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**What is the role of academic support in  
contemporary UK HE?**

By

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**A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the**

**University of Kent for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Centre for the Study of Higher Education**

**University of Kent**

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## Abstract

The role of academic support has historically lacked prominence in UK HE, only emerging in literature in the 1990s despite practices pre-dating this. Consequently research is limited and tends to focus on evaluating best practice e.g. academic literacies versus broad skills; embedded versus bolt-on; and centralised versus devolved approaches. According to Bourdieu, however, practices are shaped by an interplay between ‘context’ – the rules, dominant capital and power positions of a field, and ‘perceptions’ – habitus, capital and subsequent positions of agents (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998). Therefore in order to evaluate the practices of academic support services it is necessary to consider context – both political and institutional, and perceptions of purpose - of both HE as well as academic support.

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate critically the role of academic support in contemporary UK HE. The following questions offer a breakdown of this enquiry:

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

To answer these questions I carried out and thematically analysed data from 17 interviews with 5 academic support teams, as well as reviewing key UK HE reports and policy (1963-2016), and literature pertaining to the purpose and practices of UK HE academic support.

Analysis revealed academic support roles to be mediating a complex mix of conflicting powers (political, institutional and academic) and conflicts between economic, social and cultural values and priorities. These conflicts are embodied in three opposing, but coexisting, approaches to academic support: **‘remedial’**, **development** and **business**. While **‘remedial’** and **business** are politically driven - underpinned by competition, commerce and commodity; **development** arises from the humanistic and social values of academic support practitioners and their desire to empower individuals for social and cultural progression.

**Development** is characterised by liberal values of developing higher thinking (emotion and intellect) through the support of knowledge acquisition (self and subject); thus enabling individuals to have more fulfilling lives and contribute more meaningfully to society. In contrast **‘remedial’** involves overcoming deficits in students, staff and institutions in order to achieve policy-defined, and enforced, performance targets. However, enforced performance targets (at all levels of education) perpetuate deficits and inequalities between individuals and institutions, subsequently maintaining the need for academic support. The **business**, or customer service approach, emerged more recently with the marketisation of HE and political drives to improve teaching and learning quality ‘efficiently’ (BIS, 2016) through consumer satisfaction. However, efficiency and consumer satisfaction conflict, thus creating barriers to quality teaching and learning. Therefore the policies driving the **business** approach undermine the very purpose of education as a means to learning and growth.

Through HE policy, central government has increasingly reduced the purpose of HE to the short-term pursuit of economic capital, thus perpetuating disempowerment, inequality and social divides. In contrast, academic support services champion social and cultural values, recognising the long-term and holistic benefit of education for society as well as the economy. However, to achieve these benefits it needs government to reconsider the dominant capital of society and education, and devolve power over education to those qualified to make educational judgements for the greater good.

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I dedicate this thesis to my late dad, nan and grandad. Sadly dad and grandad passed away in my final year of writing this thesis, however both were proud just knowing that I was doing it, in their eyes I had already succeeded. I miss your fun, love and laughter.

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## **Abbreviations**

ALDinHE – Association for Learning and Development in Higher Education

AMOSSHE - Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education

BIS - Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

CBI - Centre for Business and Innovation

CVCP - Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals

DES - Department of Education and Science

DfE – Department for Education

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

ESL – English as a Second Language

HE – Higher Education

HEFCE - Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

HESA - Higher Education Statistics Agency

LDHEN – Learning Development in Higher Education Network

NACUE - National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs

NCGE - National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship

NCIHE - National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

NSS – National Students Survey

NVQ – National Vocational Qualifications

OFFA - Office for Fair Access

OIA - Office of the Independent Adjudicator

QAA - Quality Assurance Agency

QCA - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

RAE – Research Assessment Exercise

REF – Research Excellence Framework

SET - Student Evaluation of Teaching

SpLD – Specific Learning Difficulties

TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admission Service

UNISTATS – official agency for collating and displaying university and course data

WP – Widening Participation

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with exploring the question: What is the role of academic support in contemporary UK HE? The purpose of this introduction is to describe the professional circumstances that gave rise to this research, and to give an outline of this thesis structure and content. This introduction will be divided into three sections:

1. My role and interest in the research
2. Research enquiry, theory and emerging approaches
3. Structure of this thesis

Section 1 will start by giving an overview of how my interest in this research topic emerged. This will involve a summary of how my academic support role evolved within one higher education (HE) institution in the space of fifteen years, starting with my 2003 entrance into the specialist art college as a ‘Study Skills Adviser’, and ending with my current ‘Learning Development Tutor’ role in a ‘new’ specialist university for the arts. Part of this explanation will also involve the timely nature of this thesis, for current HE policy (discussed in chapter 2 Policy Analysis) has not only led to a re-focusing of my institution, but also contributed to changes in my role.

Section 2 will present the research enquiry, rationale, research questions and a brief definition and origin of the phrase ‘academic support’. This section will also introduce the choice of theoretical lens (discussed in detail in chapter 4 Theoretical Framework) and a brief introduction to the three approaches to academic support emerging from this research. The three approaches: *remedial*, developmental and business will be briefly described in relation to Bourdieu’s forms of capital and related HE policies; these three approaches form the basis of this thesis and thus will be explored in more detail throughout the proceeding chapters. Section 3 of this introduction will offer a breakdown

of the thesis by chapter; the title, content and rationale for each chapter will be explained, including the mapping of the research questions to the relevant chapters. Finally the conclusion to this introduction will summarise and reiterate what has been explained and offer a brief introduction to the next chapter – chapter 2 Policy Analysis.

## **1. My role and interest in the research**

### **1.1 Study skills advisor in 2003**

In 2003 I joined a multi-campus arts specialist HE college as a Study Skills Advisor, I was tasked with setting up and delivering a coordinated Study Skills Service. Before 2003 there had not been a coordinated or regulated form of academic support for HE students at this institution; all academic support (and Widening Participation funding) had been the responsibility of the academics within the different courses. However, with the then Labour government drive to increase student numbers significantly, and with extra funding for HEIs attracting students from non-traditional backgrounds (Dearing, 1997; Department for Education and Skills, 2003), it was decided by the institution's Widening Participation Coordinator, supported by the executive team, that a coordinated and specialist academic support service would provide a more consistent form of study support, more able to cope with the rapidly growing numbers and diversity of students.

The main purpose of the Study Skills Service was to enhance student retention, attainment and employability 'in the context of widening participation initiatives' (Study Skills Advisor Job Description, 2003), by ensuring more effective preparation and development of students' skills, awareness and criticality. Line managed by the Widening Participation Coordinator, the main accountabilities of the role were to:

- participate within course design

- support academic staff ‘in the promotion and delivery of effective learning management and study skills’ (Study Skills Advisor Job Description, 2003)
- design and deliver embedded study skills and learning management workshops
- provide individual tutorials
- create and disseminate study support material

We were also expected to work with initiatives such as ‘aim higher’ as well as networks and support agencies at regional and national level.

All appointed Study Skills Advisors (SSAs) had subject specialist experience with the added benefit of specialising in learning and teaching in different forms. I personally brought to the role fifteen years’ experience of having studied a range of our subject specialisms, including an MBA, as well as working within subject related industries. I also had five years of subject related teaching at FE level as well as experience of teaching literacy and research. This broad base of experience and knowledge not only meant that I was aware of what it was like to be both student and lecturer, but also I had insight into subject related employment. This background proved to be invaluable to my role, which was a hybrid between academic and professional support. How we approached the design and delivery of our remit was left to our own professional judgements, but each of us had direct responsibility for an allocated campus.

## **1.2 Embedded versus bolt-on approach**

Before setting up the service we undertook a substantial amount of research internally to identify ‘need’, and externally to explore approaches adopted across the sector. Our aim was to develop what we interpreted as an embedded service at point of need, successfully engaging all students and staff at course level, at the same time as maintaining the benefits of a central service - able to disseminate good practices across courses and offer bookable tutorials for students and staff. The benefits of the

integrated approach are that delivery is seen as an inseparable part of subject studies, plus it enables SSAs are able to support or instigate beneficial changes to curriculum and teaching materials from within the course. Although the three SSAs all held a similar philosophy, we did not adopt the exact same practices and approaches, two of us largely co-taught with course teams within course areas, while a colleague largely delivered with librarians in the library. This was in part down to differences in perceptions and teaching experiences of the SSAs, but it was also a result of the differences in perceptions of course teams. Not all academics at all campuses wished to engage with their SSA in the same way, and not all SSAs wished to engage with their course teams, subjects, and students in the same way. Each party held their own rationale for the decisions they made.

Therefore, while most support was embedded and linked to a specific assignment or unit, there were a few practices where ‘optional’ workshops were offered outside of subject teaching spaces. This could be referred to as the ‘bolt-on’ approach (Wingate, 2006:457) where sessions are in addition to, rather than a part of, the curriculum. The potential issue with the ‘bolt-on’ model is that some students and staff may not always see the relevance or benefit of the teaching or learning, however, this might arguably be the case with any form of teaching that does not fit with the learner’s perception (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’).

### **1.3 Holistic ‘*development*’ versus performativity and ‘*remedial*’**

Regardless of our approach, our philosophy was to develop students beyond merely acquiring ‘skills’ and meeting assessment criteria. Instead, our aim was to develop students more fundamentally and holistically. This model is what I refer to as the development approach; this will be discussed in chapter 7 Development and chapter 9 Discussion. In opposition to this there is the remedial approach, associated performativity agendas, and the idea of remedying gaps in students’ prior education - familial or formal - in order to achieve assessment criteria, institutional targets and fulfill politically-

constructed notions of 'graduate-ness'; all of which are discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial', chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion. Our institution had a very large number of widening participation students who struggled in a lot of areas of learning and self-management, many entering HE via access rather than traditional routes. Therefore despite attempts to embed support and make the curriculum more accessible, we still ended up tutoring around 20-25% of struggling students on a one-to-one basis, in an attempt to understand and remedy barriers to learning and HE. However, it is important to point out that even the very able students chose to book for one-to-one tuition with us; students at our seemed to desire individual tuition.

#### **1.4 Success, 'value for money' and administrative and academic powers**

The team were all very aware from the outset that we needed to 'prove our worth' or 'value for money'. There were two powers that we felt we needed to prove our worth to: administrative (senior leadership) and academic (course teams). Our role was dependent on relationships with academics, therefore it was important for them to trust and value our contribution as equals, in order for us to work together effectively as peers. Metrics seemed to be the accepted method of demonstrating 'value for money' at the level of administrative powers, such as: pass rates and grades - impact on student achievement and retention, as well as rates of satisfaction - positive feedback from students, course teams and external examiners. Extent of engagement was also a measure of value for money or success, because it meant we were perceived as useful in some way, similar to service industry evaluations. Therefore we kept records of the percentage of courses we engaged with, types and level of engagement, as well as student numbers seen and teaching hours delivered.

## **1.5 Rise in demands**

Very quickly demand for our services, from both staff and students, stretched two of us to capacity, and our duties expanded past the original job description. This was partly due to academics and students realising, and subsequently utilising, the scope of our knowledge and experience. This expansion was also due to the inseparable nature of developmental needs, for example when teaching students how to progress with written assignments it was impossible to separate or ignore practical elements of subjects, criticality or the language and knowledge of disciplines. On top of this student-facing work we also became more involved in:

- teacher development for professional support staff
- supporting staff undertaking postgraduate certificates in teaching in higher education, and facilitating on-campus tutorial groups
- supporting research active staff in communicating research output
- strategic working groups regarding teaching and learning, academic integrity and employability

At this point we decided to drop the ‘skills’ from our title because we felt that it had remedial connotations that may prove to be a barrier to student and staff engagement with our services, we also felt that the term implied a surface approach to learning (Wingate, 2006), which we did not wish to endorse. We wanted to evade a narrow definition of our role to ensure that new or part-time members of staff were clear about how to engage with us.

## **1.6 The need to achieve university status (2006 – 2008)**

In response to the economic climate and HE policy, many changes occurred within our institution between 2003 and 2018; it is these changes, and the impact they have had on our academic support role, that have led to this research enquiry. In 2006 our institution merged with a similar multi-campus



institution, this merger enabled both establishments to attain university status in 2008, a status which was becoming necessary for the survival of smaller HE establishments under the political power and paradigm of the time. Our mainly embedded model of academic support, initiated in 2003, became the model adopted by our newly formed HEI to lesser and greater degrees depending on the campus dynamics and the academic support tutors assigned to a campus. The newly merged team were line-managed by a newly formed Library and Learning Department. Campus dynamics are an important point to emphasise because the combined perceptions and expectations of academic teams and students on a particular campus have an impact on the ethos and role that academic support tutors play. Integrating a team of academic support practitioners with varying backgrounds, different perceptions of the role and different established practices proved to be very challenging, particularly when courses themselves had become entrenched in particular ways of working. However, over the next four years the team really formed and went on to make significant developments to the service across all campuses, until a change in HE policy and funding resulted in a reduction in campuses and a restructure of our institution.

### **1.7 Cuts in funding and the disestablishment of the Study Advisor role (2012)**

In 2012/2013 in response to Labour government cuts in university funding (Secretary of State, 2009; Lipsett, 2009; Curtis, 2009), followed by major cuts by the coalition government (Secretary of State, 2010), as well as reductions in Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) (Willetts, 2014) and a sharp rise in student fees, our university went through a restructure. This restructure, after only four years of university status, was initiated by a new Vice Chancellor in the name of financial stability and improving the 'student experience'. The restructure of our particular department in 2013 saw the merging of the Study Advice (SA) role and that of language support (the ESL team) to create a team of Learning Development Tutors (LDTs). The title of this role was to reflect the breadth of remit, which largely adopted the philosophy and duties of the Study Advisory Service as well as formally

adopting the responsibility for integrated language tuition for specific academic purposes. The merged role of LDT would be line-managed more closely by the newly developed Library and Student Services department (the merged departments of: Library and Learning and Student Services).

### **1.8 Redefining of success and the rise of the ‘*business*’ approach**

Despite the successful practices of the Study Advice role between 2003 and 2013, Learning Development Tutors were expected to take a step back from teaching students, particularly away from one-to-one tuition, in order to focus more time (rather than organically as in the past) on bringing about curriculum changes in order to make teaching more inclusive and manageable for the majority of students. This focus would involve looking at alternative modes of assessment and ensuring assessment criteria are meaningful and transparent, as well as ensuring that assessment tasks are clearly communicated, supported and progressive. Previously, in our Study Advisory role, demand for individual tutorials was perceived as a positive sign of engagement and a sign of an effective service, however demand for LDT tutorials was now interpreted as an indicator of ‘curriculum deficiencies’ and something to be investigated and resolved. Therefore our offer of one-to-one tutorials and the opportunity for individual development was significantly reduced to no more than 50% of our time, this would allow us to focus on curriculum developments and embedded workshops.

Subsequently our measures of ‘effectiveness’ moved away from a focus on student engagement and individual development, and largely onto successfully bringing about changes to ‘problematic’ units or teaching in order to increase the number of students achieving good pass marks. With the removal of funding and rise in fees we therefore seemed to be charged with improving the ‘student experience’ and rates of student satisfaction (consumer satisfaction) by improving curriculum (service or product), adopting what I would refer to as a business approach (see chapter 8 Business). However, it is questionable whether the business approach and the focus of HEIs on student satisfaction is really

leading to student development or even remedying the gaps in knowledge and skills proposed by government commissioned reports (BIS, 2011; 2016).

## **2. Research enquiry, theory and emerging approaches**

### **2.1 Gap in literature and research questions**

My academic support practices are, therefore, decided upon within the constraints of institutional perceptions of purpose and governance, in relation to political perceptions of HE purpose and governance. Despite this, over the last few decades different (and changing) notions of ‘best’, ‘good’ or ‘effective’ practice regarding academic support have been discussed regularly at conferences, through professional online forums and in publications. However, practices are rarely presented in relation to perceptions of purpose regarding academic support, and how the purpose of the role fits with, or contradicts, changing expectations of higher education institutions. Therefore in a climate of ‘league tables’ where the ‘effectiveness’ of HEIs are formally defined and measured through procedures such as the National Students Survey (NSS), Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), it seems important and timely to evaluate critically the relationship between the perceived purpose of higher education and the role and practices of academic support. In order to evaluate this relationship the enquiry has been broken down into five research questions; each question has emerged from my fifteen years experience in an HE academic support role, as well as from my wider reading on the perceived purpose of HE and the role and practices of academic support services:

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

These questions, research approach and methods are discussed in more detail in chapter 5 Methodology.

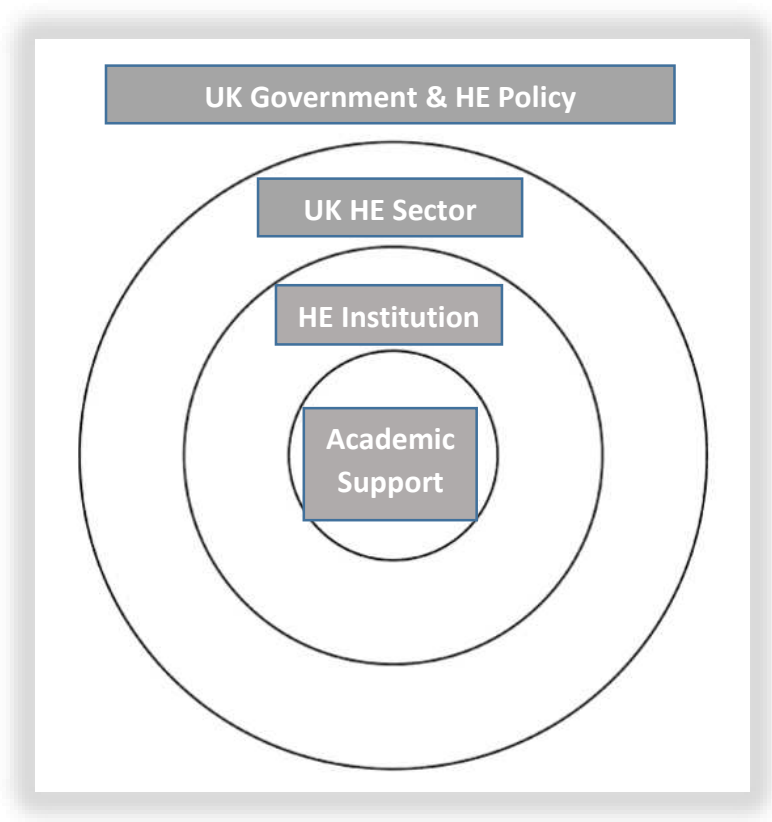
## **2.2 Choice of terms - ‘academic support’**

It is important at this stage to explain my choice and definition of the phrase academic support. In the context of this enquiry academic support pertains to any service involved in complementary teaching as opposed to subject specific teaching per se. What is not meant by academic support are services involved in pastoral or disability support specifically, although it is recognised that in teaching, academic support tutors may indeed cover elements of both pastoral and disability support. Like the research questions, the choice to use the phrase academic support comes from fifteen years experience and wider reading. Different institutions and different pieces of literature on the subject of support roles concerned with student learning and coursework, tend to use different titles. However, a survey of HE websites, coupled with a review of literature (see chapter 2 Literature Review), revealed the terms ‘academic’ and ‘support’ as the most frequently used and the most encompassing terms for the roles represented in this thesis. The phrase academic support is also consistent with the National Student Survey (NSS), for it is currently the subtitle for questions 12 - 14 regarding a student’s evaluation of course ‘advice’ and ‘guidance’. It is important to point out, however, that academic support as a role in HE, receives no mention or review in the NSS, this is an interesting point in itself, which will be reviewed later in chapter 3 Literature Review.

## **2.3 Bourdieu’s Field Analysis**

I am aware of my own position within HE as both student and practitioner, and the way in which my behaviours change when switching positions between student and teacher. I am also aware from my experience as a student and teacher at different universities how different institutional contexts can both seem familiar and comfortable with some form of shared perceptions and practices, as well as unfamiliar and uncomfortable as perceptions and practices appear alien. Therefore, I have experienced first-hand how contexts, coupled with my own perceptions, affect how I cope and behave. It is this complex web of relationships between contexts and perceptions that has led me to Bourdieu and his

field analysis approach. According to Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1998), practices are not necessarily acts of free will but are shaped by a complex and nuanced interplay between ‘context’ (field) and ‘perceptions’ (habitus and capital), which either empower or disempower, depending on the combination. The diagram below indicates the main contexts or fields in which academic support services are situated.



The political field – UK government and HE policy - ultimately has power over the HE field, different HE institutions hold different positions and statuses in relation to the political field of power. HE institutions are, in themselves, individual fields with which individuals and departments vie for positions of power and status, it is within these individual fields that academic support services are situated, between administrative, academic and student powers. When making decisions about my own academic support practice, I find myself negotiating political, administrative, academic and consumer perceptions and powers, including my own professional and personal philosophies and perceptions. It is, therefore, important to understand what specifically shapes the power in the field of HE in order to

make sense of the positions and practices of HE institutions and the subsequent positions and approaches to academic support.

According to Bourdieu (1998) power and status stem from 'capital', capital is the desired currency of a field decided upon by the dominant field of power - in this case political powers - largely to maintain dominance. The forms of capital that this thesis is particularly concerned with pertain to two self-perpetuating values - cultural capital and economic capital. I would argue that cultural capital, in relation to this thesis, equates to specific types of knowledge, education and purpose associated with cultural and social values. In contrast, I would argue that economic capital is the valuing of types of knowledge, education and purpose that perpetuates the economy. A focus on economic capital suggests HE is therefore underpinned by monetary values. The position and power that HE institutions hold within the HE field depends on the types, volumes and relative weight of their capital and how it fits with the values of political powers. Therefore capital – cultural or economic - defines (and redefines) the UK HE field, determining the position and status of different HE institutions (HEI) and the practices they assume, subsequently determining the position and status of academic support services within each institution, impacting on the practices they assume. An HEI's 'disposition' (Johnson, 1993) for maintaining or accumulating the desired capital or currency in the UK HE field is what Bourdieu (1984) would describe as its 'habitus', in other words its combined historical origin and shaping experience; therefore the following equation underpins the analysis for this thesis: [(habitus)+(capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). HEIs are currently negotiating institutional habitus and capital, and policy-driven notions of capital - cultural and economic; this thesis is concerned with the conflicts arising different expectations and positions within the HE field and the impact UK HE policy has on the role of academic support.

