use of impact case studies submitted to REF 2014 (26/2014).</p> <p>UKPISG agree current set of research UKPIs are discontinued and new UKPIs to be developed (21/2014).</p>

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
		Universities UK, Research Councils UK, Wellcome Trust and Government departments.		
<b>Economy and society</b>	<p>HEIF funding levels maintained (2011/07).</p> <p>HIEF funding for 2011-15 announced - £2150m per year. New policy on HEIF published – funding calculated on performance metrics only, funding for staff numbers as a measure discontinued, double weightings for income from small/ medium sized companies, max cap of £2.85m to any institution (2011/16, c 04/2011).</p>	<p>New Catalyst Fund launched to replace Strategic Development Fund (143<sup>rd</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Catalyst funding available for projects to enhance HE’s contribution to economic growth (£50m).</p>	£5m of Catalyst Fund to support NUS Students’ Green Fund to 2015 (2013/12).	Bids for Catalyst funding for universities as anchors, technical education at higher levels, innovative knowledge exchange developments in specialist institutions (2014/21).
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>Capital Investment Fund (CIF2) £49m for Learning and Teaching Capital Investment Fund (1 year) and £549m Research Capital Investment Fund (4 years) (2011/08). Note: reinstatement of funding withdrawn in June 2010.</p> <p>Capital funding for directly funded FECs £6.3m over 2 years (10/2011).</p> <p>Revolving Green Fund phase 2</p>	<p>Research Capital Investment Funding (RCIF2) brought forward from 2012-13 to 2011-12 (01/2012).</p> <p>Moderation funding to smooth changes no longer provided (03/2012).</p> <p>Special funding initiatives reduced from £208m to £125m. Shift to channel more funding through core routes (03/2012).</p> <p>Capital Investment Fund 2 for L&amp;T increased from £49m to £52.5m (05/2012).</p> <p>Publication of review of institution-specific</p>	<p>Second L&amp;T Capital Investment Fund (TCIF2) £33m (2013/08) as part of CIF (Capital Investment Framework).</p> <p>RCIF2 increased by £3m (2013/08).</p> <p>Revision to TRAC following consultation to streamline requirements for reporting for all HE providers in receipt of HEFCE funding. Strong objection to using TRAC for transparency of information for students (2013/09).</p> <p>£250,000 funding for developing and</p>	<p>Revision to financial memorandum between HEFCE and HEIs to accommodate requirements to manage risk around financial commitments and other minor amendments – now called Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability (2013/21, 2014/09, 2014/12).</p> <p>£200m fund for investment in STEM science and teaching facilities (to be matched funding by institutions) (02/2014).</p> <p>Increase of £20m additional capital for</p>



Category	2011	2012	2013	2014
	<p>funding announced (£10m per annum for 2 years – projects that reduce carbon emissions (16/2011).</p> <p>JISC reviewed 138<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Policy for extrapolation of funding adjustments agreed (139<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>funding in light of new funding arrangements (2012/16).</p> <p>Revolving Green Fund phase 3 (£20m) (29/2012).</p> <p>Receipt of capital funding conditional upon satisfactory carbon management plans and improved environmental performance.</p> <p>Change to the financial memorandum to require HEIs receiving research grants from the Council to comply with terms of a Research Integrity Concordat (146<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p>	<p>disseminating good practice in shared services (27/2013).</p>	<p>learning and teaching (TCIF2) (03/2014).</p> <p>New financial commitments threshold introduced (11/2014).</p> <p>Fourth round of Revolving Green Fund (RGF4) provided in partnership with Salix Finance Ltd - £34m to achieve cost savings and reduce carbon emissions (18/2014).</p> <p>Sustainable development framework introduced (162<sup>nd</sup> Board mtg).</p>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<p>Revised policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions after changes to institutional review (2011/36).</p> <p>Shared strategy for relationship management between HEFCE and institutional governing bodies (12/2011).</p>	<p>Collaboration, alliances and mergers in HE guidance published (22/2012).</p> <p>Innovation and Transformation Fund – joint LFHE. HEFCE initiative to support efficiencies in HE (£1m over 2 years).</p> <p>HEFCE Equality and Diversity Scheme 2012-14 announced (2012/03).</p>		<p>First register of higher education providers published on-line (19/2014).</p>

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	<b>Prof Madeleine Atkins Chief Executive (2014–2018)</b>			
<b>Wider policy context</b>	<p>Conservative Government elected.</p> <p>BIS introduces new controls and standards for alternative providers.</p> <p>Government intends to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework.</p> <p>Green paper on HE to announce closure of HEFCE and creation of Office for Students, Teaching Excellence Framework, enhanced WP, student protection, implications for research (consultation to run to 2016).</p> <p>Nurse Review Report on research funding structure.</p> <p>Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.</p>	<p>17 per cent funding reduction in real terms for BIS.</p> <p>The HE White Paper: <i>Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility &amp; Student Choice</i> published May 2016.</p> <p>The Higher Education and Research Bill 2016-17 had its first reading in the House of Commons 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016.</p> <p>Stern Review of Research excellence Framework.</p> <p>Sainsbury Review of skills pathways and qualifications.</p> <p>McMillan Review – international competitiveness of UK university technology transfer practice.</p>	<p>Conservative Government re-elected.</p> <p>Higher Education and Research Bill 2016-17 agreed by House of Commons and House of Lords and receives Royal Assent May 2017.</p> <p>Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced in Bill.</p> <p>UUK Bell Review of sector agencies recommends merger of Leadership Foundation, HE Academy and Equality Challenge Unit.</p> <p>Government launches industrial strategy to boost productivity and earning power.</p> <p>Government sells part of student loan book.</p>	<p>Office for Students launched.</p> <p>UKRI launched.</p> <p>HESA data to be replaced by Data Futures (providing in year analysis) 2019-20.</p> <p>Increase in fee cap to £9,250.</p> <p>Advance HE launched – merger of HEA, Equality Challenge Unit and Leadership Foundation.</p>
<b>HEFCE</b>	<p>Spending review: HEFCE to make savings of £120m by 2019-20 in teaching grant as part of Government measures to bring down public debt, but</p>	<p>HEFCE reports to DfE, not BEIS (July 2016).</p> <p>Year one of Teaching Excellence Framework.</p>	<p>Year two of Teaching Excellence Framework.</p>	<p>‘Transition’ of formula finding, QA and regulator responsibilities to OfS.</p> <p>‘Transition’ of formula finding to RCUK. Year three of Teaching Excellence</p>

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	<p>protect high cost subjects.</p> <p>Counter Terrorism Act and Security Act 2015 - HEFCE becomes HE regulator.</p>			Framework.
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	<p>Simplification of recurrent teaching funds method and processes: no longer 3 stage recalculation process, will be informed by previous year's student numbers, main allocation for high-cost subjects and supplementary allocation for London weighting, transitional allocation on forecasts of old-regime students to be phased out, changes to price groups for ITT leading to QTS (30/2013, 29/2014).</p> <p>SNC removed from HEFCE funded providers.</p> <p>Publicly funded further education and sixth-form colleges invited to become directly funded by HEFCE (2014/11).</p> <p>£1m to support projects in evaluating measures of learning gain (04/2015).</p> <p>Amendments to KIS/ NSS data</p>	<p>Loan scheme for PGT students introduced, up to £10,000.</p> <p>Reduced overall funding of HEFCE grant of £150m for 2015-16 for recurrent grants (03/2016).</p> <p>Teaching recurrent funding reduced by £21m – STEM remains a priority, new stream of funding for geographically focussed national outreach programme £30m 2016-17, £60m 2017-18 to meet PMs goal of 100% increase in participation from disadvantaged backgrounds (03/2016).</p> <p>Revised operating model for quality assessment – consistent with European Standards and Guidelines – more tailored to institution's context. Six year reviews to be replaced by Annual Provider Review light touch reviews, with more power to intervene (2016/03, c13/2016, 13/2016, 18/2016, 25/2016, 2016/29).</p> <p>T funding of £80m by 2019-20 required to support the transfer of subjects allied to medicine from DoH to BIS (71<sup>st</sup> Board meeting).</p>	<p>DADF Phase 2: funding to stimulate development of degree apprenticeships (£5m for 2017-8) (6/2016).</p> <p>Changes to KIS such that it becomes Unistats Data Collection, some changes to data set to accommodate CMA advice (04/2017).</p> <p>Changes to question set for NSS to accommodate TEF and alternative providers now required to participate (30/2016).</p> <p>HEFCE becomes responsible for supporting students completing ug courses in nursing, midwifery and some allied health professions professional registration through HE finance system (£32m) (06/2017).</p> <p>£20m announced for an institute of national focus to improve digital skills provision at levels 6&amp;7 for 2017-19 (08/2017).</p>	<p>Changes to supporting PGT students revised (£1,100 supplement for high cost subjects re-considered) (2016/39).</p> <p>Catalyst Fund: Focus on tackling religious-based hate crime affecting students (3/2018).</p> <p>Health Education Challenge Fund - £200k (2018/02).</p>