## 2.4 Emerging approaches to academic support

I propose that changing notions regarding the purpose of higher education, who and what it is for, coupled with performativity paradigms across UK education sector as a whole, has an impact on HEIs in different ways depending on the power, position and capital (cultural and economic) of the institution within the HE field. However, each individual higher education institution can also be considered a field in itself, with conflicts and power struggles between administrative, academic, consumer and student powers, all which contribute to the defining of academic support services. I have identified three common approaches to academic support, arising from empirical research undertaken for this thesis, each approach has origins in different periods of policy (although there is crossover):

- The Development approach (Robbins, 1963)
- The ‘Remedial’ approach (DfE, 1993; Dearing, 1997)
- The Business approach (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016)

Although each has arisen from different periods in policy, and therefore arrived one-after-the-other, all of these approaches coexist, with teams moving in and out of each to varying degrees. The ‘*remedial*’ approach is driven by economic capital and performativity agendas and involves remedying gaps in the cultural and economic capital of individuals and institutions. The reason for using quotation marks around the phrase remedial is because of its negative connotations, therefore practitioners tend to use the phrase self-consciously. This approach is underpinned by political perceptions that both individuals and educational institutions (compulsory sector, FE and HE) have deficits, which need addressing and enforcing. However, performativity agendas in the name of remedying deficits tend to perpetuate deficits (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’), therefore it is unclear whether deficits lie with educational institutions and individuals or with the decisions of policy-makers and educational policy. Development is underpinned by social values, and characterised by liberal and holistic education. This approach involves the development of higher thinking and emotional resilience, through the support of knowledge acquisition - self and subject; enabling individuals to have more fulfilling lives and

contribute more meaningfully to society. Unlike development and *'remedial'* approaches, the final approach, which I have described as business (discussed in chapter 8 Business), is underpinned by the pursuit and perpetuation of economic capital. Unlike the 'social values' associated with the developmental model, business is concerned with monetary 'value', 'value for money', knowledge as a commodity and private gain. The drive for institutions to secure economic capital, through the attraction and satisfaction of consumers, sometimes overshadows the development of cultural capital and social values. These three models – *'remedial'*, development and business, and their associated forms of capital, will be explored throughout the following chapters.

### **3. Structure of this thesis**

- Chapter 1 Introduction
- Chapter 2 Policy Analysis: Changing Purpose of UK Higher Education
- Chapter 3 Literature Review: Origins, Purpose and Approach to UK HE Academic Support
- Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Field Analysis
- Chapter 5 Methodology
- Chapter 6 'Remedial'
- Chapter 7 Development
- Chapter 8 Business
- Chapter 9 Discussion
- Chapter 10 Conclusion

### **Chapter 2 Policy Analysis: Changing Purpose of UK Higher Education**

This chapter addresses research question 3: How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context? A thematic analysis (Morgan, 2011) of UK government-commissioned reports will be



undertaken to enable me to gain insight into the evolving political paradigm and its influence on the field of HE. It is not possible to consider perceptions and practices of HEIs in isolation to government strategy, as increasingly policy-imposed expectations have played a role in shaping views and practices. Policy (or report) analysis is also important in gaining an understanding of the contexts in which the differing HEIs arose, for origins and heritage have historically determined the nature and purpose of establishments, and position within the HE field. Six government reports published between 1963 and 2016 will be analysed, this period was chosen as it starts and ends with major reports of national significance which, accumulatively, have impacted on the field of HE and HEIs:

- 1963 Robbins Report
- 1993 Student Support Services in Higher Education (Department for Education)
- 1997 Dearing Report
- 2003 The Future of Higher Education
- 2011 Students at the Heart of the System
- 2016 Success as a Knowledge Economy

The specific approach taken to analysing these reports is explained in more detail in chapter 5 Methodology.

### **Chapter 3 Literature Review: Origins, Purpose and Approach to UK HE Academic Support**

Chapter 3 will address the following research questions:

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

In order to respond to these questions a literature review tracing the origins, purpose and approaches of academic support in UK HE, will be undertaken. The literature in this section falls into two

categories: 1. literature arising from practitioners' reflections on practice, and 2. literature that critiques the role of academic support more broadly. This review will serve two purposes. The first purpose is to provide a UK HE sector-wide view of how researchers, practitioners and institutions have responded to changes brought about by UK HE policy (post 1963). The literature will therefore be analysed chronologically, according to the period being discussed in the publication as opposed to the publishing date. The second purpose of this literature review is to use conclusions drawn to evaluate empirical research - interviews with academic support teams (see chapter 5 Methodology). As with the policy analysis in chapter 2, this literature review in chapter 3 will be approached thematically.

This chapter will trace early forms of academic support in UK HE, who it was for and how academic support was offered, although it is not always clearly defined as 'academic' support. The literature pertains to periods post Robbins (1963) between 1964 and the present, although literature does not really emerge until the 1990s. Early use of terms such as 'student counselling' (Wankowski, 1991a; 1991b) to describe a role in the 1960s and 'study counselling' (Peelo, 1994) to describe a role in the 1980s will be explored along with their blending of emotional and learning philosophies and practices. Next, the emergence of 'study skills' in the 1990s, and the idea of developing 'skills' in preparation for study will be discussed. The use of terms such as 'study support' (DfE, 1993), 'learning support' (Wolfendale, 1996) and 'educational tutoring' (Jones et al, 1997), will therefore be analysed along with the nature of the supporting or tutoring roles and models they represent.

A noticeable divide appears in literature published in the 2000s. Some HEIs seem to evolve the 'study counselling' approach, whilst others develop whole new areas of teaching and approaches, which include roles that focus on the responsive nature of courses rather than supporting students per se. With these different models of delivery come different role titles and philosophies, which will be teased out and defined as they are used in literature. It is no surprise therefore, that in the 2000s in particular,

the idea of ‘best’ practice and models of ‘good’ or ‘effective’ practice are presented and debated more frequently through UK HE literature than in any other decade. Subsequently it is important to discuss and define different models, such as the ‘embedded model’, ‘deficit model’ (Hill et al, 2010) and ‘bolt-on’ (Wingate, 2006:457), as they are presented and discussed, and what the underlying philosophies are in relation to changing HE policy. The literature review will end with two reflective pieces one by Barkas (2011) and the other by Wingate (2015), where the purpose and practice of academic support are questioned alongside the changing purpose of higher education.

#### **Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu’s Field Analysis**

This chapter will introduce and analyse Bourdieu’s field analysis and his approaches and views on education, capital and power. In order to fully understand the practices of HE academic support services it is important to explore individual perceptions of what they do, who services act for, and how they justify their practices. The connections that Bourdieu makes between knowledge, symbolic and financial wealth (capital), childhood and education experiences (habitus), social positions (position in relation to fields of power) and subsequent practices, are useful in understanding the positions of students entering HE, the competing powers within HE (and conflicting expectations), and the subsequent practices of academic support services. Bourdieu’s field analysis offers an approach to exploring and understanding individual practices within their complex and dynamic contexts. This chapter will be divided into three sections:

1. Theoretical underpinning of Bourdieu’s approach
2. Bourdieu on power and education
3. A three-stage methodology as defined by Grenfell (2014)

## **Chapter 5 Methodology**

Chapter 5 will discuss the methodological approach that will be taken to responding to the research questions. For ease of navigation this chapter will be divided into seven sections:

1. Philosophy and Research Approach
2. Choosing a Sample Group
3. Research Questions and Research Methods
4. Approach to Data Collation and Analysis of Empirical Research
5. Research Ethics
6. The Participants
7. How I arrived at the themes for this thesis

Section 1 will explain the philosophical underpinning of the research questions. This will involve identifying assumptions, as well as explaining my philosophical alignment. This section of the chapter will also reiterate and justify the relevance and need for this research as well as justifying the qualitative approach in relation to a humanistic perspective. Section 2 will explain how the choice of sample group was arrived at, exploring the importance of the selection process to the research enquiry. Following this, section 3 will present the research questions and introduce and rationalise the research methods of observations and semi-structured interviews, and the relationship between theory, research methods and research questions. Section 3 will also present the indicative interview schedule.

Section 4 will justify the approaches to empirical data collation and analysis, explaining the purpose and use of thematic analysis (Morgan, 2011), and Bourdieu's (1984) field analysis. Section 5 will discuss the ethical considerations of the research, including how participants will be recruited and how their identities will be protected. Section 6 will present the pen portraits of participating institutions and interviewees using pseudonyms, giving a brief description of the institution, and the location of

services - managerially and physically. Section 7 will explain the process I went through to arrive at the themes and quotations for this thesis from the interviews.

## **Chapter 6 ‘Remedial’**

This chapter will present and analyse data from across the interviews identifying and explaining the emergence and drivers for the ‘*remedial*’ approach to academic support, linking both policy, literature and empirical research. The phrase ‘remedial’ was mentioned by at least one member of every team, either to disassociate practices with the term or to state that their work did involve remedying student deficits. A pattern in student ‘deficits’ emerged from the interviews, which I have grouped into three subcategories:

1. Academic skills
2. Emotional Resilience and Self-management
3. Motivation

These three categories will be used to sub-divide this chapter.

## **Chapter 7 Development**

This chapter will present and analyse data from across the interviews identifying and explaining the emergence and drivers for the developmental approach to academic support, linking both policy, literature and empirical research. The term ‘development’ emerged from interviews and from literature (critical perspectives and practices) discussed in chapter 3. The development approach is underpinned by social values and ‘an integrative view of learning and development’ (Quinlan, 2011: 2). This chapter will be divided into five subtopics, indicating the five main themes arising from the interviewees:

1. Rite of Passage
2. Choice and Identity

3. Challenging the Status Quo
4. Opening Minds
5. Holistic Development and Social Values

### **Chapter 8 Business**

This chapter will present and analyse data from across the interviews identifying and explaining the emergence and drivers for the business model, linking both policy, literature and empirical research. This chapter will explore the perceptions of interviewees that they are expected or expecting to enhance the business of their institution, serving two, often opposing, purposes: 1. customer service – tasked with meeting student expectations and enhancing their experience; 2. quality enhancement – enhancing the quality of teaching, employability of graduates, and research. Five key themes arose from the interviews, these themes will be used to subdivide this chapter:

1. Student Expectations
2. Funding and Efficiency
3. Footfall as Measure of Success
4. Grades Versus Progress as Measure of Success
5. Satisfaction as Measure of Success

### **Chapter 9 Discussion**

This chapter will explore interviewee perceptions that changes in HE funding and politically motivated expectations are driving a power struggle between HE administration, academics and learners; with conflicts in values - humanitarian versus economic, public good versus individual gain, and holistic development versus job training – all of which converge in HE. This chapter will be divided into four sections:

1. Academic power, administrative power and institutional deficits
2. Satisfaction metrics, consumer power and learner deficits
3. The power of academic support services and addressing deficits
4. Holistic education and social progression versus performativity and societal deficits

## **Chapter 10 Conclusion**

The conclusion will draw together the threads of this thesis, reiterating its purpose and my approach, as well as summarising the results and emphasising my contribution to knowledge. The conclusion will be divided into three sections:

1. Aim, questions, approach and analysis
2. Data results summarised and synthesised
3. Critical appraisal and impact of my research on practice

In section one I will reiterate the aim, rationale and questions driving this research, as well as summarising the approach that I took in exploring the research questions and analysing data. In section two I will firstly summarise and synthesise data analysis results, reiterating the three emerging approaches to academic support - '*remedial*', development, business, this will be followed by my answering of the three research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. Section three will conclude this thesis with a critical appraisal of my research and how it has impacted on my practice.

## **Conclusion**

This introduction explained how changes in purpose, practice and evaluation regarding my professional HE support role, stemmed from changes in political context and perception. Notions of 'effective', 'good' or 'best' practice however are rarely discussed in relation to policy and expectations of HE, this thesis intends to fill this gap. This introduction also introduced the research enquiry, the

theoretical framework and the three approaches to academic support emerging from this research, which will be discussed in the following chapters. The next chapter in this thesis: Policy Analysis: Changing Purpose of UK Higher Education, will address research question 3: How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?. In order to answer this question, government reports between 1963 and 2016 will be analysed, identifying how the field of politics influenced the notion of purpose, practices and evaluation of HE. The introduction to the next chapter will explain in detail how it will be structured.



## **Chapter 2 Policy Analysis: Changing Purpose of UK Higher Education**

### **Introduction**

The UK ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1998) of higher education has increasingly come under the control of government through ‘policies and directives’ (Watson, 2014: 100). What was once a small number of largely self-governing institutions for the elite (Halsey and Trow, 1971; Scott, 1995; Ross, 2006) with a socio-political relationship of ‘trust’ with policy-makers (Pritchard, 2012), can now be described as a ‘mass’ (Scott, 1995; Becher and Trowler, 2009; Scott, 2014) or ‘universal’ system of institutions (Trow, 1999) all competing with each other (McLean, 2008; Barkas, 2011; Pritchard, 2012) to meet market-driven expectations (Brown and Carasso, 2013). Universities were the cultural pillars of society, however some critics now describe them as ‘bereft of moral purpose’ (Delanty, 2011: 5). The collegiality and ‘interpersonal trust’ (Pritchard, 2012: 21) between policy-makers and institutional-leaders has diminished through time, scale and conflicting notions of purpose (Pritchard, 2012; Scott, 2014).

Academic support has arisen out of, and in response to, conflicting expectations of HE. However, these conflicts have not just arisen between politically-driven expectations and institutions, but between different periods of policy, and more recently conflicts appear within individual government reports. In this chapter I will explore the changing notion of what UK HE is for (Collini, 2012) through the analysis of six national government-commissioned reports published between 1963 and 2016. Each document in this period plays an important part in shaping the role of academic support in UK HE, and will therefore help to contextualise the literature review in the following chapter and interviewee responses in chapters: 6 (‘Remedial’), 7 (Development), 8 (Business) and 9 (Discussion). The six documents to be analysed in this chapter are:

- **1963 Robbins Report** - This is the first report to promote formally increasing access to HE. This expansion led to a change in learner needs - both academic and emotional - and a subsequent demand for support. It is also the last policy to prioritise knowledge for the greater good.
- **1993 Student Support Services in Higher Education (polytechnics and colleges)** – This DfE report is the first government publication to mention and evaluate support for non-traditional students entering HE as a result of a widening participation agenda. It not only refers to the necessity of inducting students into HE and providing ‘study skills’ support, but also concludes with government expectations of HE support provisions.
- **1997 Dearing Report** – This report defined and enforced the teaching of ‘key skills’ deemed necessary for employment and life, as well as the development of learning outcomes for all degree courses. This arguably gave rise to skills-focused academic support initiatives, such as ‘skills centres’ (Barkas, 2011).
- **2003 The Future of Higher Education** – Recommendations from this report instigated a significant rise in student numbers and diversity, subsequently impacting on how institutions induct and support students; this period was the catalyst for the launch of centralized academic support services in my institution and similarly in others.
- **2011 Students at the Heart of the System** – Recommendations from this report led to the marketization of HE, leading to, in some institutions, an ‘all-comers’ approach to recruitment and a change in motivations and expectations of learners. All this had implications for HEIs and the role of academic support services.
- **2016 Success as a Knowledge Economy** – This report is important because it brings governmental expectations of HE up-to-date, introducing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and further modes of institutional scrutiny. It also represents a notable shift in power in favour of students as consumers of education.

A thematic approach (Morgan, 2011) will be taken to analysing these documents, based on Bryman's (2008) four stages of analysis (see chapter 5 Methodology for my approach in detail). However, before discussing policy, I will briefly comment upon the historical divide between liberal and vocational education, for this ancient divide underpins contemporary debates regarding the role of both HE and academic support.

## **1. The vocational and liberal divide**

### **1.1 Historical overview**

Shifting trends in the purpose of higher education between liberal and vocational education span centuries. The liberal vocational dichotomy, in its extreme, sees liberal and vocational purposes of higher education as mutually exclusive. Carr summarises liberal education as an 'initiation into forms of knowledge and understanding ... [learning how to make] meaningful connections between diverse forms of knowledge, explanation and truth' (2009:3). The purpose of liberal education was to develop 'mind and intellect' (Carr, 2009: 1) in order to empower individuals and aid them in making a more meaningful contribution to society. Ehrlich et al translate 'liberal education' as a means to 'liberate individuals from unreflective conformity ... [helping individuals] learn to think for themselves' (2011: 52). In contrast vocational education was described more in terms relating to the needs of employers, defined as a narrow focus on 'skills' and training (Flathman, 1996; Carr: 2009).

Liberal and vocational education have a hierarchal division with roots in Ancient Greece (Carr, 2009) stemming from the philosophical academies of Plato and Aristotle. These academies were underpinned by three values: aesthetics, physical training and intellect (Mingqin et al, 2015). 'Technological' education' was excluded as it did not form part of the value-system' (Mingqin et al, 2015: 12), therefore intellect and knowledge presided over manual labour and technical skills, those with knowledge (philosophers) cultivated societal thinking (Mingqin et al, 2015), while those with practical

skills implemented it. This divide between technological education (vocational) and intellect (liberal) can be seen in modern HE and HE policy, where conflicts between vocational skills and knowledge create a hierarchal divide between HEIs, and the different needs for and approaches to academic support.

## **1.2 Education (intellect and development) versus training (skills and task management)**

In the 1990s Dearing (1997) highlighted employer's desires for both thinkers (liberal) and skilled employees (vocational) (Dearing, 1997; Lees, 2002), in principle at least. In this period Lewis (1997), refers to what he calls vocational literacy (1997: 486), a blend of vocational and liberal education. He described vocational literacy as the acquisition of 'vocational knowledge' about the world of work. This was considered to be 'valid knowledge in its own right' (Lewis, 1997: 486) and important to all citizens and their understanding of employment (Lewis, 1997). In stark contrast, however, 'vocationalism' (Lewis, 1997: 486) was defined as a narrow focus on skills, somewhat devoid of knowledge, context and development of intellect. Grayling identifies this as the distinction between what can be considered as 'education' (liberal) – concerned with developing a 'desire' and 'ability to keep on learning and benefit from what one ... learns' (2010: 9); and 'training' (vocational) – learning to complete tasks (2010: 9). Therefore skills training is described as doing very little to shape thinking, autonomy, desire for learning and self-development. It could be argued that policymakers, in their quest to meet the needs of industry, could potentially drive the compulsory sector and HE towards 'skills training' as opposed to holistic 'education' - emotional resilience and independent thinking. This will be discussed further in chapter 3 Literature Review and Chapter 6 'Remedial'.

In the wake of the 2011 white paper *Students at the Heart of the System*, Winch (2012) makes a very similar distinction, however, he uses the phrases: vocational 'training' and vocational 'education'. Training was considered to be a short-term activity of skilling people for a particular task, deemed

problematic because of its narrow, temporary relevance (Winch, 2012) and lack of holistic development. Vocational ‘education’, however, seemed more aligned with liberal education and the acquisition of knowledge for the holistic development of citizens (Winch, 2012). The literature of Lewis (1997), Grayling (2010) and Winch (2012) straddle different periods of policy, however all put forward the view that a focus on skills, devoid of knowledge acquisition and whole person development, is short-sighted and limiting and cannot be considered as ‘education’. Indeed some of the literature discussed in chapter 3 criticises ‘skills’ approaches to academic support, describing them as driven by simplistic and ‘quick fix’ views of education (Wingate, 2006; 2015), appearing to parallel the ‘training’ and ‘education’ debates.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whether a higher educational institution focuses on liberal education for holistic development, or vocational education (or training) for employment, or a blend of the two, appears to be decided upon by its governing body. However decisions are ultimately made within the broader context and confines of national policy. Over the last sixty years, UK government policy and strategy has increasingly expected HE to develop in students skills for employment for the good of the economy. However, over time, the definition and use of the term ‘skills’ has varied. It is therefore important to trace the changing definition of ‘skills’ in this chapter because, as mentioned earlier, these definitions inform the need for and different approaches to academic support.

## **2. Robbins Report (1963) – Holistic Development for the Greater Good**

### **2.1 Equal opportunities**

At the time of Robbins (1963), higher education - which consisted of ‘universities and higher technical education’ (Silver, 1990: 7) - like the compulsory sector (Chitty, 2004), was considered not entirely appropriate for societal needs. In part this was because of its inadequacy to accommodate a sharp

increase in students as the baby boom generation came-of-age (Williams, 2012) as well as the potential influx of new students from government expansion initiatives. Up until the 1960s HE had been largely:

geared towards educating a small elite of the population ... [involving] academic subjects, didactic teaching and independent research agendas. Students were young, on full-time courses, and predominantly male and middle-class. This elite model faced a number of criticisms' (Bathmaker, 2003: 9)

Not only were universities considered to be unresponsive to the 'emerging needs of the economy and the need for applied research' (Bathmaker, 2003: 9), but they were also considered socially exclusive.

There was an expectation that HE should be more inclusive and open to a larger and broader range of the population at the same time as playing a role in industry and applied research - economic or industry related. HE therefore appeared as a solution to both social and economic problems, it could act as a social equalizer as well as provide skilled labour for the UK economy. Education as a means of driving the economy gathered momentum with successive policies as 'educational institutions[,] ... universities in particular[,] ... increasingly become important to industry, individuals, and the state, as they not only conduct potentially lucrative research but also "produce" the intellectual workers that help power the knowledge economy' (Pucci, 2015: 11). Government, at the time of Robbins (1963) identified a growing need for 'highly educated and well-trained people' (Vaizey, 1963: 517), and the need for more teachers (Vaizey, 1963) as well as more industry-related teaching. However, it is questionable whether this was really one approach to higher education that was being considered.

## **2.2 Developing potential (liberal) versus addressing national deficits (vocational)**

Around the time of the Conservative commissioned Robbins Report (1963), Labour party leader Harold Wilson gave a speech that became best known for his use of the phrase The White Heat of Technology (1963). In his speech, Wilson (1963) indicated that the nation's ability to compete globally was impaired, due to a lack of scientific and technological development. Wilson (1963) suggested that the UK focus on harnessing the power of science and technology to inform the development of

industry, both new and existing, as well as focusing on the creation of more jobs. Education would subsequently be tasked with addressing national deficits, leading to a rapid and massive expansion of higher education (Willems, 2013). However, it is not just the idea of ‘national deficits’ and expansion of HE that are important to this thesis, but also the prioritising of science and technology in secondary education. For the STEM subjects - as they are now termed - inform the ‘skills’ that students enter HE with, but also shape institutional approaches to academic support because of the impact that current inequalities in subject funding have on different HEIs.