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	<p>collection – lowered headcount threshold for publication of student level data to 10 (11/2015, 12/2015).</p> <p>HESA CACHED programme – new way of presenting and using HESA data. HEFCE to use data in regulatory role (196<sup>th</sup> Board minutes).</p> <p>Guidance on reporting students in data returns for HE providers offering courses through partnership arrangements (18/2015).</p> <p>HE at FECs, 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges and alternative providers to be included in UK performance indicators (17/2015).</p> <p>Steps to Postgraduate Study – on-line decision making tool launched.</p> <p>£150m in teaching grant savings from no increase in expected student numbers, reduction in £10m for Catalyst Fund, grant reductions for HEIs that over-recruited against SNC in 2014-15 (19/2015).</p> <p>Scaling factor for high cost</p>	<p>£8 million Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund (DADF) for programmes ready for 2017-18 (c06/2016).</p> <p>Recurrent funding: maintaining in real terms the total teaching grant budgets for main high-cost subject allocation and for the targeted allocation for very high-cost STEM subjects (physics; chemistry; chemical engineering; and mineral, metallurgy and materials engineering). The amount of recurrent teaching grant continues to decline, predominantly as a result of the continuing phase-out of funding for old-regime students (those students. The supplement for old-regime students declines by £54 million from £91 million in 2015-16 to £37 million in 2016-17. (2016/09).</p> <p>Changes to KIS data collection (9/2016)</p> <p>DADF Phase 1: funding to stimulate development of degree apprenticeships (£3m for 2016-17) (6/2016).</p> <p>Revised operating model for quality assessments following introduction of TEF. TEF year 2 guidance announced (2016/32).</p> <p>HEFCE Board consider revisions to T-funding strategy to target funding on sector priorities (access, student success,</p>	<p>Principles for selection of UK performance indicator factors (16/2017).</p> <p>T recurrent grant reduced by £40m. £32m to support students on nursing, midwifery and other medicine aligned courses. £60m for national collaborative outreach programme. £40 (2016-17 and 2017-18) for student premiums (f/t, p/t, disabled students (especially mental health) – doubled funding (2017/05).</p> <p>Catalyst Fund: focus on closing the skills gap and supporting the industrial strategy through curriculum development (24/2017).</p> <p>NSS to include questions on effectiveness of students' unions in supporting students with their studies (09.11.2017 Board minutes).</p> <p>Expansion of undergraduate medical education places: call for bids for places (2017/20).</p>	

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	<p>funding of new regime students reduced and scaling factor for London students reduced, allocations related to student opportunity fund for disabled students reduced by 2.4% - to make further savings (19/2015).</p> <p>Funding for employer co-funded old regime students ceases (157<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>£50m for PGR provision (163<sup>rd</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>Additional measures introduced for the control and standards of alternative providers (164<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>£1.5m available for development of conversion courses in engineering (25/2015).</p> <p>Learning Gain programme funding extended extension of the programme budget to £4million, 2015-16 to 2017-18 (169<sup>th</sup> Board minutes).</p> <p>Changes to NSS proposed including new questions on student engagement (169<sup>th</sup> Board minutes).</p>	<p>progression to PGT), reduce data reporting, need for value for money and funding quality (Board mtg 11.05.2016).</p> <p>Catalyst Fund - focus on innovations in L&amp;T: addressing barriers to student success, student save guarding (20/201636/2016).</p>		

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	Consultation on new QA system in line with TEF.			
<b>Widening participation</b>	<p>National Scholarship Programme ceases as undergraduate support programme with re-focus to support postgraduate students from dis-advantaged backgrounds (24/2013).</p> <p>Phased in changes to Disabled Students Allowance.</p> <p>New set of principles for UKPIs - includes increased WP and research UKPIs (31/2015).</p>	<p>WP indicator based on National Statistics Social Economic Classifications 4-7 to be discontinued in UK performance indicators and will be revised (17/2015).</p> <p>Recurrent grant new stream of funding for geographically focussed national outreach programme (NCOP) £30m 2016-17, £60m 2017-18 to meet PMs goal of 100% increase in participation from disadvantaged backgrounds and white males, as well as double proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minority groups (03/2016). Scope revised to include increasing inclusivity (27/2016).</p> <p>Formula driven grants for WP reduced budget to £54m from £68m (03/2016).</p> <p>Disabled students funding doubles to £40m - with different funding weightings to improve provision for disabled students in 2016-17 to £40 million. The increase is to support institutions to meet the rapid rise in the number of students reporting mental health problems and to transition towards an inclusive social model of support for disabled students. (03/2016, 2016/06, 2016/09).</p>	<p>Formula based widening access targeted allocation discontinued, now included in NCOP (2016/39).</p> <p>Student premium for disabled students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds to include POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 and part-time students (2016/39).</p> <p>Discontinued formula based widening access targeted allocation in recurrent funding (2017/05).</p> <p>Changes to POLAR4 classification introduced (2017/29).</p>	
<b>Research</b>	Research partnership	Fourth round of UK Research Partnership	Methodology for QR Research	UK Research Partnership Investment Fund