Indeed, Robbins (1963) stipulated that, like compulsory education, there needed to be a ‘greater degree of survey and co-ordination ... to ensure that the development of higher education is adequate to national needs’ (1963: 228); thus preparing graduates for the ‘fiercely competitive world of the future’ (1963: 5). However, the four core objectives of HE were still much broader than meeting the vocational needs of the nation, for they largely focused on the holistic development of individuals. They were:

- ‘Instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour’ (Robbins, 1963: 6)
- Produce ‘cultivated men and women [able to apply] practical techniques ... to many problems’ (Robbins, 1963: 6)
- ‘Search for truth’ (Robbins, 1963: 7)
- Development of individuals for a ‘healthy society’ (Robbins, 1963: 7)

Three of the four objectives were underpinned by liberal ideology and the holistic development of individuals for the greater good, with only one vocation and skills-related objective. This indicates that vocation preparation was considered a part of education, as opposed to the sole purpose of education. Indeed the Robbins Report (1963) concluded that a single purpose would be an over-simplification of the benefits of higher education. However, in the 1990s that ideology would be reversed, and vocation and skills for the work place would be pushed to the forefront of ‘education’.

### **2.3 Knowledge and thinking**

Robbins (1963) considered the different types of students entering HE and the different ‘minds’ and ‘preferences’ of these individuals. The ‘urge’ for ‘knowledge for its own sake pursued in depth’ (Robbins, 1963: 91) was considered to inspire all students of all ‘levels’ and abilities; however, there was also thought to be ‘another sort of mind that at the first degree stage is likely to be more at home in broader fields studied to more moderate depth’ (Robbins, 1963: 91). Robbins (1963) talked about there being ‘evidence that many young people would prefer’ broad fields of study instead of the traditional in-depth study, if they were ‘assured’ that there was not an inferiority ‘stigma’ attached to this.

In the 1960s, Robbins seemed to highlight a change in the student body - a different kind of ‘mind’, ‘more at home’ with breadth of knowledge. Indeed, ‘specialist degrees’ were described by critics of education and industry at the time as ‘not suitable’ (Robbins, 1963: 89) for many of the students who were undertaking them. The implication seemed to be that there was either a change in what was expected of HE students, or there was a differing mix of abilities maybe as a result of changes in secondary education or access routes, or both. Interestingly Robbins (1963) describes the purpose of a ‘first degree’ as teaching students ‘how to think’ (Robbins, 1963: 90), indicating that this is not sufficiently developed prior to HE. Indeed, developing the ‘critical thinking’ of HE students is mentioned frequently in literature regarding academic support (see chapter 3 Literature Review) and during interviews with practitioners (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’).

The other point Robbins (1963) makes is that specialist degrees, in a climate of ‘rapidly changing knowledge’ (Robbins, 1963: 89), were becoming ‘overloaded’ and therefore ineffective; thus indicating a need to meet the rapidly changing needs of industry. Indeed, although Robbins (1963)



mentions broad knowledge being ‘more desirable’ in ‘many walks of life’ he goes on to name areas of employment such as ‘industrial and administrative’ roles (Robbins, 1963: 93) that would benefit particularly, thus making a clear link with proposed changes to HE curriculum and the emergence of particular roles within industry. The very notion of HEIs being shaped by different HE stakeholders at different ends of the university experience, for instance the aptitude of students entering HE and the needs of industry as students exit, hints at the kinds of conflicting expectations that HEIs will have to ‘satisfy’ from the 1990s onwards.

However, despite hints at the vocational direction of policy, the Robbins Report (1963) was underpinned by values of knowledge and intellect, as Robbins concludes ‘it was difficult to reach agreement as to where to impart less knowledge and where to concentrate more on principles’ (1963: 89-90) without an over emphasis on principles related to specific professions. Therefore, the decision was for both degrees of knowledge to coexist in HE. The primary concern of HE at this time was still to develop citizens, with graduate destinations as secondary to knowledge and intellect. Some fifty years on, however, graduate destinations and employability take precedence over knowledge for knowledge’s sake, with jobs, skills and breadth of knowledge dictating course content and approaches to academic support.

## **2.4 Widening participation**

The purpose of the Robbins Report (1963) was not just to outline the role of higher education but to also discuss who should benefit from it. A ‘key’ objective of the report was to justify an expansion of student numbers that was already taking place. Prior to the Robbins Report (1963), between 1958 - 1961 (Rich, 2001; Collini, 2012), the university grants committee supported the creation of ‘seven new universities’ (Rich, 2001: 49) with a ‘strong emphasis on ... close pedagogic and social contact

between students and teachers ... committed to ... 'liberal education' in the arts and sciences (Collini, 2012: 30).

Unlike the traditional universities these had 'sprung into existence [out of colleges or low level establishments] fully funded on virgin sites and with unchallenged degree awarding powers' (Shattock, 2012: 43). Several of the universities were invested in 'getting away from the single-honours, department-based degree' (Collini, 2012: 30) associated with traditional notions of 'depth' of knowledge. However, according to Rich most had a 'bias' towards liberal education and intellect as oppose to vocational education for industry, therefore failing to 'respond adequately to the political demand for technologists and applied scientists' (2001: 49-50). It is important to consider the differences HEI origins as this affects institutional priorities, the students they attract and approaches to supporting them. The relationship between institutional origin, sense of purpose, and approaches to academic support will be discussed in the following chapters.

### **2.5 Widening participation – affluent, suitably qualified, grammar school boys**

The aim of government at the time of Robbins (1963) was to 'raise the percentage of the age group receiving full-time higher education from about eight percent to about 17 per cent by 1980' (Burke, 2012: 13). The drive for 'expansion was supported by the human capital arguments put forward by economists' (Burke, 2012: 13). However, there was also a social agenda 'based on liberal principles concerned with social justice and widening participation' (Shattock, 2012: 55) known as the 'Robbins principle' (Shattock, 2012). This principle was that 'university education should be available to all who have the ability and qualifications to benefit' (Reay et al. 2005: 2), leading to an expansion of student numbers (Ross, 2006 b).

It is debatable whether the proposal put forward by Robbins (1963) was to widen participation as we understand it today, for students were expected to pay ‘20 percent of the cost of their university tuition fees’ (Williams, 2013: 32), which would therefore rule out ‘working class’ families with low disposable income (Archer, 2006). However, between 1963 and 1968, according to Reay et al, there appeared to be a ‘decline in class inequalities’ (2005: 2), although this apparently rose again between 1970 and 1989 (Reay et al. 2005). It is important to emphasise that the ‘Robbins principle’ was not an ‘all comers’ policy but a harnessing of talent from those with the qualifications and experience to benefit from HE. During later periods of policy however, particularly from 2011 onwards, some HEIs are described as adopting an ‘all comers’ approach to recruiting students (BIS, 2016) – (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’), thus leading to a wide range of abilities and support needs.

In 1963, Robbins largely talks about ‘working-class grammar-school boys’ (Williams, 2013: 32) in relation to widening participation. He makes the point that these students ‘may not’ have traditionally ‘perform[ed] as well at university admission interviews as their middle-class, perhaps privately educated peers’ (Williams, 2013: 32), thus indicating an inequality and disadvantage in educational experience. Robbins (1963) suggests that schools and universities work together more effectively to better prepare suitably qualified applicants. However what Robbins does not seem to consider is how working-class grammar-school boys perform while at university, if their educational experience does not necessarily prepare them for the entrance examination. The research of Wankowski (1968; 1991a) discussed in the following chapter, raises some of the disparities between school and higher education in the 1960s as a result of the Robbins Report (1993), highlighting issues in academic competence and emotional resilience, and the subsequent need for student support.

### **3. Student Support Services in Higher Education (1993) – Remedying Study Skills Deficits**

#### **3.1 The context of the report**

student support services are designed to ensure the well-being of students studying in higher education and enable them to fulfill their academic potential. Such services embrace a wide range of activities ... Recent increases in student numbers and widespread changes in the HE curriculum have affected student support services. This [DfE] report describes and assesses the quality of student service provision in, what was until September 1992, the polytechnic and college sector. It will be of interest not only to teachers, employers and advisers but also to students and their parents (DfE, 1993: back page)

Some thirty years after the Robbins Report (1963), between 1989 and 1992, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) carried out reviews of student support services in HE colleges and polytechnics, culminating in an evaluative report that was published in 1993. This document seems to be the first and only time that central government has evaluated the role of student support in this sector. Although this report talks about being one of a series, other reports published in 1992 and 1993 seemed to largely review specific subject teaching; thus indicating the close surveillance that these HE institutions were under in this period.

The timing of these inspections, particularly into 'student support services' is significant, for it not only follows increases in widening participation and concerns about how diverse student groups are supported, but also occurs around the same time as the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). This act, which would allow polytechnics to be 'rebranded as universities' (Hart, 2012: 16), was described by Hart as an attempt 'to homogenize the HE sector' (2012: 16), however the inclusion of polytechnics would significantly expand and diversify HE (Hart, 2012). It is therefore possible to surmise that this series of reviews was an assessment of polytechnics in the run-up to university status and to safeguard and improve existing support services for widening participation, as the content of the report suggests.

The DfE report (1993) into student support also follows the birth of the national curriculum, coinciding with what would have been the first cohort of school leavers under this new homogenised regime. The

generic curriculum and examination expectations of policy, which assumes that all students require and respond positively to the same knowledge and experience, would, arguably, have an impact on some students' abilities to cope with HE study (see chapter 3 Literature Review and chapter 6 'Remedial'). The national curriculum, however, like this report into student support in the HE polytechnic sector, was also an indicator of the kind of control that would be exerted over HE curriculum in the future - regulated learning outcomes and quality control mechanisms.

### **3.2 Widening participation and student support**

The opening statement on the back cover of the Student Services (DfE, 1993) report highlights the formalising of both academic support as well as emotional support – through counselling and wellbeing services - in HE colleges and polytechnics, as opposed to being an integral and seamless part of curriculum teaching. The purpose of student support was described by the report as enabling students to 'fulfil their academic potential', implying that students were unable to reach their potential without additional emotional and academic support. Indeed the inspection and the report seemed to be driven by 'concerns' regarding how the HE polytechnic and college sector were managing and addressing the 'diversity of need' (DfE, 1993: 2) as 'greater numbers of older students, ethnic minority students, overseas students, part-time students and students with special needs' (DFE, 1993: 2) entered HE through widening participation agendas.

Polytechnics seemed to be at the coal face of widening participation, brought in by government in the 1960s to address the needs of industry, which the new universities largely failed to do. Polytechnics did not have the same power and autonomy as universities, they could not award their own degrees and largely followed a policy-defined emphasis on vocation, responsive to the 'community' (Collini, 2012). In contrast universities continued with their pursuit for knowledge and intellect (liberal); this HE division was known as the binary principle, which reinforced the historical and hierarchal divide

between intellect - 'liberal education', and job-related skills - 'vocational education' (Flathman, 1996; Carr, 2009; Mingqin et al, 2015). These divides shaped the purpose and priorities of institutions, the students they attracted and the nature of support required to ensure that they succeed on their courses.

However the DfE report seems to consider young school leavers as not necessarily the students in need of support so much as mature students and ethnic minority groups:

The widening of access for non-standard entry and mature students creates diversity of need and often a shift in balance of the services provided. The support of these students is more individual, more personalised than for younger, school leavers. For instance, mature students either from Access courses or through direct entry frequently require more tutorial support for the preparation and return of marked work, students from some ethnic minority groups and from overseas, sometimes require help with written language (DfE, 1993: 2)

Interestingly, mature students were the cohort who were considered to require the most intensive support, usually having been out of education for a while. The report talks about the need for one-to-one support in preparing individuals, however this appears to conflict with political expectations at the time which was to increase student numbers. Indeed the DfE report talks about the 'diversity of need' and shifting the 'balance' of what is, or can, be provided depending on student staff ratios. Students were increasingly entering polytechnics and colleges via non-traditional (non-A level) routes and were therefore not necessarily prepared for their course of study; this meant institutions needed to prepare students at the same time as helping them to engage with their studies.

According to the DfE (1993) report, student support services and HEIs were expected to predict the needs of students and plan for filling gaps in knowledge and educational experience, in order to make best use of limited resources. However the report concluded that there had not been enough evidence of this:

although all colleges have quality control mechanisms, few of them systematically appraise the areas of work covered by student support staff ... Currently owing to the pace of change, in the number and nature of the student body, ... many institutions lack proper planning and review mechanisms to achieve adequate control of the quality of student services (DfE, 1993: 15-16)

The report makes the point that HE polytechnics and colleges were not forward thinking and putting in place policies regarding intentions and quality control, implying that institutional approaches to support tended to be reactive rather than strategic. However, in their defence, the report explains that the nature and quantity of students entering HE was rapidly changing, making it difficult for institutions to keep up with changes at the same time as managing day-to-day business. The report pointed out that the ‘poorest practice’ (DfE, 1993: 16) correlated with those institutions who felt the need to accept ‘all comers’ (DfE, 1993: 16), however, this is, arguably, a byproduct of funding-linked widening participation and skills agendas. In the cases where ‘all comers’ were accepted student support services were described as ‘inadequately staffed, badly sited and poorly publicized ... [with] managers, staff and students all express[ing] dissatisfaction with the system’ (DfE, 1993: 16).

### **3.3 Inductions into HE and helping students manage themselves**

Student support was largely seen as ‘assist[ing] students to settle quickly’ (DfE, 1993: 1) into their courses as well as helping them to ‘deal with serious obstacles to their continuing academic progress’ (DfE, 1993: 1). Typically student support services were managed by ‘student services unit[s]’ (1993: 1) – a centralised model - however there was also a mention in the report of academic support provisions being managed at course level – a devolved model. The scope of student support included a broad range of ‘activities’ such as ‘admissions, induction, personal guidance, academic tutoring, study skills, careers advice, counselling, health and medical matters, chaplaincy and learning support (DfE, 1993: back page), a blend of both emotional and academic guidance. However the areas mentioned by the report that are important to this thesis are: ‘induction’, ‘study skills’ and ‘academic guidance’, as these all pertain to academic support services.

The report highlighted that ‘in most colleges, subject departments are responsible for providing induction courses’ (DfE, 1993: 5), which tended to occur in the ‘first term’ to aid first year students in

familiarising themselves with the HEI, course and expectations. Inductions could also take the form of ‘diagnostic tools’ in order to identify and remedy any possible study issues or perceived gaps; effectively assessing the quality of a students’ educational background – familial as well as formal. The report highlighted a practice of allocating ‘personal tutors’ to first year students. However, despite the benefits of this, the increase in student numbers made this approach difficult to sustain, hence moves towards more generic and more centralised approaches to support. In an attempt to maintain individual support, some institutions were employing second year students to run weekly sessions with first years. The purpose of this support was to ‘encourage ... [first years] to organise their work effectively and to discuss approaches to problem solving’ (DfE, 1993: 6), hinting at a lack of self and time management of students entering HE, beyond academic issues of mature students and writing issues of ethnic minorities mentioned by the report.

### **3.4 Inequality of institutions, students and subsequently academic support**

Schemes such as peer support were devised to reduce ‘the load on teachers’ (DfE, 1993: 6) reduce ‘drop-out rates ... [and improve] end-of-year performance’ (DfE, 1993: 6). However, not all institutions were equal in terms of their induction programmes and initiatives, the ‘quality’ across institutions was described as ‘variable’, ‘where good programmes exist’ students were described as generally settling ‘well into study ... where induction is poor, many students [were described as] feel[ing] uncertain about their chosen courses and their own ability to cope’ (DfE, 1993: vii). Although the report seemed to indicate that the development of self-resilience and a sense of belonging was important to settling students into their studies, fostering this is arguably dependent on the habitus and capital of institutions. For this determines the quantity and types of students it attracts (support needs) as well as the ability of an institution to provide appropriate support (appropriately experienced as well as staff-to-student ratios).



Like inductions, ‘academic tutoring’ seemed to be another role undertaken by course teams, which involved discussing ‘issues’ with individuals including their ‘written work and [any] learning difficulties’ (DfE, 1993: 7). However, these one-to-one roles were also proving unsustainable at some institutions, with the increase in student numbers and diversity ‘Very few subject lecturers had sufficient timetabled time for academic tutorials with the large groups of students they were teaching. This resulted in individual tutorials taking place in seminar periods, whilst the main body of students work in groups on set tasks’ (DfE, 1993: 7). Similar to inductions, the quality of academic tutoring varied across institutions. There were ‘serious gaps in staff development opportunities’ (DfE, 1993: viii) ‘not all ... [were] trained for the work and many ... [were] allocated large numbers of individual students without sufficient time to do the work effectively’ (DfE, 1993: vii). Strength in approaches however was often down to the knowledge and initiative of individual tutors, one ‘good’ example of academic tutoring was described as combining effective assignment feedback and effective activities to aid understanding of how to address feedback - through peer assessment, reflection and discussion. The strengths of this approach, according to the report, was what this particular tutor managed to achieve in the one hour with each student, particularly regarding an ‘emphasis’ on analytical skills and ‘writing skills’ (DfE, 1993: 7). The report therefore seemed to equate ‘good’ teaching with ‘efficiency’ (BIS, 2016) and what can be achieved on limited resources – time and money.

### **3.5 HEIs need to look for ‘other sources’ of funding to support government initiatives**

Unlike 21<sup>st</sup> century inspections and league tables where educational institutions are named and scrutinised through data-sets, the DfE report (1993) did not name the institutions involved in the ‘inspections’. Instead it summarised the different practices across the sector, evaluating strengths and weaknesses, as well as highlighting the challenges of coping with the growth in numbers and needs. The report suggested that student support services be better managed, that an ‘appropriate’ amount of ‘time’ be allocated to the roles, and that ‘adequate’ staff training and forward planning be carried out

(DfE, 1993). It also suggested that institutions undertake research into ‘other sources’ of funding (DfE, 1993: 17) in order to pay for staffing and initiatives. This suggests that there was a lack of sufficient funding coming from government at the time, despite policy-makers instigating widening participation, and then reporting on the need for better student support. The conclusion of the report mentioned the visibility and entitlement of support, pointing out that ‘students would benefit from a clear statement of entitlement at the beginning of their course’ (DfE, 1993: 17) and ‘channels for voicing concerns during all stages’ (DfE, 1993: 17). The report also highlighted a need to target ‘certain student groups ... for specific support’ (DfE, 1993: 17), which suggests singling out categories of students who lack the desired educational experience necessary for HE.

The closing statement of the report was that ‘good practice, wherever it occurs, should be disseminated’ (DfE, 1993: 17). The rationale given for disseminating was that ‘the ‘value added’ elements of student support should be recognised’ (DfE, 1993: 17), hinting at the commercial benefits of student support and the learner experience, which in 2011 and 2016 is pushed to the fore (see chapter 8 Business). Disseminating was also considered to be a means of boosting the ‘morale’ amongst staff who were ‘bearing the burden of outdated or inadequate systems’ (DfE, 1993: 17). The underlying purpose of the report appeared to be partly communicating government expectations to the wider HE sector, at the same time as encouraging staff to share and promote good practice. Indeed there had been a dearth of research pertaining to HE academic support up until the 1990s, whereas literature starts to emerge in the early 1990s and continues through the next two decades, particularly coming from the university sector (see chapter 3 Literature Review).

### **3.6 ‘Skills’ as distinct entities**

‘Skills’ were consistently mentioned throughout the DfE (1993) report, often in relation to addressing skills deficits, particularly: academic, personal, writing and maths. However unlike the Robbins Report

(1963), where skills were developed through the acquisition of knowledge, this report talks about 'skills' as distinct entities. Even 'study skills' embedded into curriculum seem to be pre-defined and mapped onto, rather than naturally arising from, subject knowledge. Therefore the notion of distinct skills appears to emerge with 'support' for widening participation agendas and the idea of developing 'study skills', as opposed to Dearing (1997) and 'key skills' being fully responsible for the 'bolt-on' (Wingate, 2006) 'skills' phenomena. The very idea of teaching students 'study skills' in HE, however, implies that this has not arisen from prior educational experiences, thus raising questions about learning to learn in the compulsory sector and why there seemed to be such a disparity between government expectations of secondary education and HE study (see chapter 3 Literature Review). Four years later, however, Dearing (1993) defines an explicit homogenised set of 'key skills' to be mapped onto all HE courses, regardless of subject and institution, it would therefore seem that the HE curriculum would fall under the control of government agents driven by the same economic agenda as the compulsory sector.

#### **4. Dearing Report (1997) – Remedying National Skills Deficits**

##### **4.1 Skills for employment**

Instead of finding a new synthesis of this educational triad [Old Humanist; Industrial Trainers; Public Educators], modern mass Higher Education is largely driven by the industrial trainer tendency, suitably disguised as 'vocationalism' but a vocationalism of 'transferrable skills' and ephemeral 'competencies' (Steele, 2000: 55)

Although it was not until 1997 that key skills were formally defined and introduced as an explicit part of all HE courses, these skills started life in 1989 as core skills. Core skills were initially born out of a 16 to 19 initiative recommended by Kenneth Baker, the then Secretary of State for Education, they were described as a 'number of skills ... which young people and adults in the future will all need' (Wolf, 2002: 118). The list of skills were: communication - written and oral; numeracy - involving calculations and 'understanding orders of magnitude' (Wolf, 2002: 118); 'Personal Relations [including] team working and leadership' (Wolf, 2002: 118); a familiarity with technology systems,

changing social contexts, and foreign languages (Wolf, 2002). This recommendation came as part of a drive to increase participation in education past the age of 16, and to reform further education, so that young people left education with skills to meet the changing needs of the economy and businesses (Coates, 1991; Wolf, 2002). This focus on skills would progress into HE, informing the development of centralised academic support roles, such as ‘skills centres’ (Barkas, 2011).

This skills ‘revolution’ was further enforced a few months later by the Centre for Business and Innovation task-force (CBI) when they launched nationwide educational targets in their report: *Towards a Skills Revolution* (1989). These nationwide targets, known as common learning outcomes were to underpin all stages of 14 to 19 education and training (Coates, 1991; Wolf, 2002). Very similar to the core skills mentioned by Baker (1989), these common learning outcomes covered areas such as: ‘Values and integrity’, ‘effective communication’, ‘applications of numeracy’, ‘applications of technology’, ‘understanding of work and the world’, ‘personal and interpersonal skills’, ‘problem solving’ and ‘positive attitudes to change’ (CBI, 1989 cited in Wolf, 2002: 119). This suggests that the role of education comes to be understood as a means to developing not only ‘skills’ for work but also skills for life and ‘values’. It is no longer assumed that young people will develop these from familial experiences and holistic school education prior to the age of 14, but instead developed within five years between the ages of 14 and 19. However, not unlike most approaches to skill development, neither employers nor academics had an ‘agreed vocabulary for the definition and discussion of these transferrable skills. The same ideas and the same skills appear under different terminology and are grouped in different ways’ (Bradshaw, 1992: 65).