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	<p>investment Fund 3<sup>rd</sup> round (£100m) (2013/35, 2015/33).</p> <p>Parameters of research funding method reviewed in light of REF 2014 results. Funding for QR disaggregated according to how sub-profiles contributed to overall quality profile, STEM adjustments and removal of STEM protection, increase relative quality rating between 4* and 3* from 3:1 to 4:1 (03/2015).</p> <p>£52m savings from one-off transitional research allocations which are no longer provided (19/2015).</p> <p>Changes to policy on open access in next REF (20/2015).</p> <p>Removal of cap on supervision funding rates per student (164<sup>th</sup> Board mtg).</p> <p>New set of principles for UKPIs - includes increased WP and research UKPIs (31/2015).</p>	<p>Investment Fund (UKRPIF) £200m of matched funding over 2 years (2014/17).</p> <p>2016-17 recurrent grant for research (QR) increased by £20m to £1070m. Other research recurrent streams remain at the same level (03/2016).</p> <p>Open access policy for REF updated (32/2016, 2016/35).</p>	<p>Degree Programme supervision funding changes to take account of supervision across dual institutions (34/2016).</p> <p>Change in method for counting PGR students that inform RDP supervision to include only year 1-3 (p/t 1-6) (34/2016).</p> <p>Increase in mainstream research funding of £17m to include allocation from Global Challenges Research Fund and further £11m in October (24/2017).</p> <p>Initial decisions on REF2021 framework published (33/2017/ REF2017/01).</p> <p>Catalyst Fund: focus on supporting mental health and wellbeing for postgraduate research students (40/2017).</p> <p>REF procedural guidance published October 2017 (2017/25).</p>	<p>(£220m in 2020-21) – research capability funding 6<sup>th</sup> round (2017/05).</p>
<b>Economy and society</b>	<p>HEIF funding extended for further year with £10m supplement. £150m for main funding method (03/2015,</p>	<p>HEIF £160m for 2016-17. New approach to annual allocations and annual modifier (2016/16, 176<sup>th</sup> Board).</p>	<p>£100m announced to incentivise university collaboration in research commercialisation, based on HIEF methodology called Connecting</p>	

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
	05/2015).		<p>Capacity Fund. £15m formula funding for 2017-18 and £85m competitive projects 2017-21 (2017/03).</p> <p>Recurrent funding for Knowledge Exchange Fund remains at £160m (2017/05).</p> <p>Catalyst Fund: focus on tackling hate crime and online harassment on campus (20/2017).</p> <p>HEIF: additional funding for knowledge exchange to deliver Government's industrial strategy £40m 2017-18 plus £25m recurrent funding (25/2017, (2017/24)).</p> <p>HEIF: Connecting capability fund (second round) from existing funding (34/2017).</p>	
<b>Finance, estate and assurance</b>	<p>Changes to financial reporting to model SORP practices (02/2015).</p> <p>Changes to methodology for formula teaching and research capital allocations (09/2015).</p>	<p>Review of institution specific funding – new criteria introduced (06/2015).</p> <p>Changes to the Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability 0 triggers for Exchequer interest repayment (15/2016).</p> <p>Re-development of value for money reporting to recognise changing landscape for HE regulation and policy (aligned with Diamond Review) (23/2016).</p> <p>Museum, galleries and collections review</p>	<p>Capital Investment Framework funding for 2017-18 announced based on previous funding methodology (£135m for teaching, £189m for research) (07/2017).</p> <p>Change to institutional financial statements to include corporate governance and internal control (27/2017).</p>	



Category	2015	2016	2017	2018
		£10.7m.		
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<p>Prevent duty: Monitoring Framework for the higher education sector (2015/32)</p> <p>Colleges given opportunity to enter into a direct funding relationship with HEFCE for 2016-17 (169<sup>th</sup> Board minutes).</p>	Revised framework for Prevent duty (2016/24).	<p>Changes to framework for monitoring of Prevent duty in higher education in England produced for 2017 (2017/10).</p> <p>HEFCE publishes guidance on severance pay and remuneration of senior staff (June 2017).</p>	