In the 1990s, HE also came under government scrutiny and rule, required to follow the same skills agendas as compulsory education and 16+ sectors. In 1995 the CBI urged that all learning should be developing core skills with varying levels of competence – thus adhering to assessment terminology

and approaches associated training. Core skills were not only to be central to sixth-form curriculum, government funded training schemes and apprentices, but they were also deemed as ‘a priority for higher education’ (Wolf, 2002: 120). However, as with previous ‘skills’ revolutions and their definitions, the groupings and definitions are disputed, but so were ‘attempts to deliver core skills meaningfully’ (Wolf, 2002:122).

#### **4.2 Key skills and learning ‘input and outcomes’**

Eventually ‘Core skills’ became a set of ‘key skills’ in HE. While Robbins (1963) saw bodies of knowledge as primary, this seemed to be secondary for Dearing (1997). ‘Key skills’ were formally defined, introduced, and mapped onto all compulsory, 16+ and HE curriculum. Key skills were divided into a small set of key skills and a set of cognitive skills. The key skills were: communication, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning how to learn. Defining learning how to learn as a skill would imply that it can be simply ‘bolted-on’ (Wingate, 2006) to a person and tested like a competency, rather than something that is developed holistically through the interplay between subject knowledge and knowledge of the self, reinforced through experience. Similarly, there were a set of cognitive skills that were simply defined as understanding methodologies and the ability to critically analyse; these ‘skills’, that are a simplification of intellect, sat alongside vocation-specific skills such as abilities within a laboratory environment (Dearing, 1997). The Dearing Report (1997) suggested that all HEIs immediately develop programme specifications for each course, which would stipulate the intended learning outcomes – knowledge, understanding and key skills achieved on completion - thus reducing holistic education to sets of competencies.

Despite this mapping exercise, an increase in academic support initiatives were adopted by many institutions around this time, raising questions about the effectiveness of ‘key skills’. This echoes and calls into question national curriculum examinations and other competency models of assessment,

where abilities are simply measured in terms of 'can' and 'cannot'. Rowland refers to this form of assessment and related 'jargon' as the 'mechanical metaphor' with 'roots' in 'the factory in which inputs and outputs are controlled in order to produce quality-assured products for consumption' (2006: 7), thus portraying 'learning and research in ways that deny its unpredictability and humanity' (2006: 7). Indeed in the 2016 BIS report *Success as a knowledge economy*, factory terms such as 'output' and 'product' are used to describe education, denying the human aspect of teaching and learning. Arguably, initiatives such as pre-defined learning outcomes put a limit on learning, for they send out the message that learning outside of defined assessment criteria is irrelevant, as it is not acknowledged or rewarded.

The HE 'key skills' drive seemed to present a lack of faith in HE knowledge acquisition and student development, the government equally seemed to lack faith in HEIs to teach key skills without some form of rulebook. HEIs were guided and regulated externally by government agencies, such as the newly formed Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (Education Act, 1997), to ensure key skills were developed in the way policy-makers expected. The QCA was charged with communicating, regulating and offering guidance on mapping, embedding and implementing key skills within programmes of study, alluding to the unnatural nature of these bolt-on skills (Wingate, 2006). Unlike Robbins (1963), Dearing (1997) considered breadth of study - context and skills - to be the purpose of all undergraduate study for the world of work. Breadth of study was considered most conducive to developing a more responsive workforce, able to deal with cultural and economic changes; as well as conducive for further postgraduate study. However 'skills' and vocational 'training' is, as discussed earlier, a short-term context-specific activity lacking fundamental development of individuals, therefore a focus on 'key skills' was unlikely to lead to a responsive workforce.

### **4.3 Policy-driven ‘quality’ control**

At the time of Key Skills, other measures were also imposed on HE to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK HE. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) devised detailed subject benchmark statements which underpinned all subject areas and levels of HE study. These benchmark statements ‘set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas ... [defining] what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject’ (QAA, s.d). It was possibly a combination of these QAA benchmark statements, and the views of employers cited in the 1997 Dearing Report, that saw the expansion of the four key skills to six in 2000, to include: problem solving and working with others (QCA, 2000). However, either way this was starting to overload the curriculum with numerous layers of learning criteria and outcomes for course teams to adhere to, at the same time as an increase in student numbers and diversity. It is therefore, hardly surprising that institutions were formalising approaches to academic support in order to aid with the induction of students into HE study as well as supporting them to meet the specific (knowledge) and generic (key skills) expectations of their course.

### **4.4 Changing meaning of ‘employability’**

Dearing (1997) pointed out that students seemed to struggle with making connections between theory and practice, as well as recognising the relationship between education (school and HE) and employment (QCA, 2001), therefore explicit key skills were deemed imperative to employability. It is important, at this point, to trace the emergence and historical development of the term ‘employability’, as this will give an indication of how, from the 1990s onwards, it became the main focus of HE policy and strategy.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘employability’ was to distinguish the ‘employable’ from the ‘unemployable’. In the 1960s it was a way of measuring the gap between ‘individual characteristics and the demands

of work in the labour market' (Gazier 1998a, cited in McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005: 201), thus hinting at the emergence of the 'deficit' paradigm. In the 1980s and 1990s it was associated with outcome-related 'labour market performance ... [and] individual responsibility; and 'interactive employability', which 'maintains the focus on individual adaptation, but introduces a collective/interactive priority' (Gazier 1998a, cited in McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005: 201). The latter definition and use of 'employability' coincided with performance targets and standardisation in education through the national curriculum, as well as through FE and HE skills agendas.

Although 'employability' initially started as a term to demarcate those 'unemployable' and unable to be employed, in more recent decades, particularly with technological developments, the concept is used to identify 'whether unemployed people may be 'unemployable' ... [due to] technological changes' (Saint-Paul, 1996, cited in McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005: 201); thus requiring training. Much educational policy post-1990s have been based on circumnavigating 'un-employability' and predicting 'employability' in the face of rapid change. As highlighted earlier by Robbins (1963), there were some people with the perception that undergraduate courses were overloaded with in-depth knowledge described as not always wholly appropriate to the changing knowledge-driven markets.

Dearing (1997) identified education as the vehicle to creating 'economically successful nations' (1.1, chapter 1) consisting of flexible workforces able to adjust to the rapidly changing economic environments, brought on by technological advancements and globalisation. During the time of Robbins (1963) industry consulted education to see what innovation was occurring, making use of the development of knowledge and intellect that were allowed to flourish. Thirty years later, however, HE is increasingly expected to meet external, and politically-driven, demands, raising questions about the changing expectations, role and freedom of institutions.



## **5. The Future of Higher Education (2003) – Remediating Skills Gaps of a Nation**

### **5.1 Higher skills and global competitiveness**

It was a difficult multiple birth. Some of the babies were unsure about being born; others were anxious to greet their new life. But in the end the law made it happen. The ‘modern’ universities started their existence with a problem of ‘image’ and an accompanying debate about market position and educational niche (Gledhill, 2001: 95)

Although widening access had already been a part of government drives, and UK HE had already acquired the irreversible status as a ‘mass system’ (Scott, 1995), the New Labour government led by Tony Blair wished to widen and increase participation even further. In Blair’s 2001 speech launching Labour’s education manifesto at the University of Southampton, he specified a goal of up to 50% of young adults to enter HE by 2010 (The Guardian, 2001). All underrepresented societal groups became the target of institutional and government initiatives, in order to increase and diversify HE populations.

In the white paper *The Future of Higher Education*, it was estimated that ‘43 per cent of 18-30 year olds’ (2003: 2) were entering higher education in 2003, in comparison to 6 per cent of under 21 year olds who entered university in the 1960s (DfES, 2003). However, the paper still recommends that HE should expand even further, enabling even more people from varying backgrounds to benefit from HE, and as a result meet the economy’s need for ‘higher level skills’ (DfES, 2003: 15-16). There were three main rationales for expanding the HE sector further, two related to creating a world-class workforce and world-class industries. HE was seen as a potential driver of innovation but also a place where time is dedicated to obtaining up-to-date information and knowledge, this innovation and cutting-edge knowledge was considered to be important in leading, or being at the forefront of global advancements, rather than being left behind, or worse still ‘ground down by it’ (DfES, 2003: 2).

Whether the UK was at the forefront was considered to depend ‘critically upon’ the UKs ‘universities’ (DfES, 2003: 2) and their efficacy in ‘mobilizing even more effectively the imagination, creativity, skills and talents of all ... people ... [and] using that knowledge and understanding to build economic

strength and social harmony’(DfES, 2003: 2). HE was also seen as important for the individual and society, as HE was considered to play ‘a vital role in expanding opportunity and promoting social justice’ (DfES, 2003:3). Central government described HE as a social leveler and mobiliser with ‘far-reaching’ (DfES, 2003:3) benefits for individuals, both personal and financial. However Reay et al question whether simply widening HE participation leads to social leveling and mobility or whether it is possible that this could lead to ‘new forms of inequality’ (2005: vii).

## **5.2 Corporate capitalism versus individual development and ‘social change’**

It is arguable whether social levelling and social mobilisation can coexist, for social mobility relies on society being multi-leveled. According to Wolf (2002), if large numbers of school leavers gain degrees to compete in the market place (social levelling), then individuals may feel the need to distinguish and differentiate themselves with higher degrees – thus leading to a multi-level system again. Ainley (1994) points out flaws in the kind of thinking that equates education with money and status, whether it be the economic status of a nation or the economic and social status of an individual. For this kind of thinking challenges the idea of education as a means to learn for interest and personal development (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’). Ainley considers education as a means to ‘develop[ing] a heightened awareness in students ... so that students graduate with positive self-images and the knowledge and skills to get along in the world as far as possible’ (Ainley, 1994: 184). However, for education to be able to ‘contribute to social change’ (Ainley, 1994: 184) Ainley believes that there needs to be ‘space within education’ (Ainley, 1994: 184) free from political and capitalist interference. The holistic development of individuals for social change and the greater good is discussed in-depth in chapter 7 Development and chapter 9 Discussion.

According to Wolf, the expansion of HE in 2003 was largely driven by political desires to harness the power of UK HE as an industry:

Education is a big player in the economy and labour market of any country ... and almost unimaginably enormous worldwide ... its sheer scale determines a great deal of how modern education operates, and how it affects people. It is also why education is inevitably a major concern to any politician, whose voters will necessarily use it, worry about it, work in it, pay for it (Wolf, 2002: 1).

HE has become an industry in itself, it plays a key role in the British economy as a major supplier of jobs and funds. Indeed, it is beneficial to the HE industry if degrees become the norm, as this may encourage more students to pursue MA and PhD qualifications to distinguish themselves. Government mantras and initiatives such as ‘Lifelong learning’ and a 50% increase in undergraduate participation, led to the growth of the UK HE industry; and also the birth in teaching ‘excellence’ initiatives. until that is, in 2011, when the government deemed the funding structures as financially unsustainable – with financial debts outweighing financial benefits.

## **6. Students at the Heart of the System (2011) – Satisfying Consumers of Education**

### **6.1 The business and ‘learning’ conflict**

Our reforms are designed to deliver a more responsive higher education sector in which funding follows the decisions of learners and successful institutions are freed to thrive; in which there is a new focus on the student experience and the quality of teaching ... The overall goal is higher education that is more responsive to student choice, that provides a better student experience and that helps improve social mobility (BIS, 2011: 8)

Students at the Heart of the System came about as a result of the coalition government inheriting large ‘budget deficits’ (BIS, 2011: 2) from Labour. However, although cutting HE would be an answer, the government did not want to let go of the industry that had ‘a fundamental value’ (BIS, 2011: 4), which it considered to be ‘world-class: in research; in attracting international students; and in contributing to the economy’ (BIS, 2011: 4). However, the coalition wanted to relinquish its ‘micro-management’ (BIS, 2011: 2) of HE, or at least make it less burdensome and more efficient in terms of man-power. Therefore, rather than relinquishing control per se, a more efficient way of controlling ‘output’ was set up through market-competition and consumer-supplier mechanisms.

This 2011 policy proposed a business model where public funding, which had been declining, would be cut and universities could charge full fees for courses - between £6,000 and £9,000 per year, picked up by student loans. Ainley and Weyers describe the very notion of fees for HE study as refuting central government's aim of widening participation, which, when it was introduced in 2006 led to 'disproportionate falls amongst adult, minority ethnic, and working-class applicants – precisely those for whom the government intended to “widen participation”' (2011: 131). Indeed Robbins in 1963 dismissed the idea of students taking responsibility for fees until such a time when studying in higher education had become habitual for the nation, through fear that high fees may put off those who would not normally consider university (Williams, 2013). It was around this time that, according to Williams, 'the economics of education – and higher education particularly – became part of mainstream economics in the United Kingdom' (2013: 58), hence HE being perceived in more economic terms.

Under the 2011 policy, student numbers would no longer be allocated and capped, instead institutions would compete for consumers through a demonstration of value for money. Students voting for institutions with their custom was described as a way of applying 'competitive pressure' to provide a 'quality' 'experience' (BIS, 2011: 14) and 'high-quality teaching' at 'lower cost[s]' (BIS, 2011: 2). Never before had institutions really needed to attract and retain students like they did now; not only that, they also needed to pay special attention to the student experience to ensure public reviews of institutions supported recruitment strategies, at the same time as managing efficiency (BIS, 2011). Academic support, like other teaching staff, would play a key role in not just the academic development of individuals but also in enhancing the student experience, although arguably academic development and student satisfaction do not always equate (see chapter 8 Business). Data on each institution would be published every year through government agents, covering:

- student feedback
- costs of studying with the institution including accommodation

- employment destinations and wages
- student attainment

Although improvements to Unistats would offer more detailed ‘comparisons between subjects at different institutions’ (BIS, 2011: 9) the white paper (2011) also suggested that student feedback on individual tutors and units may also be made available to the public. The combination of a sharp increase in debt and external and internal pressures on students, arguably leaves academics and academic support teams vulnerable to increasing consumer expectations and feedback mechanisms.

## **6.2 Consumer feedback and learning**

The demand-supply mentality driven by this business model is arguably confusing high fees with a product (a degree) – a purchase, as opposed to a teaching and learning experience - engagement. This potentially encourages consumers (students and parents) to place higher levels of responsibility on institutions for what is learnt or gained (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’ and chapter 9 Discussion). This, coupled with clearer review mechanisms, may potentially see some academics and academic support staff under pressure, by government and consumers, to achieve high student results, as discussed in chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion. According to Blumenfeld (2015) and May and Tenzek, (2018) the pervading paradigm of ‘competition’ and mounting pressure may contribute to unethical practices, as both students and HE staff try to meet politically-driven expectations. Interestingly, the recent Westminster Higher Education Forum (2018), which was led by policy-makers, was dedicated to concerns regarding the validity of qualifications on entry and exit from HE, without questions being raised to how the political climate was contributing to less than ethical practices.

Grove (2014) highlights the risks of consumer satisfaction models to evaluate learner-teacher roles, arguing that they provide a powerful leverage for students. He goes onto explain that a ‘faculty member acting alone to tighten grading or workload faces real and, if the individual is untenured, threatening

pressures, ‘that risk’ endangering their careers’ (Grove, 2014). Therefore the message seems to be that rates of satisfaction do not necessarily equate to learning or legitimately qualified and employable graduates, but can affect a teacher’s ability to do what is needed to ensure that all students engage with their studies and learn.

### **6.3 A policy of conflict**

Students at the Heart of the System (2011) is a policy of conflict. HEIs are tasked with conflicting roles to recruit, retain and satisfy students as well as guaranteeing completion and high paid employment, in order for HEIs to survive in the market. However graduate destinations do not necessarily reflect the benefits of the HE experience, or an HEI’s ability to prepare a student for employment. Employability is also dependent on the educational background of an applicant attracted to, or recruited by, a particular HEI and their motivation and resilience during their course, as well as their choices post-study – as discussed in the following chapters. Employment is also dependent on discipline-related occupation trajectories and availability of jobs in particular sectors. Employment aside however, it is important to point out that the most satisfying experiences are not always the most effective learning ones; nor can it be assumed that meeting student demands is going to lead to better qualified graduates and social mobility.

Social mobility is also more complex than government-commissioned reports describe. According to Crawford et al the educational achievements of individuals are more closely related to their economic status, Crawford et al go onto explain that if ‘low enrolment rate of poor students [in university] is [because of] their lower achievement in school – as ... research suggests is the case – then clearly policy needs to be focused as much on the school system as the point of entry into university’ (Crawford et al, 2017: 72). But not only does the applicability of the national curriculum need to be considered more closely, as one-size does not necessarily fit all learners, but also the current HE fee

system needs re-thinking in terms of accessibility, as this does not favor those from the poorest economic communities (Reay et al, 2005; Ainley and Weyers, 2008). The current way in which UK policy manages and measures education is not necessarily conducive to social mobility; according to critics they reinforce the social divides that they are attempting to remedy (Reay et al, 2005; Reay, 2017). Indeed, an education system which values and is shaped by commerce and competition, as opposed to cultural and social values, is more likely to reinforce pre-existing social divides, prejudices and emotional and intellectual deficits (Gibbs, 2017).

Another issue posed by this 2011 policy, is the conflict between efficiency, quality and decreased funds. Poorer institutions sitting outside of politically-favoured STEM funding are largely reliant on student fees. These institutions may find themselves needing to accept all HE candidates in order to bridge funding deficits (see chapters 6, 7 and 8), particularly when the HE field as a whole faces decreasing numbers of available HE applicants. In such cases, as discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial' and chapter 8 Business, there is pressure on academic support services to work efficiently, enable learners to meet the expectations of their courses, at the same time as achieving consistently high levels of student satisfaction. Therefore at a time when equality, social levelling and mobility are driving widening participation agendas, educational institutions are forced to compete with each other within a somewhat unequal HE field.

Indeed, *Students at the Heart of the System* (2011) seemed to be directed at the privileged few, both in terms of institution and student body, thus echoing historical binary and social divides. Despite all of these conflicts, the 2011 policy talks about the idea of a hypothetical 'good' student who will 'not simply [be] a consumer of other people's knowledge, but will actively draw on all the resources that a good university or college can offer to learn as much as they can' (BIS, 2011: 33). This, arguably, is a description of students who have already developed the intrinsic higher thinking, motivation, and

freedom to make the most of learning outside of prescribed assessment expectations (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’). If universities were indeed full of these ‘good’ students, there would be little need for the role of academic support, and this thesis would not exist.

## **7. Success as a Knowledge Economy (2016)**

### **7.1 Choice in the open market**

Our universities have a paramount place in an economy driven by knowledge and ideas. They generate the know-how skills that fuel our growth and provide the basis for our nation’s intellectual and cultural success. Higher education in the UK enjoys a world-class reputation, with globally renowned teaching and cutting-edge research and innovation. We have maintained our position as a world leader, with continuing success in education exports in the face of increasing international competition. But we must be ready for the challenges of the future (BIS, 2016: 7)

Despite this positive opening statement highlighting the importance and successes of ‘our’ UK universities, the 2016 white paper identifies the need for yet more reform. The report made several conflicting criticisms of HEIs, presenting institutions and the support for student engagement and learning with even more dilemmas. The report highlighted that there was still unequal representation of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, however, rather than the lack of funding and rise in fees being considered a barrier to access, the accessibility and recruitment strategies of HEIs were held accountable. Institutions were also blamed for high dropout figures, as a result of recruiting students who were incapable of ‘benefitting from higher education’ (BIS, 2016: 46), in other words taking an ‘all comers’ approach. Despite the ‘business’ needs of institutions, the government report urged all HEIs to consider the qualifications and aptitude of students much more carefully before accepting them.

Despite these concerns, Success as a Knowledge Economy (2016) highlights the ever prevailing skills shortages, particularly within STEM subjects, as well as indicating that not all teaching is ‘as good’ as it could be (BIS, 2016), with a third of student complaints being about limited teaching hours and



oversized classes. This point then directly conflicts with other expectations outlined in the report, particularly the expectation that HEIs move much more radically towards efficiency through ‘low cost’ teaching and accelerated two year degrees (BIS, 2016). Other criticisms raised by the 2016 report are about ‘variation in graduate outcomes across both providers and subjects ... even for those ... [studying] the same subject within the same provider’ (BIS, 2016: 8). However, this point, to some extent, assumes that institutions and students are homogenous groups, which conflicts with policy-driven expansions in the name of diversity.

These conflicting expectations not only affect the abilities of institutions to support student engagement and learning effectively, but also affect student motivation and how they respond to teaching and learning. However according to the Success as a Knowledge Economy report ‘insufficient competition and a lack of informed [student] choice’ (BIS, 2016: 8) is the cause of inconsistent and poor student performance. The solution proposed by the report was to create and publish more HEI performativity measures, in order to inform student choices. Informed student choices were equated with ‘better student outcomes’, and would, therefore, ‘protect the interests of taxpayers and the economy’ (BIS, 2016: 15). Taxpayers and the economy were associated with student choice several times throughout the 2016 white paper, largely because wrong or uninformed decisions were described as not only ‘costly’ to the student but to the ‘broader economy and the taxpayer’ (BIS, 2016: 11). What was not associated with student choices, however, was the impact it may have on an individual’s esteem, and the development of them as individuals and citizens, as discussed in Chapter 7 Development.

To aid students in their decision-making, much more data and detailed reviews of institutions, than in 2011, would be gathered and displayed in the public domain. Displaying admissions records of institutions would include: ‘application, offer, acceptance and progression rates [of students] ...

published by ‘gender, ethnicity and disadvantage’ (BIS, 2016: 19). The rationale for this seemed to be to ‘encourage’ the more selective institutions to accept a wider variety of students, however this seems to be in direct conflict with the expectation that students are chosen for their capabilities, rather than whether they fit into underrepresented groups. To reinforce policy however, all barriers for new institutions to enter the market with degree awarding powers would be removed, equally it would be made much easier for established institutions, regardless of history and cultural standing, to ‘exit’ the market. HEIs ‘needing’ or ‘choosing’ to ‘exit the market’ was deemed to be a ‘crucial part of a healthy, competitive and well-functioning market’ (BIS, 2016: 38). The notion of educational institutions coming and going from the marketplace like businesses raises questions about the simplistic and temporary view of knowledge acquisition, as well as the simplistic and temporary view of teaching and degree standards.

## **7.2 The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)**

According to BIS (2016) ‘research’ had taken priority over ‘teaching’, however both were now to be considered equally, with teaching being regulated through the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), as research had through the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The white paper associated teaching excellence with social mobility therefore the TEF would ‘measure teaching’ (BIS, 2016: 13) and how it ‘supports ... [Government] widening participation aims’ (BIS, 2016: 14). The TEFs ‘core metrics’ would therefore be ‘broken down to include those [students] from disadvantaged backgrounds’ (BIS, 2016: 14). Probably the most significant point regarding the TEF would be the financial incentives or penalties. Three different TEF bands were proposed: ‘Meets Expectations, Excellent and Outstanding’ (BIS, 2016: 44). The ‘providers with a rating of Meets Expectations will be eligible for 50% of the inflationary uplift, while providers with a rating of Excellent or Outstanding will be eligible for 100% of the inflationary uplift’ (BIS, 2016: 51). However ‘a provider’s fee/loan cap is solely dependent on their current TEF level ... where a provider’s TEF level drops for the

academic year to which the new level applies, they will have to lower the fees they are charging existing students ... a provider which falls below the baseline quality threshold will also lose any TEF award' (BIS, 2016: 51).

Despite 'recognis[ing] that metrics alone cannot tell the whole story; [and therefore] ... must be ... contextualised, and considered alongside ... additional narrative' (BIS, 2016: 46), the equating of 'excellent teaching' with 'excellent outcomes' (BIS, 2016: 44) is, at best, simplistic. Assessing teaching through externally defined measures is assuming that it is an exact science with homogenous participants engaging and responding to learning similarly. This therefore does not take into account the diversity of student groups and differences in motivations, priorities, self-resilience and abilities (see chapter 6 'Remedial').

It was proposed that the TEF would be rolled out alongside more direct methods for monitoring and responding to student complaints. Dissatisfaction with teaching, assessment, feedback and academic support, raised through National Student Survey (NSS), may have an impact on an institution's TEF results. This potentially places teaching staff in a precarious position in between students - and their need for a good degree to compete in the market, and institutions - and their need for impeccable reputations to compete for students. This policy, like the 2011 policy, therefore encourages academic and academic support staff to prioritise student expectations in order to gain the much needed rates of satisfaction (see chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion).

### **7.3 Education and social values versus economic survival**

The 2016 white paper talked about the risk of 'disengagement pacts', however, what was not discussed was how the political paradigm may be contributing to such a phenomena. Not all students and institutions hold the same capital (cultural and economic) that the political field expects of them;

institutions can be geographically positioned within economically deprived areas, serving as a local institution for local people, outside of the higher echelons of Oxbridge and Russell Group institutions, and more lucrative STEM subjects and alternative streams of funding. Students' education – familial and secondary - may not necessarily equip them for further study or lucrative employment, regardless of how much emotional or academic support they receive. Indeed the business-model of education in itself seems to echo historical social inequalities, for it forces individuals and institutions to compete with others as equals within a system that favors those with higher levels of economic capital and the educational experience that comes with it.

#### **7.4 'Quick fix' skills reinforcing the status quo versus long-term development and change**

As discussed earlier, there is an overt use of business or 'factory' terminology in 2016 describing learning in terms of 'products' and 'exports' rather than people and development. Business theories are also applied to understand the economic value of HE, highlighting the 'strong correlation between opening universities and significantly increased economic growth' (BIS, 2016: 9). So, despite citing teaching excellence and the private benefits of HE as the need for increased competition, there is an economic and 'global competitive market' rationale. Indeed the paper highlights the sense of urgency and need for agile and rapid-response providers who can change their offer as quickly as the skills in the market change. All of this implies a huge leap for institutions, away from cultural cornerstones – focused on the development of individuals and culture - to servants of the economy.

In 2016, knowledge is equated to rapidly changing 'skills' which individuals are encouraged to 'accrue' in the shortest amount of time possible in order to start contributing to the economy, either through payment for further study or through high paid 'professional' employment (BIS, 2016). Although private economic benefit and social mobility is referred to throughout the paper, this appears to be a mere incentive to keep students coming into HE. It is within these starkly changing

environments between Robbins in 1963 and the knowledge economy in 2016 that the role and approaches to academic support have emerged and evolved.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of HE has progressively come under the control of often conflicting (Ball, 2013) national government policy with ‘increasingly economic agenda[s]’ (Collini, 2012: xii). HEIs have been maneuvered through funding-tied initiatives into a position where economic values driven by skills deficits, competition and money-related status and power, have taken precedence over cultural and social values driven by a desire for knowledge, intellect and empowerment. The purpose of the university and the role of academic support seems to have gone from the long-term, holistic development of individuals (Robbins, 1963; Archer et al, 2006; McLean, 2008) to the short-term satisfaction of the market (Dearing, 1997; Brown and Carruso, 2013; McGettigan, 2013).

Academic support in UK HE arose from these ‘numerous changes in higher education’ (Lea and Street, 2000: 32) and the need for HEIs to ‘consider ways in which ... greater number[s] of students can be helped to meet the criteria’ (Hill et al, 2010: 2-3) of degree study. Therefore, there is a relationship between policy-driven expectations of HE and the role of academic support; institutional funding and status impacts on notions of purpose and approaches adopted to academic support, as indicated in the DfE (1993) Student Services Report. However, despite conflicting politically-driven expectations of degree study, those ‘involved’ in academic support do not necessarily ‘see these different purposes of higher education as mutually exclusive’ (Hill et al, 2010: 2). The next chapter will explore the purpose and practices of UK HE academic support through literature, identifying the different philosophies and approaches that practitioners, researchers and institutions have adopted.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review - The Origins, Purpose and Approach to UK HE**

### **Academic Support**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will review literature regarding the origins, purpose and approach to academic support in UK higher education (HE). There are two types of texts under review in this chapter: 1. critical literature in the traditional sense, where researchers-practitioners evaluate the role of academic support in relation to HE practices, and 2. Practice-related literature where practitioners critique and report on their own practices in order to disseminate practice or argue for different approaches. The two types of literature largely serve two different purposes in this thesis. The practice-related reports are the main source for this review because they help to establish how institutions have responded to national policy, therefore I will be adopting a more practice-focussed than conventional approach to reviewing literature. The critical papers highlight more fundamental concerns regarding the relationship between the perceived purpose of HE and the role that academic support services play, these papers are useful in situating practice within a wider educational and social construct. This type of literature is interspersed with more practice-focussed sources.

It is difficult to identify exactly when academic support provisions were first formalised in UK HE because there is so little published on the topic prior to the 1990s, raising questions about the visibility and pedagogic status of the role prior to this time. Indeed, Broadbridge (1996) on ‘academic advising’ and Corbett (1996) on ‘study skills’, both in the mid-1990s, highlighted a gap in literature, suggesting that although academic support was beginning to take place in a more formal way, literature and research had not yet caught up. Differences in terminology and scope of academic support in HE have also made it difficult to trace literature on its emergence and development. Although commenting on academic support in US HE, and prior to the 1960s, Entwistle believed that differences in approach and scope tend to be down to a ‘dearth of clear-cut research findings’ (1960: 243) regarding ‘optimal’

approaches, however a lack of shared practice and terminology make it then difficult to research and disseminate. Although, Entwistle does not attempt to define optimal approaches to academic support, Entwistle does define a set of qualities important to student achievement, these are: '(1) morale or self-confidence, (2) scholarly drive and values, (3) study mechanics, and (4) tendency to plan for getting work done' (1960: 243). The need for students to have emotional resilience, self-management, motivation and skills – whether academic skills or employability skills - can be traced through the literature in this chapter.

Although the literature I will review in this chapter reflects research and practices in UK HE between 1964 and the present, thus mirroring the time span of policies analysed in chapter 2, most of the literature pertaining to academic support between the 1960s and the 1990s was published retrospectively from 1991 onwards. Corbett believed that a lack of literature prior to the 1990s was due to the fact that academic support outside of course teams in UK HE was not considered worthy of research or 'quality indicators' (1996: 159), despite 'most innovative and student-centred teaching materials ... [emerging] from those concerned with improving study skills' (1996: 159). Thus indicating a hierarchal divide between academics or researchers, and the role of centralised academic support.

Indeed, literature emerging during the 1990s or later that reflected on practices during the 1990s, coincided with a number of changes to both the compulsory and higher education sectors. These were: the skills agenda, the standardisation of the compulsory sector curriculum, the DfE student support report, diversification of the HE sector through widening participation and the re-classification of polytechnics and higher colleges (see chapter 2 Policy). After a flurry of literature in the 1990s and 2000s, there appears to be very little published from 2011 onwards. There are several reasons why this may be the case, one reason could be because institutions are now in direct competition with each

other, therefore staff may be self-conscious about what they share through fear of damage to reputations (individual and institutional). It is important to point out however, that conferences and online forums are still used as a means to discuss and share practice on academic support in a collegial environment. Another reason for the present dearth of literature on academic support could be that recent developments have meant that researchers and practitioners are more preoccupied with the concerns of their individual institutions, as different institutions face different pressures. A third reason could be that academic support is much more of an established profession now, and practitioners and institutions have less new information and ideas they wish to share. However, whatever the reason, this thesis aims to address this gap in literature.

Four periods of policy appear to be key to the emergence and development of academic support in UK HE; this chapter, and the literature under review, will therefore be divided into the following four eras:

1. 1960s to 1980s - following the 1963 Robbins Report, the emergence of 1960s universities and initial widening participation in HE
2. The 1990s - following the 1987 National Curriculum, the 1992 FE and HE Act, and the 1993 DfE 'Student Support' report
3. The 2000s - following the 1997 Dearing Report and 2003 Future of Higher Education
4. 2011 onwards - following The Browne Report: higher education funding and student finance (2009), which later informed policy

Although I have fifteen years' experience in academic support services, I approach this thematic analysis of literature with no predetermined conclusions. The conclusions that I draw from this review will help me to evaluate thematically empirical research presented in subsequent chapters.



## 1. The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s

### 1.1 Student failure and the pedagogical gap between school and university

While supporting student engagement at the University of Birmingham, Wankowski in *Success and Failure at University* (1991a) talks about his 1964 research into ‘student wastage’ (1991a: 59), which followed ‘recommendations’ made by the 1963 Robbins Report (Wankowski, 1981; 1991a).

Wankowski began his investigations by exploring four ‘assumptions’:

[1] ‘student’s readiness to learn ... may depend ... on his habitual disposition derived from past [learning] experience[s] ... [affecting] expectations and assumptions about learning in the future [2] continuity of success is more likely ... if the learning and teaching conditions ... are as satisfying ... [as previous] educational experiences [3] difficulties and failure may be more likely ... when ... [conditions] appear ... to be ... contrary to ... habitual expectations’ [4] many students may succeed in adopting new and efficacious ways of dealing with ... university [teaching] if they have clearer professional and social goals, and ... a ... disposition which is less likely to interfere with the readjustment of ... habits ... and attitudes’ (1991a: 59)

These four assumptions, like Entwistle’s (1960) successful attributes, are primarily based on students’ motivations, confidence and aptitude for study, however Wankowski (1991a) identified previous educational and learning experiences as key to shaping these attributes, as well as shaping the expectations and subsequent achievements of students’ in HE (Raaheim and Wankowski, 1981).

In the case of failing students, the ‘general inferences of the survey’ (Wankowski, 1991a: 60) were that ‘academic over-compliance, rigidity in learning styles and ... dependency on routines and teachers’ (Wankowski, 1991a: 62) in the compulsory sector, did not prepare all students for ‘detached modes of tuition at university’ (Wankowski, 1991a: 62). Therefore failure was deemed to be a result of a ‘pedagogical gap in transition from school to university’ (1991a: 62). School teachers were criticised for adopting ‘protective’ forms of ‘teaching’ to ensure ‘their clear objectives – the public examination requirements’ were met (Raaheim and Wankowski, 1981: 28). This situation would only be exacerbated with the ‘standardisation’ and ‘heavy regulation’ (Derham and Worton, 2010: v) of the compulsory sector in the 1980s (Blackburn, 2010; Ferguson, 2010; Lebus, 2010; Reiss, 2010); coupled with increased and widened participation in HE.

In the 1960s, the UK government was keen to offer the most talented pupils from state-run schools the opportunity to enter university (see chapter 2 Policy). However, whilst Robbins (1963) talked about schools and HE working together to better prepare non-traditional pupils for university entrance exams, to give them the same opportunity as their privately educated peers, Wankowski's (1991a) research was concerned with the failure and dropout of students once through entrance examinations. Therefore this early form of academic support at the University of Birmingham, attempted to remedy the deficits in students, resulting from differences in approach and expectations between schools and higher education, although, according to Robbins (1963), the issue lay with state run compulsory sector.

Wankowski (1991a) suggested that both schools and universities would benefit from adopting pedagogic elements from each other to aid students' transition into HE study. Some recommendations for HE particularly were: smaller lectures, more variety in teaching methods, more tutor contact, more explicit teaching objectives and assessment, more feedback, more 'training in self-assessment as pupils learn to organize their studies' (1991a: 65), more careers advice, and 'more encouragement given to students to discuss ... specific learning difficulties as ... they arise' (1991a: 65).

## **1.2 Growth in HE and complex needs**

Towards the end of his research into attrition in 1968, Wankowski published some of his quantitative and qualitative findings concluding that 'with the inevitable expansion of higher education the problems of tuition will grow more and more complex' (1968: 38), thereby alluding to the inclusion of less prepared students. Wankowski indicated that the more participation is widened, the more 'advanced training for teachers at all levels of higher education' (1968: 38) and knowledge of 'learning processes' (1968: 38) will be necessary in order to enable HEIs bridge the deficit between student abilities (academic and emotional) and the expectations of universities and government policymakers.

However, the feasibility of employing subject specialists who are also ‘skilled teachers’, was perhaps a little ambitious, outside of the obvious education-related subjects.

Wankowski (1991b) in *Assisting the Individual Student with Study Difficulties* defined his early academic support role in the 1960s as a ‘student counsellor’ and ‘remedial teacher’ (1991b: 88), remedying deficits in academic competence and emotional resilience largely resulting from a disparity between their prior educational experiences and their HE experience in some form. The purpose of Wankowski’s one-to-one ‘educational counselling’ was to help restore ‘academic competence’, as well as helping to develop ‘efficient, self-directing learner[s]’ (Wankowski, 1991b: 89). Wankowski (1991b), therefore, seems to elude to two different types of student - those who had academic competence but temporarily lost it and others who never emerged from school with it. Wankowski also defined his work as attempting to improve or restore the ‘mastery of learning how to learn to live with oneself and others, as well as learning how to learn at university’ (Wankowski, 1991b: 99), therefore, alluding to a more holistic development - including self-acceptance, and acceptance of others in addition to emotional resilience.

### **1.3 Study assistance**

In another, later, piece of research *Increasing Students’ Power for Self-teaching* (Wankowski, 1991c), Wankowski appears to have shifted his thinking. In this work, Wankowski (1991c) reflects on his career at the university, but consistently refers to his role as ‘study assistance’ as a ‘Study Assistance Tutor’ as part of a ‘Study Assistance Unit’ (Wankowski’s, 1991c). Previously, in earlier literature Wankowski (1968; 1991a; 1991b) had referred to his role as ‘educational counselling’ as part of an ‘Educational Counselling Unit’, which focused on the emotional resilience of students, helping them to become self-directed. The work that he refers to at this point is still a ‘last resort’ one-to-one service, but Wankowski (1991c) talks about ways to get students to self-manage and self-teach ‘what they

intended to learn for their degrees' (1991c: 141). Therefore, although Wankowski's role is still attempting to encourage independence and autonomy, it appears to be more related to bridging deficits pertaining specifically to students' courses of study.

The changes in the title of role and department (if they were changes in title and not completely different roles and departments) indicate a shift away from the idea of 'counselling' and 'emotions' and their relationship to learning and citizenship more broadly. There seems to be much more of a focus on students' 'study'. This change may be as a result of an increase in participation and the need for support to be mainstream and course focused, as Wankowski himself predicted in 1968. However, whilst these changes in role and department titles may seem less stigmatising, the work itself could, arguably, be a step towards a more generic and instrumental approach to academic support focused more overtly on academic deficits rather than holistic development. It is possible to see how the developments of this one role seems to be moving more towards study skills models, which were formally presented in the 1993 DfE Student Support report.

#### **1.4 Study counselling**

Similarly to Wankowski, the purpose of Peelo's (1994) 'study counselling' role is reflected in the title of her book: *Helping Students with Study Problems*; alluding to a focus on study, deficit and remedy. Like Wankowski, Peelo (1994) also has a background in educational psychology and also describes her work, between 1985 and 1993 at Lancaster University (1960s institution), as 'counselling'. The most important similarity to highlight between Peelo (1994) and Wankowski (1991c) is that in the 1980s they both use the prefix of 'study' in their titles. Whilst Wankowski refers to 'study assistance' Peelo talks of 'study' counselling. This could indicate more of an emphasis on the student's experience and academic abilities, with their emotions seen as secondary.

Peelo defined 'study counselling' as not entirely counselling in the traditional sense but also 'not precisely the same as 'study skills' teaching' (1994: 1) either. It is important to emphasise that here we see the first mention of 'study skills' in the literature, following the 1993 DfE 'Student Support' report (see chapter 2 Policy). Peelo (1994) defined the role as being more about 'ways of helping students after everything they know about study has let them down' (Peelo, 1994: 1), not unlike the 'last resort' role of Wankowski (1991b), implying more of a loss of competence rather than having lacked it in the first place. Peelo makes the distinction between her work and that of 'study skills tuition' defining the latter as 'preventative teaching through workshops ... for people that have not run into crises' (1994: 1). In contrast Peelo (1994) defines 'study counselling' or 'study tutoring' as work carried out with individual students to overcome 'problems with their academic work' (1994: 5). Therefore 'study counselling' and 'tutoring' were translated as a one-to-one service centered on individuals in crisis, evolving from and delivered by 'counselling' roles, whereas 'study skills tuition' was defined as 'preventative' group teaching delivered by a different role unrelated to counselling and emotional well-being, with a more generic approach 'all comers' approach.

### **1.5 Emotion and intellect combined**

In contrast to the 'preventative' 'study skills' tuition, Peelo described her one-to-one support as putting 'students' needs first, rather than teaching a pre-decided set of study techniques' (1994: 119). She defined her remit as:

grounded in three combined beliefs: that people bring their prior experiences to learning at university; that learning is an emotional as well as intellectual matter; and that the social environment of the institutions in which adults study exercises a strong influence over the process of learning (1994: 119)

Similar to Wankowski (1968; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c), Peelo (1994) also emphasises the importance of an individual's prior learning experience, describing 'learning' as a combination of both emotion and intellect, which, coupled with the 'social environment', can impair or enhance learning. Therefore, 'preventative teaching' would be considered impersonal and purely study or 'skills' related, devoid of

knowledge, addressing deficits before they arise. Although the 1993 DfE Student Support report seemed to allude to polytechnics and colleges taking a more mainstream and inclusive approach to academic development (see chapter 2 Policy), the separation of emotion and intellect appears to be a move towards a more surface, mechanistic and ‘deficit’ approach to academic support, with the aim of meeting learning outcomes, rather than whole person development and fundamental growth.

In contrast, Peelo (1994) described her early study counsellor role as ‘teeter[ing] on the edge between academic support and welfare support’ (Peelo, 1994: 2), working with students to help them ‘get whatever it is they want[ed] out of their studies’ (Peelo: 1994: 6), hinting at a consumer service role referred to in the 2011 and 2016 BIS reports (see chapter 2 Policy and chapter 8 Business). Without tutoring students in their studies or offering help with extreme emotional or psychological issues, Peelo’s (1994) role appeared to be more academic facing than that of Wankowski’s earlier role (1991b). Indeed, Peelo (1994) indicated that her work could involve ‘acting as a sounding board for ... specific piece[s] of writing ... instructing on what essay-writing, reading, note-taking can be ... [and] challenging inflexible ideas about what learning is’ (1994: 6). Therefore Peelo’s (1994) practices seemed to straddle both ‘study skills support’, albeit on an individual level, as well as educational counselling, probing limiting beliefs and supporting a more holistic emotional development.

Peelo (1994) pointed out that there had been a notable rise in demand for ‘study counselling’ between 1985 and 1994 at Lancaster University. This rise in ‘referrals’ of students with ‘study problems’ seemed to coincide with increases not just in student numbers, but also in diversity of those attending university. Some aspects of Peelo’s (1994) role, however, such as taking notes, writing letters or making telephone calls on behalf of students seemed to step into the role of loco parentis. ‘Infantilisation’ (Furedi, 2017), or acting as a buffer between students and the realities of study and

life, may inadvertently maintain student dependence, deficit, and subsequent need for academic support, although potentially maintaining levels of consumer satisfaction (see chapter 8 Business).

## **2. The 1990s**

### **2.1 ‘Inappropriate and underdeveloped repertoire of study skills’**

Similarly to Wankowski (1991a; 1991b; 1991c) and Peelo (1994), Wolfendale (1996) also came into HE with a background in educational psychology, however Wolfendale straddles academia and support as a Professor in Psychology and Director of a Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of East London. In *Learning Support in Higher Education: principles, values, continuities*, Wolfendale (1996) describes ‘Learning Support’ as a ‘broad and encompassing’ ‘approach’ to meeting the needs of those who ‘request’ or ‘require targeted extra, or additional help’ (1996: 2). The ‘principles and values underlying learning support in HE ... [were defined as] entitlement, students’ rights, equal opportunities, access, inclusion, and continuity’ (Wolfendale, 1996: 3). These entitlements were regardless of whether it was enabling students with disabilities and specific learning differences, or enhancing language, research, thinking and writing skills. The purpose of learning support was therefore to reduce or eliminate ‘the risks of marginalizing ... [any] students’ (1996: 3), enabling all to integrate and learn together. Therefore, an emphasis seemed to be on bridging barriers to integration and opportunities, ensuring social inclusion occurs within and beyond the HE learning environment and into social communities.

Although much of what Wolfendale discusses seems to be pertaining to equal opportunities (in education and work) as well as tolerance and social cohesion, there is a mention of students being ‘treated ... as a partner in the learning enterprise’ (1996: 3). ‘Enterprise’ – a term usually associated with business, alludes to the idea of HE learning being contractual and commerce-related. Indeed, Wolfendale highlights growing policy-driven pressures on both students and HEIs to bridge deficits in

‘personal and transferrable skills’ (1996: 4) deemed important for commerce. Wolfendale (1996) cited ‘employer’ ‘criticisms’ that ‘graduates are often insufficiently equipped with a range of requisite reasoning and communication skills’ (1996: 5). Therefore institutions were expected to ‘assist students’ to develop:

appropriate language skills ... information gathering, recording and presentation [abilities] ... critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving ... ability to work in groups, listen and respond to others; to manage time effectively ... [the ability] to carry out self-appraisal, goal-setting ... task management ... [self-awareness and helping them become] more aware of their learning style and learning needs and to develop effective ways of studying and learning (Wolfendale, 1996: 4)

These attributes are, arguably, the key skills highlighted by Dearing in 1997. They could also be defined as ‘study skills’, although Wolfendale (1996) highlights that ‘traditionally’, ‘study skills’ were not ‘acknowledged’ as an area of ‘need’. In evaluating a ‘Study Skills Drop-in facility’ pilot (1996: 11) undertaken by a colleague in 1990, Wolfendale highlights the most ‘commonly reported’ issues as student ‘motivation’, ‘organization’ and ‘exam anxiety’ (1996: 12). The greater severity of needs related to difficulties regarding ‘spelling’ ‘note-taking’ ‘reading for information and meaning’ and ‘essay writing/expression’ (Wolfendale, 1996: 12). However, a ‘small minority of students’ presenting themselves to the service required ‘structured, [and] sustained intervention’ (Wolfendale, 1996: 12) before any notable improvements in their abilities to read, understand and express themselves could be seen. Wolfendale deduced that ‘there are students who enter higher education with residual literacy needs, and/or with an inappropriate and underdeveloped repertoire of study skills’ (1996: 11). However, she points out that this ‘must always have been the case ... the point is whether, within a policy of Learning Support, higher education now recognize that this area can be problematic, and that they can and should be pro-active in terms of providing the necessary support’ (Wolfendale, 1996: 11). Wolfendale (1996) therefore hints at potential issues with administrative powers recognising the needs of students and taking an active rather than reactive approach.