## Appendix D: PERCEPTIONS OF CETL PARTICIPANTS, PRACTITIONERS AND PVCs

The perceptions of CETL participants, practitioners and PVCs for Learning & Teaching are collated from the statistical data provided in the summative report, and provide some insight into how the CETL programme was viewed (see Chapter 6). (SQW 2011) ©HEFCE

	<b>Pro-Vice-Chancellors</b>	% strongly agree or agree	% strongly disagree or disagree
B1	As a result of the CETL programme, we have improved teaching and learning practice in our institution	67%	7%
B2	As a result of the CETL programme, we have introduced (or improved) processes for recognising and rewarding staff excellence in teaching and learning	54%	7%
B3	As a result of the CETL programme, staff in our institution now have more time and opportunity to reflect on their teaching	47%	7%
B4	As a result of the CETL programme, we have better facilities for teaching at our university	53%	7%
B5	As a result of the CETL programme, we have increased opportunities for better staff-student interaction at our institution	46%	7%
B6	As a result of the CETL programme, we have developed innovative approaches to teaching and learning at our institution	53%	7%
B7	As a result of the CETL programme, staff at our institution have more opportunities to engage in pedagogical research and scholarship	40%	7%
B8	If your institution is involved in more than one CETL, as host and/or partner, please say to what extent these CETLs have worked well together to benefit your institution as a whole	20%	-
C1	Whether or not you are directly involved in a CETL, are you aware of any developments within specific subject areas that have arisen from the CETL programme?	47% Yes 40% No	-
D1	Good practice and innovation in learning and teaching have been shared between CETLs and non-CETL institutions	73%	13%
D2	CETLs have contributed to improvements in student retention, achievement and employability	33%	13%
D3	There has been effective working between CETLs, the Higher Education Academy and other organisations and networks to develop and disseminate findings and good practice more widely	60%	13%
D4	The level of collaboration between and across CETLs has been good	40%	7%
E3	Reflecting on the CETL programme as a whole, do you agree that the approach take to developing and funding the programme was the most effective way to recognise and disseminate excellence in teaching and learning in HE?	37%	33%
F1	We have put formal processes in place for reviewing CETL impacts and incorporating the results into our institutional planning	53%	-
F2	Developments arising from our CETL are reflected in our institution's strategic and operational plans and embedded in our ongoing processes and activities	53%	-
F3	Teaching and learning have a higher status and profile in our institution as a result of the CETL	40%	-

	<b>Pro-Vice-Chancellors</b>	% strongly agree or agree	% strongly disagree or disagree
F4	Now that external CETL funding has ceased, our institution is providing internal resources to support further innovation in learning and teaching	60%	-
F5	Our institution provides resources for staff development to embed new approaches in teaching and learning	60%	-
F6	Our institution is continuing to collaborate with CETL partners and other non-CETL institutions to support the development of teaching and learning	34%	13%

	<b>Participants and practitioners responses</b>	% CETL employees	% non-CETL employees
B1	As a result of the CETL programme, my overall teaching and learning has improved	91%	69%
B2	As a result of the CETL programme, my excellence in teaching and learning has been recognised via promotion or some other form of recognition and reward	63%	28%
B3	As a result of the CETL programme, I have had more time and opportunity to reflect on my teaching	70%	33%
B4	As a result of the CETL programme, I have developed innovative approaches to teaching and learning	90%	68%
B5	As a result of the CETL programme, I have had opportunities to engage in pedagogical research and scholarship	81%	60%
C1	The CETL programme has contributed to improved teaching and learning practice in my institution	92%	74%
C2	The CETL programme has encouraged my institution to recognise and reward staff for excellence in teaching and learning	64%	47%
C3	The CETL programme has resulted in more time and opportunity to reflect on teaching in my institution	69%	53%
C4	The CETL programme has contributed to the adoption of innovative approaches to teaching and learning in my institution	86%	75%
C5	The CETL programme has resulted in more opportunities to engage in pedagogical research and scholarship at my institution	87%	68%
C7	The CETLs in which we are involved have worked well together to benefit our institution as a whole (for respondents whose institutions are involved in more than one CETL)	34%	42%
D1	Whether or not you are or have been involved in a CETL. Are you aware of any developments within specific subject areas that have arisen from the CETL programme?	76% Yes 5% No	56% Yes 24% No
E1	Good practice and innovation in teaching and learning have been shared between CETLs and non-CETL institutions	61%	51%
E2	CETLs have contributed to improvements in student retention, achievement and employability	76%	35%
E3	There has been effective working between CETLs, the Higher Education Academy and other organisations and networks to develop and disseminate CETL activities and good practice more widely across the sector	56%	42%
E4	The level of collaboration between and across CETLs has been good	51%	22%