## **2.2 Different learners and learning experience**

Like Wolfendale (1996), Simpson (1996) believes students' learning needs should be acknowledged, with more institutional-wide initiatives adopted and integrated as part of the whole HE experience. In the chapter Learning Development in HE: deficit or difference? Simpson, Senior Lecturer in the Learning Development Unit for the University of East London, states that:

a positive strategic response is required which recognizes the different levels of knowledge, skills and personal qualities that students, in ever increasing numbers, are now bringing to their HE learning experience. In this way, we can move away from the deficit view that sees learning development needs of students as problems, synonymous with falling standards and requiring remedial provision, towards a more positive strategic response (1996: 17)

Simpson refers to a shift in philosophy, and the move away from 'problematising' gaps between students' abilities and the expectations bestowed upon HEIs referred to as 'remedial provision[s]'. Simpson highlights that the 'diversification of the post-16 educational curriculum has resulted in a whole range of alternative access routes and qualifications' (1996: 20). Simpson describes institutions as no longer being able to assume a readiness for study and full engagement, the 'widening of access' has led to a 'growing number of students' with progressively 'mixed' educational experiences and 'long' absences from education, 'gaps in knowledge', lacking 'confidence', lacking 'clarity about what is required', 'increasing outside commitments', 'anxieties', 'linguistic diversity', and an 'unfamiliarity with the UK system and academic conventions' (1996: 19). Simpson (1996) highlights in the 1990s that both 'domestic' and 'financial' situations did not allow 'many students' the 'luxury' of 'total immersion' in their studies, presenting further hurdles for students and their institutions to navigate. However, the marketisation of HE in 2011, would further place students and institutions under pressure (see chapter 6 'Remedial').

## **2.3 The accountability and widening participation 'strain'**

Simpson points out the difficulties facing academics and academic support teams, he explains that 'those of us ... working in the HE sector are very much aware of the difficulties involved in ensuring

a quality service for our students in the context of increasing numbers and decreasing resources' (1996: 17). Simpson points out that the 'changing' 'profile' of students, coupled with 'demands for greater accountability' regarding service quality, is placing 'current arrangements under strain' (1996: 17). Although the HE sector was described as 'committed to providing the highest possible quality of education' (1996: 17) they were considered to be 'subjected to the close scrutiny' (Simpson, 1996: 17) and 'pressure' from a range of conflicting bodies such as: the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC); the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE); the National Union of Students (NUS); and 'individual university charters' (Simpson, 1996: 17).

Simpson concludes that the 'irony' of the situation 'is not lost on those who have to deliver. At a time of significant reductions in full-time staffing levels at the University of East London ... from 1520 academic and support staff in 1970 to 1112 in 1995, the increase in student numbers has been dramatic ... from 6726 ... to 12,400 in 1995' (1996: 17). Therefore while student numbers, quality assurance and scrutiny increase significantly, funding and staffing levels, of both academic and support staff, are reduced. According to Simpson (1996) this situation in itself is difficult, however this combined with the increase in 'different learners' was thought to require a complete re-thinking of the HE experience. Simpson puts forward what he refers to as a 'learner support framework' to raise awareness and enhance every aspect of the student experience from guided admissions to exit guidance, ensuring that all departments, resources and spaces support the learner experience.

Simpson saw 'learning development' as being more of an individualised learner experience that takes account of every individual's needs from 'entry' 'assessments' 'skills audits' and 'induction[s]', through to 'on-programme' monitoring, 'personal/professional development', 'key skills', 'transferable skills', tutorials, and 'additional support' etc. However, it is not clear how a fully

individualised student-centred approach to meeting the learning needs of ‘all students’ (Simpson, 1996: 27) fits with the resourcing issues raised previously. As discussed by Wankowski (1991b, 1991c), Peelo (1994) and Wolfendale (1996), to identify and address the individual needs of a diverse range of students, by its very nature, requires one-to-one contact, which becomes more difficult as student numbers significantly outweigh staffing levels – therefore funding impinges on a more individualistic and potentially more developmental approach. However, Simpson’s argument seems to be that the whole of an institution needs to be concerned with learner support, not just one dedicated team, possibly due to the financial implications and restrictions of such a limited resource. Therefore, Simpson (1996) argued that the journey of the student needed much more of a systematic approach to education (Corbett, 1996).

#### **2.4 Division of responsibility between academics and academic support**

Only one year on from Wolfendale (1996) and Simpson (1996), Jones et al (1997), in *Researching into Student Learning and Support*, saw support for learning as the responsibility of course teams. As lecturers at Westminster College Oxford, and a Professor and Dean of Education at the University of the West of England, Jones et al make clear distinctions between what they call ‘educational counselling’ and ‘educational tutoring’, pointing out the importance of setting parameters in this area in order to make clear ‘the responsibility of every lecturer’ (1997: 45). Educational tutoring was identified as the sole domain of subject specific lecturers, and was described as:

[a] regular programme of events directed at supporting students’ academic development: for instance, their ability to set themselves educational objectives and monitor their own progress towards them, their ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, or their development of study skills (Jones et al, 1997: 45).

Jones et al (1997) mirror the recommendations of Wankowski, emphasising the importance of skilled HE subject specialists (Wankowski, 1968) able to support the ‘self-mastery’ of students (Wankowski, 1991c). Jones et al (1997) seemed to blend both psychological support with knowledge acquisition and skills, this included exploring ways in which the ‘hidden and overt curriculum are, or are not

supporting ... [students'] learning' (Jones et al, 1997: 45). Jones et al, however, have the added advantage of being academics and researchers within the field of education, within a school and institution that specialises in education. Therefore subject teaching and specialist knowledge for learning support is one and the same, with presumably students benefitting from subject study that brings learning knowledge and self-reflection to the fore.

## **2.5 Holistic approach to knowledge acquisition**

Jones et al talk about investigating student beliefs and behaviors around study and 'educational authority' (1997: 45) as well as identifying any 'values and expectations [that] may be causing the student problems, or causing the student to create their problems' (Jones et al, 1997: 45). Therefore Jones et al not only seem to challenge course habitus, but also student habitus, thus considering the whole student - emotional and academic, beyond meeting learning outcomes. Indeed Jones et al (1997) define 'educational tutoring' as an embedded and holistic mix of emotional support, knowledge acquisition and learner guidance. Jones et al (1997) make general reference to addressing the needs of 'new and returning students' (Jones et al, 1997: 45), but do not indicate the size of cohorts and their ability to manage individual support.

However, not all support was the domain of academics, because 'educational counselling', in contrast to 'educational tutoring', was defined by Jones et al (1997) as the domain of specialists outside of course teams that lecturers may call upon if students' progression gave them cause for concern. Therefore unlike 'educational tutoring', 'educational counselling' is more 'problem-centred' and may supplement 'educational tutoring', in order to remedy an 'academic crisis ... or ... long-standing problem with a student's work' (Jones et al, 1997: 45). The fact that 'problematic' deficits seem to be passed on to additional support outside of subject teaching indicates a need for educational specialists adept at dealing with complex and deep-rooted boundaries to learning. This also seems to set up a

hierarchy between roles, where academic development is dealt with by academics and long-term issues or crisis are dealt with staff outside of courses – ‘go to’ services.

Similarly to the service mentioned by Wankowski (1991b, 1991c) and Peelo (1994), the ‘educational counselling’ discussed by Jones et al (1997) was indeed an external problem-solving one-to-one service for the students. It was described as a service that helps to address ‘study problems, misunderstandings, confidence, discrimination and conflict ... development of knowledge ... skills or helping the student to develop more appropriate attitudes and behaviour’ (Jones et al, 1997: 45). Although this ‘counselling’ role is similar to that described by Wankowski (1991b, 1991c), it is more akin to the role described by Peelo in 1994, which was individual study tuition combined with addressing psychological issues. However, post-Dearing Report (1997) and the skills agenda, as well as another surge to increase and widen HE participation, there was a change in the way in which Peelo’s work was titled and defined, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **2.6 Study support for all**

Ivanic and Lea explain that ‘with the expansion of higher education in the 1990s, increasing numbers of institutions – in particular the post-1992 universities – began to offer fairly comprehensive programmes of study skills ... [with] some attention to writing (2006: 9). Indeed, the post 1992 universities were the types of institutions (polytechnics and higher colleges) discussed in the Student Services report (DfE, 1993) that, arguably, had a head start on supporting widening participation agendas compared to the more traditional universities. Therefore study skills programmes seemed to have roots in colleges and polytechnics and the preparation of more non-traditional students; my own institution and that of Downton (the post-1992 ex-polytechnic participating in this research) are evidence of this. Blythman and Orr (2002) in *A Joined Up Policy Approach to Student Support*, discuss the setting-up of ‘study support’ as Teaching and Learning Coordinators, at the London Institute in

1997. They emphasise that the creation of the service came about just as the notion of ‘study support was emerging’ (Blythman and Orr, 2002: 52). According to Parry, the ‘study support’ phenomenon really grew through government initiatives to encourage HEIs to ‘provide additional academic support and counselling’ (2002: 27) to ensure that ‘wider participation’ (WP) did not ‘result in more students failing’ (2002: 27). Additional funding could be gained as an incentive to provide support for WP students and improved retention figures. Therefore study support was, arguably, a government instigated response to skills, knowledge and emotional deficits of non-traditional students entering higher education. Despite this, Blythman and Orr (2002), like similar services in other HEIs, offered support to all students, rather than singling out WP students, who may or may not need, or wish to access, the support.

Blythman and Orr (2002) decided to take a two pronged approach to retention: 1. set up a study support service and 2. work with academic staff to develop in-course strategies and improvements, therefore acting as advisors to course teams. Blythman and Orr defined their study support as:

an offer to students of one-to-one or small group support with the aim of maximizing their opportunity to succeed ... [this offer included] many aspects of learning ... [such as] situated (discipline-specific) study skills, understanding disciplinary cultures, reading, research skills, time management, analysis, writing development and help with progression ... [including support for] students with a specific difficulty, such as dyslexia ... English as a second language and those with a disability (2002: 52)

The key areas of need seemed to be around helping students to understand subject related cultures and practices, as well as research and literacy such as reading, writing and thinking critically, and learning how to manage themselves and their work. As with Peelo’s (2002) ‘learning support’, Blythman and Orr (2002) defined ‘study support’ as separate to ‘student services’, with a ‘high profile’ and ‘linked firmly to the curriculum’ (2002: 53). They were keen that the service was viewed as support for those wishing to increase their chances of ‘high grades’ rather than merely associated with ‘study problems’ (Blythman and Orr, 2002: 53). ‘Study support’ in this case, and in similar cases, appears rooted in, and

limited to, meeting pre-defined and course related learning outcomes, as opposed to the more holistic developments in the 1960s-1980s mentioned by Wankowski (1991a) and Peelo (1992).

Blythman and Orr (2002) avoid phrases such as ‘study problems’, or any other language that would place ‘study support’ within what Wingate (2006) would describe as a deficit model of tuition, instead Blythman and Orr (2002) describe their study support as proactive and developmental. Blythman and Orr (2002) made use of tutors from a range of professions and philosophical approaches including ‘English for academic purposes, academic literacies and dyslexia models’ (2002: 53) in order to encompass all ‘different conceptions of learning’ (2002: 53). These study support staff worked with academic staff and student services to ensure a network of support was available to students and to also offer support to staff in the development of their teaching practices.

## **2.7 Libraries as learning centres**

Unlike the multi-approach of Blythman and Orr (2002), Oyston, editor of *Centred on Learning: Academic Case Studies on Learning Centre Development*, talks about the ‘learning centre model’ (2003: x), with ‘academic library service[s] ... at [it’s] heart’ (2003: xi). This book covers the evolution of the ‘learning centre’ approach in response to educational policy and rapid changes during the 1990s in four universities: University of Aberdeen, Leeds Metropolitan University, University of Lincoln and Sheffield Hallam University. Oyston explains that ‘academic libraries and other services are driven by institutional strategies and priorities, and demands for greater efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness. They do it in different ways, according to the character of their parent institution and their role within it’ (2003: ix). Therefore, despite calls for optimum methods of academic support, the approach institutions adopt in supporting students is based on a complex mix of variables. The idea of achieving ‘greater efficiency’ in meeting ‘demand’ is reminiscent of the business sector and the idea

of financial sustainability, which, in 2011 would be brought to the fore (see chapter 2 Policy and the 2011 BIS report).

Although libraries have played a key role in offering physical and digital resources in support of subject study, they are traditionally associated with sourcing information and non-teaching roles. Oyston himself recognises this, identifying however that in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a move away from libraries as just a support for ‘student[s] information needs’ (2003: ix). This move, which coincided with the 1997 skills agenda and the 2003 proposal to increase and widen participation even further, led to libraries taking a more central role in developing and implementing teaching and learning strategies, working in ‘partnership with academic colleagues in course development and management’ (Oyston, 2003: xi); hence the addition of the term ‘academic’ to ‘library’, in order to mark this change. Indeed Howard (2012), talked about the move in the mid-2000s, at the University of Leeds, to bring ‘academic skills support’ alongside ‘information literacy’ within the library, forming a ‘skills’ team to work ‘alongside librarians’ within the four faculties, liaising with staff in schools and faculties (2012: 72). Therefore, it appears that in some institutions central services such as libraries were also being utilised to develop students in the way expected by central government.

## **2.8 From study skills to ‘graduate’ skills - developing sustainable support**

Alongside the term ‘skills’, the phrase ‘lifelong learning’ - the mantra of the 1997 Labour administration and the focus of the 1998 green paper *The Learning Age* – starts to emerge in literature. However, whilst academic support teams and HEIs were addressing ‘skills’ agendas, the notion of ‘lifelong learning’ was being used by national government to drive yet further HE expansions - in numbers and diversity (Abson, 2003). Alongside developing ‘skills’ for ‘study’, a generic set of ‘employability’ or ‘graduate’ ‘skills’ are also defined in government commissioned reports, these too are expected to be developed through HE study (Abson, 2003). Indeed, Abson explains that their



‘learning centre approach [was a] ... response to the changing teaching and learning landscape within higher education’ (2003: 1) and the ‘general shift in ... skills requirements of the [UK] workforce ... [with] an emphasis on ... graduate-level skills’ (2003: 1).

Using definitions from Harvey and Mason (1996), Abson defines graduate-ness as ‘core skills’ involving: ‘knowledge, intellectual ability, ability to work in a modern organization, interpersonal skills, [and] communication skills’ (2003: 2). The idea of knowledge acquisition, as a means to developing skills, is thus relegated to a skill. Therefore, one can assume that a lack of relevant prior knowledge becomes part of the ‘skills’ remit of academic support teams. The ‘learning centre’ approach emerged from existing support services (Abson, 2003), namely libraries, not only to meet skills agendas but also to establish more financially sustainable approaches to attracting and retaining the kinds of students that central government expected, amidst diminishing funding.

## **2.9 Supporting, advising or teaching**

Within each library-based learning centre there were variations in roles, however most seemed to contain specialists covering disability assessment, ‘information advisors’ - originally librarians (Moore et al, 2003: 149) and ‘learning advisor[s]’ (Moore et al, 2003: 149) specialising in education and the facilitation of learning. The learning advisor role, to varying degrees within each of the universities, appeared to mainly advise course teams, and devise resources to promote and embed skills development within the curriculum (Moore et al, 2003), thus maximising capacity for specialist teaching by developing the knowledge and skills of academics, as suggested by Wankowski (1968; 1991a) in the 1960s.

Parallels can be drawn between the role of the ‘learning advisor’ (Moore et al, 2003), and that of the ‘study support’ staff introduced by Blythman and Orr (2002), in-so-much as they both act as specialists

in learning and teaching, working with academic colleagues to advise and help embed skills development into the curriculum. However, it is not clear whether the learning advisor role, like Blythman and Orr's (2002) 'study support', involved teaching students. Blythman and Orr (2002) placed equal importance on one-to-one bespoke sessions for the development of individuals as well as that of on-course initiatives. However, while Blythman and Orr (2002) refer to 'supporting' 'study', the 'learning centre' uses the broader term of 'learning', and the idea of 'advising' on it. 'Advice' can be considered as an imparting of knowledge and information for an individual to make use of, whereas 'support' can paint a picture of students passively 'resting' or 'relying' on staff. Neither researchers talk about the idea of 'teaching', which I would argue is the purpose of academic support.

### **3. The 2000s**

#### **3.1 From 'study counsellor' to 'study consultant'**

Peelo in 2002 refers to her 'learning support practice' as a 'study consultant', supporting the 'potential' and 'independence' of all (2002: 160), which contrasts with her earlier 'study counselling' and 'crisis' management role (Peelo, 1994). The move from 'study counselling' to 'study consultant' hints at potential changes in expectations. On the one hand the language is a move away from the idea of remediation and 'problems', but at the same time it reflects a move towards a more impersonal, generic or business approach to academic support. Indeed, in her 2002 literature, despite Peelo's views a decade earlier, she talks about undertaking 'study skills' 'language teaching and library work' (2002b: 1) in groups as well as individually. This was the very work that she previously described as 'pre-decided' study skills teaching, which she positioned in opposition to her, then, holistic and individual-centred approach. Therefore, although Peelo's approach in 2002 extends beyond the crisis management of one-to-one support for a few towards the all-encompassing approach discussed by Wolfendale (1996) and Blythman and Orr (2002), her work seems to be less about the holistic

development of individuals (emotional and academic) and instead more of a generic approach to remedying 'skills' deficits.

Indeed, Peelo in 2002 describes her role as separate to 'counselling' and 'advising' (2002a: 1), thereby hinting at a separation of emotion from learning, which she had previously considered inextricably linked. However, the move away from an emphasis on individuals in crisis and towards more preparatory, and somewhat generic, group-work, coincided with further increases in student numbers and diversity post-Dearing (1997), and therefore may have been a more strategic and economically sustainable approach to support, as opposed to a change in educational philosophy.

### **3.2 Un-established and reactionary**

Peelo explains that 'learning support' or 'study support' ... [was] one of the most recent arrivals in the provision of student support services' (2002: 161) and was therefore not necessarily a 'settled or established occupation' in HE (2002: 161), despite it having been practiced for many years in a variety of forms in tertiary education. According to Corbett (1996) because academic support was a relatively new addition to HE, no-one really knew how or where it sat within teaching and learning or research; consequently its purpose and practices tended to evolve out of previous practices, and largely in response to national policy. This also meant that it was unclear who was best qualified to undertake the work of academic support, hence conflicts arising between specialist teachers, counsellors and subject specialists as identified throughout this literature review. Peelo (2002) explains that there was a lot of space for different staff to undertake the work of academic support e.g. dyslexia, language tuition or counselling and approach the work very differently depending on their professional backgrounds. However, Peelo (2002) fails to mention subject specialists and their role in the academic support of their own cohorts. This could be for two reasons: 1. academic support is perceived as

something separate to subject teaching; or 2. Peelo's position in relation to, and involvement with, course teams is minimal, therefore she is unaware of what is occurring within the courses.

### **3.3 LearnHigher and Learning Development in HE – communities of practice**

It is not possible to trace the history of academic support without discussing the development of the professional network which arose alongside. In 2002 John Hilsdon set up the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN), which was an email 'community of practice' discussion group with a common interest in student learning and sharing practice (Keenan, 2009). In 2003 'the first LDHEN symposium was held at London Metropolitan University' (Keenan, 2009: 1) to discuss the nature of what 'Learning Development' could be. As a result of the symposium, representatives from sixteen institutions joined partnership, and 'began exploring ideas for a collaborative venture to facilitate the sharing of materials and ideas. However, it was not just about sharing knowledge and materials but also about counteracting 'the view' that learning development (academic support), 'is merely 'remedial', and instead 'demonstrate the academic legitimacy' of the role as 'a field worthy of attention by staff and students in all disciplines' (Hilsdon, 2004: 12).

To get this collaborative venture 'off the ground' it was crucial to find 'external funding' (Keenan, 2009: 2) which came as a result of HEFCE funded Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning initiative, instigated by the The Future of Higher Education (2003) white paper:

'Centres of excellence' [CETLs] were first proposed as one of the several initiatives to boost the quality of teaching ... After consultation the Higher Education Funding Council for England invited bids for 'Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning' ... Seventy-four Centres ... were established within higher education institutions (HEIs) ... This initiative was the largest ever single-funded intervention in teaching and learning in the history of the UK higher education, receiving £350 million over five years. The CETL policy was clearly an instrument that relied on economic means to incentivise ... HEFCE later reported that all English HEIs were represented in at least one bid (Hartley et al, 2011: 3).

In 2005, after a successful bid, the ‘LearnHigher CETL was launched with Liverpool Hope as the lead institution. Each of the sixteen partners received an amount of capital money which ... [was] spent on learning spaces in their institutions’ (Keenan, 2009: 2) and undertaking practitioner-led research into students’ use of learning resources. In 2007 the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) was established; its membership was described as offering ‘the opportunity to strengthen our voice and contribute to the development of policies promoting learning development and CPD opportunities for staff’ (Keenan, 2009: 4).

### **3.4 Doing away with study skills**

Appearing at odds with the more centralised approach to academic support, Wingate (2006), senior lecturer in Language in Education at Kings College London, talks extensively about ‘doing away with’ the notion of ‘study skills’. Wingate argues that the:

widespread approach to enhancing student learning through separate study skills courses is ineffective, and that the term ‘study skills’ itself has misleading implications, which are counterproductive to learning ... [L]earning how to study effectively at university cannot be separated from subject content and the process of learning. (2006: 457)

Wingate (2006; 2015) sees ‘student learning’ and ‘study skills’ as the antithesis of each other, with ‘skills’ being seen as a down-playing of the role of knowledge. Wingate’s (2006; 2015) philosophy comes from the idea that students’ ‘epistemological assumptions’, rather than just their study ‘techniques’ is what often holds them back from achieving. This philosophy seems to echo the early research of Wankowski (1991a) and that of Peelo (1994) where students’ thinking and emotions, shaped by past educational experiences, either enable or present a barrier to future learning.

Although forty years on from the 1960s research carried out by Wankowski (1968; 1991a), and within a very different political paradigm, Wingate (2006), like Wankowski (1968; 1991a), highlights a miss-

match between school and university teaching as the cause for widespread dependency and inadequate preparation for university study. Wingate states that there had been:

a growing awareness that not only ‘non-traditional’ and a few weak ‘traditional’ students struggle with the demands of studying at university. The National Audit Office (NAO, 2002) found that due to changes in the secondary system, most students from the traditional A level route are not adequately prepared for the independent learning required in higher education. (2006: pp 457 - 458)

Whilst changes had occurred within universities in order to better support students in HE, the compulsory sector, under close control and scrutiny of the government – through the curriculum, qualifications and examination targets - seemed to move school teaching further away from supporting learner independence. Therefore policy-driven targets in both compulsory and HE sectors present barriers to individual development, thus increasing the gap between the knowledge and abilities of school leavers and the expected knowledge and abilities of HE graduates.

### **3.5 ‘Embedding’ learning enhancement**

Wingate (2006) states that the idea of ‘skills’ teaching divorced from ‘subject content’ encourages an ‘undesirable epistemological belief that knowledge is an ‘external, objective body of facts’ (Gamache, 2002: 277) which can be acquired with certain tricks and techniques ... leading to a surface approach to learning’ (2006: 459). Citing the work of Gibbs (1994), Drummond et al (1998; 1999) and Cottrell (2001), Wingate states that researchers agree that the embedded model of skills development ‘addresses the complexity of skills in an inclusive and holistic manner ... progressively throughout ... [a] degree course’ (2006: 459); for ‘skills’ are not merely for ‘study’ purposes, but also for ‘students’ lifelong personal and professional development’ (2006: 459). Therefore learning and skills are not merely about bridging national deficits underpinned by ‘vocationalism’ (see chapter 2 Policy), but more for holistic empowerment and enrichment of life. In her later article, *A framework for transition: supporting ‘learning to learn’ in higher education* Wingate makes the point ‘that a holistic, subject-

specific approach is needed to support all students in the complex process of learning to learn in higher education' (2007: 391) with a 'framework' to facilitate the:

transition to university by helping students to understand what is expected from them ... by addressing their conceptions of learning and knowledge and by gradually developing their competence as independent learners as well as their competence in constructing knowledge in their discipline (2007: 391)

Such frameworks, as indicated by Simpson (1996) require the full 'engagement of academic teachers' (Wingate, 2007: 391) and, more importantly, require the 'appropriate recognition' for 'effective teaching' 'from university managers and policy makers' (Wingate, 2007: 391). According to Wingate, this would mean 'instigating changes in conceptions of teaching, providing opportunities for educational development and setting incentives for teachers' commitment to student learning' (2007: 391).

### **3.6 Meta-learning awareness**

Around the time of Wingate's (2006; 2007) articles, Shreeve (2007) similarly talks about the broader notion of 'learning development' defined as study skills and increased 'meta-learning awareness', embedded within courses. Like Wingate (2006; 2007), Shreeve is also a subject specialist (textiles and arts education) and was, at the time of writing Learning Development and Study Support, the 'Director of the HEFCE funded Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CLIP CETL) at the University of the Arts London' (2007: 25). However, unlike Wingate (2006; 2007), but similar to Wankowski (1991b; 1991c), Peelo (1994), Blythman and Orr (2002) Shreeve considers there to be some value in support offered outside of courses. Like Wingate (2006; 2007) though, Shreeve mainly sees the need for learning development to be addressed 'at the point of contact between tutors and students in the learning environment' (2007: 11).

Shreeve cites the 'increase in student numbers ... [and] pressure on resources ... [as well as] the increase in the audit and accountability culture ... pervading higher education (Strathern 2000)' (2007:

11) as one of the main reasons for embedding ‘learning development and study support’ into the curriculum. Therefore, similar to Simpson’s (1996) institution-wide strategy, the decision to embed is driven by a squeeze on funding, close government scrutiny, and the growing gap between governmental expectations and the education and abilities of students entering HE. Shreeve advocates the ‘community of practice’ (2007: 11) approach to learning, where students participate in devising how their learning is facilitated, a collegial approach involving multi-disciplinary teams of staff, including employers if relevant, rather than tutors assuming the role of expert and merely imparting knowledge.

### **3.7 The ‘centre’ or ‘unit’ approach**

Unlike Shreeve (2007) and Wingate (2006; 2007), Marsh (2008) – Director of Learning Support Services at the University of Bradford (1960s university), and Stephenson (2008) – Head of Student Development and Advisory Services at the University of Cumbria (post-1992 university), discuss their academic support ‘centre’ (Stephenson, 2008) and ‘unit’ approach (Marsh, 2008) to support. Their academic support therefore sit external to courses, similiar to that of the ‘learning centre’ discussed by Oyston (2003), Abson (2003) and Moore et al (2003). Stephenson’s (2008) ‘Academic Skills Centre (ASC)’ is situated with other student services such as careers, counselling, disability, and advice, within the broader department of Student Development and Advisory Services (SDAS). The departmental ‘mission is to embrace an integrated approach to a student’s transition and progression through the University’ (Stephenson, 2008: 44). The ethos of collaboration was underpinned by the ‘premise that ‘teaching is no longer the preserve of the academics’’ (Stephenson, 2008: 45) and is therefore shared by all. A few examples were given for cross university collaborations in order to ‘pool resources, skills and effort ... to underpin the design and delivery of programmes and modules’ (Stephenson, 2008: 45). These largely relate to ‘skills’ and ‘employability’ frameworks and agendas, therefore underpinned by external employment expectations and subsequent deficits. However, this



seemed to fit the vocational nature of the institution, which largely consisted of subjects such as teaching, policing, forestry, sports science, media and design etc.

### **3.8 The ‘centre’ approach and ‘academic skills’**

The Academic Skills Centre (ASC) was described as providing:

academic support for all students wishing to improve their academic achievements, not just those needing learning support. Indeed the ASC seeks to de-stigmatize learning support and to provide opportunities for students to take control of their learning and approach ASC staff to enhance their academic performance and build on their existing skills regardless of ability level (Stephenson, 2008: 40)

The Academic Skills Centre (ASC) therefore seemed to be very skills focused and for the purpose of improving academic performance; this notion is reinforced by the titles of the roles: Academic Skills Coordinator, Student Skills Coordinator, Academic Support Advisor, Academic Skills Tutor, and Student Learning Assistances (Stephenson, 2008: 41). It is also important to point out that there seemed to be a distinction between ‘learning support’ and general ‘academic support’. ‘Learning support’ seemed to be for students presenting ‘needs’, whereas ‘academic support’ seemed to be for those ‘wishing’ to enhance performance; therefore distinguishing between remedial and development roles.

The ASC seemed largely to be a one-to-one service for self-selecting students, however the staff were also ‘charged with working closely with faculties and Learning and Information Services (LIS), to complement and strengthen the range of academic skills modules and skills audit tools available’ (Stephenson, 2008: 40). ASC was also an ‘informed’ referral ‘point’ to ‘other experts such as librarians, help desk professionals and learning technologists’ (Stephenson, 2008: 40). Although the role seemed to have a wider remit than just one-to-one support, it is not clear what the philosophical approach and breadth of remit is.

### **3.9 The ‘unit’ approach and ‘student success and employability’**

Similar to that of Stephenson’s centre (2008), Marsh’s (2008) ‘Learner Development Unit’ (LDU), is located along with other student-focused services such as library, IT, careers, counselling and disability within the department of ‘Learner Support Services’ (LSS). Also similar to Stephenson (2008), the term ‘learning’ seemed to hold some form of remedial stigma, hence the move to the term ‘learner’, which was deemed positive and more ‘individual’ centred (Marsh, 2008). However, unlike the previous department mentioned by Stephenson (2008), Marsh’s Learner Support Services (LSS) also consisted of teaching and staff development teams such as: ‘Teaching Quality and Enhancement Group (TQEG)’ and the previous HR-based ‘Staff Development’ team, as well as the ‘Graduate School ... responsible for ... [postgraduate] research skills training’ (2008: 54). Therefore, although academic support did not appear to be both staff and student facing, the uniting of both roles within the same department could arguably lead to a more institutional approach to learning development.

This relatively new approach to support services at this institution was spurred on by the University of Bradford experiencing ‘declining student numbers coupled with poor retention rates, and a relatively low average ... entry tariff’ (Marsh, 2008: 53). It was not clear how this new approach to academic support was intended to address the decline in student numbers, other than using it as a marketing tool to attract students through an improved learner experience. Marsh describes the institutional approach to student support as ‘holistic’, ‘educating the whole student’ (2008: 59). However, the core educational outcomes of the institution embedded ‘within the curriculum and supported outside formal teaching by LSS’ seemed to be largely vocational and deficit-driven, covering skills development such as: ‘subject and professional expertise’; ‘communication in an information age’; ‘working effectively in teams and groups in the context of an increasingly diverse society’; ‘independence and lifelong learning’; and ‘student success and employability’ (Marsh, 2008: 59). These skills and employability

focused ‘outcomes’, would not necessarily be considered ‘holistic’, in comparison to the ‘far-reaching’ HE benefits mentioned by Robbins in 1963 (see chapter 2 Policy).

It is also important to highlight the division between ‘formal teaching’, and the ‘outside’ role of LSS. Indeed teaching and ‘professional expertise’ was considered to be ‘primarily the responsibility of the academic schools ... [whereas] Learner Support Services (in conjunction with schools) support personal and academic development’ (Marsh, 2008: 59). This highlights a possible institutional difference between teaching confined to course teams in the 1960s university, and the post-1992 institution where teaching is deemed the responsibility of all (Stephenson, 2008).

### **3.10 Helping ‘greater number[s]’ to meet the criteria**

Similarly to Marsh’s article *From Learning to Learner* (2008), Hill et al (2010) talk about moving *From Deficiency to Development*, also alluding to a change in thinking and approach away from ‘remedial’. The Hill et al (2010) ‘article details the journey from a retention-focused initiative towards an inclusive, responsive and embedded provision aimed at enhancement and achievement for all’ (Hill et al, 2010: 2) at their post-1992 University of Huddersfield. Hill et al contextualise their situation stating that ‘Higher education institutions have recognised the need to consider ways in which a greater number of students can be helped to meet the criteria necessary to succeed’ (2010: 3). The authors cite the work of Lea and Street (1998), Blythman et al (2003), Ganobcsik-Williams (2004) and Wingate (2006), in identifying transparency regarding what is expected of students, and the need for a whole institution approach, similar to Simpson (1996).

When discussing the move from ‘deficiency’, Hill et al (2010) cite the 1998 work of Lea and Street as their work ‘prompted’ what Hill et al (2010) refer to as a more ‘student centred’ approach, recognising the diversity of student experiences and rejecting what they saw as a ‘student deficit’ approach. Like

Marsh's (2008) notion of moving from learning generally to the individual 'learner', Hill et al (2010) felt that their service was moving away from homogeneity and instead towards individuals and difference, although students were being progressed towards the same learning outcomes and expectations as previously.

### **3.11 Writing in the disciplines**

Hill et al refer to the work of previous researcher-practitioners such as Wingate (2006) and Blythman (2003) in an attempt to assess and assimilate best practice across the sector, justifying the changing paradigm and approach to academic development at their 'post-1992 University' (2010: 2). The support provided by Hill et al (2010) was described as a devolved model of learning development delivered by subject specific 'academic skills tutors'. This devolved model encompassed a range of approaches discussed previously in this chapter: embedded 'group sessions ... [which] foster a developmental ethos, being timely, relevant, linked to the subject curriculum and devolved into each School' (Hill et al, 2010: 11); one-to-one bespoke support for individuals; and a focus on 'teaching processes, staff development and recording documentary evidence' (Hill et al, 2010: 14-15). Their move from a 'deficiency' to 'development' model and the 'embedding' of 'study support within the curriculum' was inspired by 'the American experience which has seen a shift from separate provision towards Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WiD) approaches' (Hill et al, 2010: 2). Here we see reference to 'writing' support rather than general 'skills', although arguably 'writing' covers a suite of skills such as reading, criticality, research and academic conventions (see chapter 6 'Remedial'). A noticeable split appears between institutions and the literature, with those who take a 1. broad skills approach to student development, referred to as academic skills or study skills, identifying a need to tutor students in self-management; and those who focus on 2. writing more explicitly or 'academic literacies' (Lea and Street, 2002).

### **3.12 Inadequate schooling and perceptions of HE study**

Like other earlier authors, Hill et al (2010) evidence the fact that compulsory education does not seem to prepare students adequately for HE study, despite policy stipulating the outcome of both compulsory and higher education, and closely monitoring both. Inadequate preparation for HE was described as affecting the perceptions of students, who were not generally inclined to access any learning experience that may be considered optional or ‘extra-curricular’ (Hill et al, 2010). Learning for learning’s sake and personal development therefore seem to be undervalued or de-valued, in the present political, commerce and commodity-focused, paradigm.

## **4. 2011 onwards**

### **4.1 Issues with widening participation**

The objectives underpinning the policies to expand and widen participation have impacted on university provision to help students improve their general literacy and academic writing skills ... [The Paradox of Skills] provides an introductory text into the complexity of universities’ role as they try to address central government’s demands for graduates to have demonstratable ‘employment skills’ (Barkas, 2011: Back cover)

In *The Paradox of Skills*, Barkas, Student Support Centre Coordinator, analyses ‘how and why’ Students’ Skills Centres (SSCs) ‘gained such a hold in the sector, despite the contentious nature ... of generic writing skills’ (Barkas, 2011: back cover); therefore subscribing to an ‘academic literacies’ (Lea and Street, 2002), rather than broad skills, approach. In her book, Barkas (2011) reports on a longitudinal study of her SSC, spanning eleven years from inception in 1997 to 2008, at Teesside University, ex-polytechnic and post-1992 university. She describes the origins of ‘study support or skills centres (2011: 16) in HE emerging from ‘senior managers’ ‘knee jerk’ response ‘to the Dearing Report’s (1997) policy emphasis for widening participation’ (2011: 16) and ‘key skills’ (2011: 53). However, she points out that the ‘differentiated discourse can be traced to the Robbins Report (1963)’ (2011: 16).

Barkas admits that she originally considered the purpose of SSCs as being to ‘help [students] with all and everything to do with non-contextualised skills’ (2011: 7). However, her research findings regarding her institution ‘showed that this was never the case’ (2011: 7); instead, students accessed ‘help’ with ‘understanding their subject and how to write about it’ (2011: 7). Barkas initially argues that ‘if students entering higher education were expected to have a minimum standard of qualification (Level 3, GCSE, A-level or equivalent) surely they were ready to learn how to study in university?’ (2011: 53) in which case their ‘needs could therefore, be ‘supported’ and ‘guided’ through the university’s conventional subject tutorial system’ (2011: 53).

However, according to Barkas, the ‘pressure on universities to widen access, meant that they accepted students straight onto degree courses who would, before the Dearing Report (1997), have enrolled on an accredited ‘Access to Higher Education course’ in a college of further education’ (2011: 54). As Teeside University successfully employed widening participation strategies, like so many other researchers have reported, the ‘range of issues students presented to staff in the SSC ... increased and diversified’ (Barkas, 2011: 8). Students who were ‘new to higher education’ were described as seeking out the SSC ‘because they had nowhere else to go’ (Barkas, 2011: 53) hence the ‘bolt-on’ approach (Wingate, 2006) to academic support became part of the institution, shouldering the ‘unrealistic’ expectation, which came with widening participation and skills agendas (Barkas, 2011).

#### **4.2 Managing conflicts in SSCs**

Barkas defined five key ‘areas’ impacting on the ‘work of SSCs’ which she described as: ‘policy discourse; the changing role of universities; human capital theories and social capital theories; lifelong learning and access’ (2011: 13). Within each of these worlds Barkas describes five dimensions: ‘academic literacy’, ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’, ‘business and technology’ and ‘teaching’ (2011: 16). All of which not only led to the need for academic support but also affected approaches to it as demands on

institutions changed. Barkas (2011) highlights the conflicts between the worlds and dimensions within institutions, particularly noting conflicts in use and understanding of terms such as ‘skill’ ‘teaching’ and ‘support’, as well as some misconceptions that SSCs only ‘support’ but do not ‘teach’. Barkas pointed out that ‘the work of SSC tutors in a cross-institutional, multidisciplinary role’ (2011: 106) was indeed ‘dismissed as second-rate support which is of insignificant value to modular teaching’ (2011: 106). Placing academic support in an inferior position to academic powers, thus impacting on the role and approaches (see chapter 9 Discussion).

### **4.3 The commerce and social values conflict**

One of the most fundamental points that Barkas (2011) makes in her book, however, is about the relationship between increased participation and ‘economic competitiveness’. She points out that ‘despite the success of widening participation strategies employed by universities, the new utopia of a highly skilled, graduate workforce has not yet arrived’ (2011: 100), in the meantime ‘economic competitiveness of a society has eclipsed the intrinsic value of knowledge and a higher education’ (2011: 100). The issue with a focus on ‘skills’, as Wingate (2006; 2007; 2015) consistently highlights, is the lack of consideration for knowledge and notions of cultural capital required to empower individuals and a society. Barkas points out that, ‘The skills deficit thinking ... behind the mythical role of SSCs is ... reflected in the emphasis on skills for employability’ (2011: 106). However, despite ‘research into knowledge-based economies’ (Barkas, 2011: 106) exposing the vulnerability of ‘societies’ that depend on worldwide ‘trade’, governmental priorities continue to link skills, HE participation and commerce.

Concerns with ‘global’ commerce, are described by Barkas as affecting the ‘character of universities as they juggle with their own identity and their position in the league tables of other universities ... forced into the business model by the market’ (2011: 100). Howard (2012) echoes this sentiment,

raising concerns regarding student fees and greater competition for fewer applicants, particularly for the ‘arts, humanities and social science[s]’ (2012: 73), whose students ‘will often be funding their entire studies themselves’ (2012: 73). Howard points out that students, as a result of the fee hike, ‘are likely to appraise their course and university much more critically. Does it offer them value for their money? Will it guarantee them a good job? ... scrutinising data on the employment of previous graduates provided as part of Key Information Sets (2012: 73). Therefore the onus falling on the abilities of HEIs, and academic support teams, rather than on the qualities and efforts of the students. Arguably, however, it is not necessarily on the abilities of institutions to teach but rather on their position within the field and their abilities to attract the most able students:

the tensions of survival, cooperation and competition coexist [between HEIs,]... [and yet] there are only so many students who can be accommodated in any one institution and in a ‘free-market’ the wealthier and/or more successful institutions can choose whom they want to accept and thus defend their decisions in any way they see fit (Barkas, 2011: 101).

Barkas (2011) considered the pre-1992 research intensive institutions (largely Oxbridge and Russell Group) as the ‘elite’ who could afford to dismiss widening participation (WP) strategies and choose their students based on appropriate qualifications and aptitude, thus maintaining their standards and reputations with very little impact on subject teaching.

Barkas considers Students’ Skills Centres to be non-existent ‘in these establishments’ (2011: 101) because there was considered to be no need for them. Therefore Barkas (2011) makes a causal link between the hierarchal position of institutions, the types of students they attract and approaches to support, with lesser establishments grappling with widening participation and skills deficits. The differences in type of institution, the students they attract and the student experience they can subsequently offer, potentially reinforces social divides. The less fortunate students at the less fortunate institutions will have to adhere to skills agendas in order to financially survive, and those at more fortunate institutions will afford the experience of being immersed in knowledge acquisition, like the vocational and liberal divide of Ancient Greece (see chapter 2 Policy). Arguably, this trajectory starts



prior to HE in the compulsory sector – with the hierarchal divide between schools, particularly between state-controlled and private education.

However, it is important to point out, that while in 2011 SSCs may not have been overtly present in Russell Group institutions, academic support did exist in some form in at least one Russell Group institution prior to 2011 (Fairfax - participating in this research), followed by the emergence of another academic support team in 2012 at another pre-WWII Russell Group institution (Chartwell – participating in this research), see chapter 5 Methodology ‘pen portraits’.

#### **4.4 A refocus on knowledge**

Barkas points out that ‘tensions in society do much to suggest that the over-emphasis on commodities has not been the right approach’ (2011: 102) to education. Citing the work of others authors, Barkas highlights a call for a revised HE underpinned by knowledge and social values in order to instigate a ‘renewal of moral and civic virtues’ (2011: 101). Barkas considered it ‘necessary’ for universities to make a ‘move away from the market dominance’ (2011: 101) in order to relieve some of the pressure on universities to ‘respond’ to policy and markets. This space would provide HE with the support to ‘restructure’, ‘rebuild’ and re-establish a focus on knowledge. Barkas believes that this re-focus on knowledge would not only meet ‘the need for a successful economy’ (2011: 102) but also meet the need for renewed social values for the greater good (Barkas, 2011).

In the meantime Barkas makes several recommendations regarding SSCs. These are that they remain in place ‘until practical, subject specific, alternatives’ are embedded (2011: 106), which all students are in receipt of. However, as ‘new initiatives are instigated, the complexity of SSCs must be acknowledged and their function in providing a teaching role, accepted’ (Barkas, 2011: 106). Barkas, like Wingate (2015), added that, ‘The findings from the extensive research into writing in and across

the disciplines must ... be considered and built into the subject based, higher education curriculum' (Barkas, 2011: 106). This is to ensure that instruction is 'holistic' and contextualised, enabling the development of 'epistemological and sociocultural knowledge' (Wingate, 2015: 9) key to meaning making and understanding. This also means considering, the effect of ICT (information communication technology) on the 'written and spoken language', to ensure that 'students' proficiency in literacy' is of a 'sufficient level to enable them to put into words the critical language awareness demanded of a higher education' (Barkas, 2011: 106).

## **Conclusion**

Policy-makers have increasingly looked to education as a means to bridge national 'skills' deficits to meet the needs of industry, rather than focusing on challenging students' 'epistemological assumptions' (Wingate 2006; 2015), or developing students emotionally and intellectually. Therefore, HEIs have had to interpret and respond to policy. Although, historically, some institutions offered personalised services blending academic and emotional support - albeit outside of course teaching - when faced with increases in student numbers and diversity, academic support services tended to assume more proactive and 'efficient' (BIS, 2016), but more generic, modes of support. Therefore the role and approaches to academic support have been significantly shaped by the political field of power, and their perception of what education – compulsory as well as HE – should be for, and what form it should take.

Between the 1960s and 1980s - following the 1963 Robbins Report, the emergence of 1960s universities and initial widening participation - early forms of academic support were delivered by educational psychologists supporting the holistic development of individuals, largely as a result of pedagogical gaps between school and university. Wankowski predicts that with the growth in HE, students' needs will become more complex and will require highly trained teachers at all levels of HE.

In the 1990s - following the 1987 National Curriculum, the 1992 FE and HE Act, and the 1993 DfE Student Support report - students were described as entering HE with an unsuitable and 'underdeveloped' range of 'study skills'. Some subject specialists, usually in education, saw academic support as their domain arising from knowledge, unless, that is, that students' 'problems' were deep-rooted and needed specialist help outside of course teams. However, the general feeling across practitioners was that accountability and widening participation agendas were putting a 'strain' on HEIs, who were subsequently adopting more sustainable, but perhaps less personalised and holistic approaches to academic support, such as learning centres within centralised libraries, to enable larger numbers of students to achieve in HE. It is important to point out that not all institutions were experiencing the same strain due to the inequality of power within the HE field (see chapter 2 Policy, chapter 4 Theory, chapter 6 'Remedial' and chapter 9 Discussion).

In the 2000s - following the 1997 Dearing Report and 2003 Future of Higher Education – there was a similar picture; while critics argued against the idea of 'study skills', which was deemed a superficial 'quick fix', favouring holistic approaches and meta-learning, a majority of literature referred to sustainable moves towards 'centre' or 'unit' approaches, in order to help 'greater numbers' of students to meet assessment criteria. An important issue raised in this period was about the problematic nature of compulsory education, with a causal link highlighted between the way pupils are taught to pass exams in secondary education and HE students' lack of motivation to engage in any non-assessed learning experience in HE. In 2011 - following The Browne Report (2009) – Barkas (2011) critiques the many conflicts arising from 'economic competitiveness', widening participation and skills agendas, which had not led to the 'utopian' highly skilled workforce governments had expected. Instead, Barkas (2011) emphasises how economic competitiveness and commodity-culture has created disharmony overshadowing the intrinsic 'value of knowledge and a higher education' (Barkas, 2011:

100). Barkas (2011) called for a return to knowledge and cultural values in order to rectify societal issues.

Although the literature highlights differences in views and approaches to academic support, all seem to agree that compulsory education, under control of policy-makers, is not consistently preparing students for independence or HE study, and therefore students are unable to meet performance expectations in HE without support or incremental tuition. The compulsory education experience was also described as impairing the expectations and motivations of some students, who subsequently see learning as a means merely to meet assessment criteria, avoiding learning opportunities if they are not assessed, even if imperative to their development. The current paradigms of: 1. performativity (Ball, 2003) – education as a means to demonstrating that one can meet assessment criteria; and 2. commodity culture – education as something to ‘obtain’ or ‘collect’ to gain money, are arguably devaluing learning as an active engagement with knowledge and a potentially life (habitus) changing experience.

Through performance targets governments have attempted to homogenise the compulsory and HE sectors. However, institutions and students are not homogenised groups; indeed, there is an inequality in both the compulsory and HE sectors, largely due to an inequality in economic capital, which present an inequality in educational experience. Therefore HEIs have tended to respond to policy in different ways and within different time-scales. A lack of literature and ‘clear-cut’ ‘findings’ regarding optimum methods of academic support (Entwistle, 1960), which practitioners-researchers have tried to remedy from the 1990s onwards, have also led to variations and a fluidity in perspectives and approaches. Despite variations there appear to be two models of academic support emerging: 1. those who focus on ‘academic literacy’ (Ivanic and Lea, 2006; Wingate, 2015) and the writing process, and 2. those who deem it necessary to have a broader skills remit often referred to as ‘study skills’ (DfE, 1993;

Shreeve, 2007) or ‘academic skills’ (Hill et al, 2010). Both models are discussed in more detail in chapter 6 ‘Remedial’.

Approaches to academic support tend to fall into three categories: 1. remedying deficits in attributes and skills to meet achievement and employability agendas (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’), which includes deficits of academic staff and institutions; 2. holistic development of individuals, empowering them for life beyond study and mere employment agendas (see chapter 7 Development); and 3. an emerging area of business, where the balance between economic capital, sustainability and consumer satisfaction takes precedence over learning (see chapter 8 Business). The next chapter will introduce and define the work of Bourdieu as a means to understanding the power positions of the HE field and the subsequent perceptions and practices adopted by academic support services.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework - Bourdieu's Field Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Expectations regarding who should enter UK higher education and what they should achieve have been the evolving concern of governments since the 1960s. Alongside this, despite variations in purpose between different HE institutions, successive governments have attempted to standardise teaching and learning, defining and measuring effectiveness against economically motivated goals in an attempt to secure global competitiveness. The formalising and evolution of academic support in HE emerged as a field out of conflicts between HEIs and of national political expectations of the sector. However, the general purpose of academic support, as discussed in the previous chapter, was to help students: develop independence and autonomy, engage with the HE curriculum, achieve in their HE studies, and develop the skills required to succeed in the work place. However, because the origins and collective experiences of institutions, and of the individual learners they attract, are all different, institutions tended to respond to government-driven expectations at different rates and in different ways.

In order to fully understand the practices of HE and the role of academic support, it is important to explore current perceptions of who academic support is for its purpose and the justification for practices within political and institutional context. It is this complex web of relationships between contexts, perceptions and subsequent practices that has led me to Bourdieu and his field analysis approach to understanding social practices. The connections Bourdieu makes between knowledge, symbolic and financial wealth (capital), childhood and educational experiences (habitus), social positions (position in relation to fields of power) and subsequent practices, are useful in understanding the competing powers and perceptions within HE, and the subsequent drivers for academic support practices. Bourdieu's field analysis offers a systematic approach to exploring individual practices within their complex and dynamic contexts. This chapter will be divided into three sections: 1.

Theoretical underpinning of Bourdieu's approach; 2. Bourdieu on power and education; 3. A three-stage methodology as defined by Grenfell (2014).

## **1. Theoretical underpinning of Bourdieu's approach**

### **1.1 Relational existence**

Experientially we often feel we are free agents, yet base everyday decisions on assumptions about the predictable character, behaviour and attitudes of others. Sociologically, social practices are characterized by regularities – working-class kids tend to get working-class jobs (as Willis 1977 put it), middle-class readers tend to enjoy middlebrow literature, and so forth – yet there are no explicit rules dictating such practices (Maton, 2012:49)

According to Bourdieu (1987, 1998) our existence in the world is relational; what is considered 'reality' is in fact a complex projection of relational positions. Within social spheres we are classified and classifying, defined and defining ourselves and our practices in relation to others, both consciously and unconsciously. Bourdieu explains that people:

are both classified and classifiers, but they classify according to (or depending upon) their position within classifications. To sum up what I mean by this, I can comment briefly on the notion of point of view: the point of view is a perspective, a partial subjective vision (subjectivist moment); but it is at the same time a view, a perspective, taken from a point, from a determinate position in an objective social space (objectivist moment) (1987: 2)

In other words, our viewpoints (how we classify) are both subjective and objective; they come from both our experiences of the social world and how we have made sense of those experiences, but also from the position, or positions we assume (how we are classified) within the social world. The social world shapes and 'structures' our internal world, our 'consciousness' (Johnson, 1993: 4), and to some extent our 'social reality is ... shaped by the conceptions and representations that individuals make of the social world' (Johnson, 1993: 4). The relationship between inner and external is therefore two-way, our inner sphere and subsequent practices within a particular 'social arena' (Maton, 2012: 50) are both shaped by the external and are also shaping the external, even if that shaping involves reinforcing the status quo through predictable practices, such as practices associated with a specific notion of class (Maton, 2012). In other words, internal structures are the basis of our views of ourselves

(and the world) in relation to others, which are shaped (and reinforced or altered) by our experiences of the external world, informing the positions and then practices we assume; the positions and practices that people assume form their social 'reality'. Groups (categories of people) demonstrate particular behaviours.

## **1.2 Interrelatedness of social contexts and practices**

Bourdieu's field theory or field analysis is a useful theory and method of empirical data analysis for understanding and explaining the relationships between specific practices and the social contexts in which those specific practices occur (Webb et al, 2002). Bourdieu states that his:

entire scientific enterprise is indeed based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a "special case of what is possible," as Bachelard puts it, that is, as an exemplary case in a finite world of configurations (1998: 2)

Bourdieu emphasises the need to explore practices in context because of what he defines as the interrelatedness of social contexts and practice, historically situated, and their transformative nature. Bourdieu's belief was that in order to understand the relationship between practices and social contexts, it is necessary to dissect the 'relationship between systems of thought, social institutions and different forms of material and symbolic power' (Johnson, 1993: 1). It is imperative however, to consider the result of dissection within its context of time, culture and social sphere, taking into consideration the unwritten rules of the game or 'doxa', which is the set of 'core values and discourses' (Webb et al, 2002: 21) shared by participants. Bourdieu's belief is that by studying a dissection of society, and its practices, it is possible to gain insight into one possible outcome when specific ingredients are brought together; in other words the results cannot be generalised or typified, this is because of the fluid and dynamic nature of social spheres and those participating within them.



The dichotomy between ‘theoretical knowledge of the social world as constructed by outside observers and the knowledge used by those who possess a practical mastery of their world’ (Calhoun et al, 1993: 3) is the ‘related opposition which Bourdieu ... [sought] to overcome in many of his writings’ (Calhoun et al, 1993: 3). Bourdieu’s field analysis approach however, goes some way to bringing these two points together, in order to aid an understanding of practices within their social contexts, as an external and reflective observer. Bourdieu refers to the coexisting, overlapping social contexts, which have the ability to ‘produce and transform attitudes and practices’, as ‘cultural fields’ (Webb et al, 2002: 21). A cultural field ‘is a metaphor for representing sites of cultural practice’ (Webb et al, 2002: X), consisting of ‘a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations and appointments which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities’ (Webb et al, 2002: X). The purpose of the concept of field is to ‘provide the frame for a “relational analysis,” by which ... [Bourdieu] means an account of the multidimensional space of positions and the position taking of agents’ (Calhoun et al, 1993: 5). Agents, in this context, are those occupying, or participating in, specific metaphorical spaces.

### **1.3 Coexistence of social fields**

Fields coexist, they can therefore overlap and have an interest in another field, such as the field of politics might have a strong interest in the field of education. Therefore it is not unusual for an agent in the field of higher education, for example someone involved in the delivery of academic support, to have to navigate their immediate HE field as well as interacting fields (e.g. political field of power) whether the agent plays a part in those fields or not. There are circles of influence (fields) surrounding the practice and practices of academic support in HE, each with its rules (doxa), institutions and dynamics. These fields could be grouped into two categories, those that are external to a particular HEI and those that reside within a particular HEI. Those that are external to the HEI are: the fields of politics, compulsory education and higher education, relevant discipline related fields and professional

bodies or fields that academic support practitioners may be affiliated with (although some may originate from within a particular HEI) and students' parents. Those social arenas that could be considered as fields of influence internal to an HEI are: the HEI itself (philosophy and leadership), the courses (what is taught and how they are taught), the student demographics (the qualities they possess and the fields they may straddle) and the department that academic support is situated within or forms a part of. Finally, there are the influences from within academic support, such as individual staff members with professional or personal perceptions.

Cultural fields can have very overt identities with physical and symbolic qualities and identifiable practices such as the UK higher education, or they can be identity-less where a field is 'constituted by, or out of ... conflict' (Webb et al, 2002: 22) such as the field of linguistics. The field of linguistics consists of schools of thought in conflict with each other; although there are courses addressing a variety of linguistic topics, the field of linguistics is not necessarily a tangible field in itself. Linguistics is an example of a field born of agents taking opposing positions on the topic of dialect; the very debate or conflict between the different positions creates the field. This is similar to the quite literal field between opposing goals on a football pitch. It takes two opposing teams with two opposing goals (although in a field there can be many conflicting positions with varying aims), in order to create competition and therefore a game of football. This is what is meant by a field constituted by, or arising out of conflict; opposition creates competition and a metaphorical field.

#### **1.4 Conflict and the fight for power**

Conflict in the social world is considered by Bourdieu (1986, 1989) as an attempt to determine the dominant quality or currency (capital) in a particular field, in a fight for power. Beholders of the desired or agreed dominant quality in a field hold the power, until that is, what constitutes the dominant quality or currency changes. It is important to point out though, that the dominant quality within a field, and

subsequently the power of the said field, usually takes time to evolve; therefore, fields and powers within them are not usually fast changing. Bourdieu refers to the qualities that are key to holding power in a field, as capital. There are different forms of capital and the position that agents take in a field depends on the types, volumes and relative weight of their capital in relation to that field (Bourdieu, 1998). Bourdieu defines capital as:

accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is *avis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world (1986: 46)

Capital, whether materialistic or embodied, is the intrinsic consistencies or currency of a field, with which agents metaphorically buy (hold) positions. Capital can determine the fields that agents occupy as well as positions they assume within them, not unlike the players in a game of football assuming particular positions based on their skills. Capital can however, also be what defines a field. In other words 'the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world' (Bourdieu, 1986: 46).

Capital forms the 'reality' of social spheres, it is what underpins their structures and the way in which they function, offering opportunities or constraints which determine the 'chances of success for practices' (Bourdieu, 1986: 46). In other words, the desirable capital of a field defines the positions of agents based on the capital they hold, if notions of the dominant quality change, then the parameters of the field change, affecting the positions of the agents. For instance if a particular employer (position of power) requires employees to hold a particular degree, then the degree is the desirable capital, therefore the candidate holding the desirable degree gets the job. However if there is an increase in applicants holding the same degrees (as has been seen in recent decades) then the original candidate no longer holds a key position. In a situation like this the rules of the game are changed, and employers are likely to re-define the desirable capital in order to distinguish between candidates. The original

individual may then have to accumulate ‘other’ or ‘more’ desirable capital to obtain (or maintain) their position within the field. This is a very simplified example, and in reality the interplay between cultural capital, fields, and doxa, can be much more complex.

### **1.5 Power and capital**

In his article *Symbolic Power* (1979) Bourdieu mentions three types of capital: cultural, economic and political. Additional forms of capital emerge in subsequent publications, these are: social, symbolic, academic and educational. In *The Forms of Capital* Bourdieu broadly defines the ‘three fundamental guises’ of capital (1986: 47) as: economic, cultural and social, which can assume different forms ‘depending on the field in which it functions’ (1986: 46-47). Bourdieu elaborates on these forms of capital explaining that:

*economic capital* ... is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; ... *cultural capital* ... is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and ... *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections'), ... is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (1986: 47)

Economic capital is considered to be the most transferrable across fields, not just because of its generic and apparent timeless quality, but mainly because it can be easily ‘converted into symbolic [capital] (that is, social and cultural) ... although symbolic capital can ultimately be transformed into economic capital’ also (Calhoun et al, 1993: 5).

Social and cultural capital are known as symbolic capital because of their representative nature, in other words, capital in its symbolic form communicates something about the agent or agents beyond the capital itself. For example a student with a degree from a prestigious university in comparison to a less well known or lesser established university, may symbolise some form of enhanced or higher achievement over the lesser known institutions, just through association with the established qualities of the institute. Bourdieu explains how the notion of affiliation works, stating that social capital can:

be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them ... they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges (1986: 51).

Social (and cultural) capital can be accumulated, communicated and reinforced through association.

When considering again the example of a student graduating from a prestigious institution, it could be said that the symbolic nature of association does not stop with the notion of some form of 'value added' qualification and lifelong membership to some form of elite group. For this association can also symbolise the possession of particular qualities or status, both cultural and social, that an individual may have possessed prior to entering the establishment in order to be deemed worthy of a place, and subsequently succeed in such a place. Symbolic capital of this nature can then influence the relationships and positions that agents go on to assume within particular social and work-related fields, therefore desirable capital in a particular field can then subsequently pave the way for accumulating and reinforcing desirable capital in other fields; power leading to more power.

Bourdieu states that capital 'takes time to accumulate' (1986: 46) in both its 'objectified or embodied forms', and has the potential to 'produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form' (1986: 46), which tends to 'persist in its being' (1986: 46). Arguably, the economic capital required to study for a full-time degree in the UK (in the present climate) can lead to the reproduction of cultural, social and economic capital, therefore reinforcing the status quo regardless of government intentions. For instance those who can afford to undertake HE study (have the economic capital) can access it, potentially convert it into cultural and social capital, such as subject knowledge and skills as well as gaining the status of 'graduate' and a degree certification. They can then attract better employment with possibly higher wages than those who are unable to afford HE study, subsequently capital leading to the accumulation of more capital. This is what is meant when Bourdieu (1986) states that capital has the potential to reproduce itself.

## **1.6 Embodied cultural capital - the power of knowledge**

According to Bourdieu cultural capital can exist in three forms: the embodied state which can take the ‘form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (1986: 47); the objectified state which can take the form of ‘cultural goods [such as] (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories’ (1986: 47); and finally the institutionalized state, which is a ‘form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee’ (1986: 47). The embodied state of cultural capital can be explained by considering the different dispositions and bodies of knowledge students enter university with. The nature and weight of a student’s form of embodied cultural capital on entry to university (determined by parenting and familial capital, schooling and other accumulated experiences) can arguably prove to be an aid or boundary to the accumulation of both cultural and social capital (symbolic capital) while on their course. For instance a student with rich experiences of learning can give them a disposition for, and wider perspective on learning, whereas negative or limited experiences of learning and limited perspectives on learning can present individuals with barriers to future learning.

Similarly, relevant knowledge of the world combined with subject specific knowledge can aid in the relational understanding and assimilation of new knowledge, whereas lack of knowledge can prove to be a boundary to assimilating new knowledge due to a lack of framework with which to consider and relate anything new. Therefore, cultural capital self-perpetuates, those with appropriate capital to particular fields can dominate fields, and consequently the capital of those fields can remain with the same groups of people and familial lines for some time. However, this is not to say that these situations are fixed, for individuals have the ability to strive for and accumulate the capital that they need to challenge the status quo. Indeed Bourdieu is himself an example of such an individual.

It is the combination of capital and what Bourdieu terms as habitus, that can determine the power an individual possess in a particular field. Johnson explains that habitus:

is sometimes described as a ‘feel for the game’, a ‘practical sense’ (*sens pratique*) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather, it is a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. The habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a ‘second sense’ or a second nature...the disposition represented by the habitus are ‘durable’ in that they last throughout an agent’s lifetime. They are ‘transposable’ in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity (1993: 5).

Therefore, the habitus is a mixture of learnt beliefs or perspectives and ways of being, a set of dispositions, which when combined with an agent’s circumstances (fields of participation) results in particular practices (and varying amounts of power). It is not possible to understand the practices of agents by considering their habitus on its own, habitus can only suggest how a person may think and act. Particular behaviours are as a result of the interplay between the nature of the fields that an agent may have a stake in, combined with the disposition of an agent, their habitus. The habitus is shaped by one’s past experiences (childhood and education for example), it is ‘both structured by material conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth in accordance with its own structure’ (Maton, 2012: 50). Habitus is therefore historical, however because of its intrinsic nature, combined with field, it has the ability to ‘shape’ the positions and practices one assumes in the present, and one’s experience in the present (habitus and field combined) can subsequently influence the positions and practices a person assumes in the future.

### **1.7 The habitus**

As one’s habitus is a disposition or preference to particular ways of thinking and acting (or reacting) in relation to fields of power, agents do not merely passively act out ‘the implications of ... [their] upbringings’ (Maton, 2012: 50), however they also do not act ‘with full knowledge of the facts’ either (Bourdieu, 1998: 24). Bourdieu describes habitus as somewhere between the two extremes and yet much more complex than either, he states that agents are:

active and knowing ... endowed with a practical sense ... an acquired system of preferences, of principles of division (what is usually called taste), and also a system of durable cognitive structures (which are essentially the product of the internalization of objective structures) and of schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response (Bourdieu, 1998: 25)

Therefore, it is possible for us to deviate from what might be our predictable behaviours or trajectories, and develop in ways that are not considered typical of one's habitus. However, although habitus is rarely changed overnight it can change quite rapidly under unexpected circumstances that challenge our inner structures, but more often than not change occurs over a long period of accumulated experiences that reinforce changes (or developments) to our inner structures. Developments in habitus may subsequently alter practices, including the nature of capital that a person may accumulate and the fields one may assume. Practice is therefore a result of what Maton refers to as Bourdieu's three main 'interlocking...thinking tools' (2012: 50) in a way best demonstrated in the following equation:

$$[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice} \text{ (Bourdieu, 1984: 101)}$$

Habitus and capital are adjoined but separate entities, they are what an agent or participant bring to a field and defines their position in the field, but it is the study of all three within their specific time-bound context that enable us to go some way to understanding particular practices.

## **2. Bourdieu on Power and Education**

### **2.1 School and cultural capital**

Today I would like to speak about the extremely complex mechanisms through which the school institution contributes (I insist on this word) to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and, consequently, of the structure of social space ... The reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital is achieved in the relation between familial strategies and the specific logic of the school institution. (Bourdieu, 1998: 19)

Bourdieu (1998), in his book *Practical Reason* discusses the notion of school and the role of cultural capital in education. The main point he makes is that school and familial stratagems lead to the reinforcement of existing distributions of cultural capital, and subsequently the perpetuation of



positions assumed in relation to fields of power; thus maintaining ‘the preexisting order’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 20).

Through research Bourdieu noticed that the educational system was flawed with inherent inequalities due to the central role that cultural capital played within it:

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me ... as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, ie., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. This starting point implies a break with the presuppositions ... which sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes, and in human capital theories (Bourdieu, 1986:47).

Bourdieu proposes a correlation between the distribution of cultural capital and that of ‘academic success’. Rather than school being a place where ‘academic success or failure’ is based on aptitudes, success and failure tend to be based on levels and weight of cultural capital. Therefore, education (particularly school) tends to emphasise the existing division and ‘gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 20). Effectively transforming ‘social hierarchies into academic hierarchies and, by extension, into hierarchies of ‘merit’ (Johnson, 1993: 23). Cultural capital is passed from parents to children (approaches and attitudes to learning), which continues to affect children throughout their education experience.

The main educational sorting process that divides students in terms of capital, according to Bourdieu, are the ‘tests or competitive examinations [which pupils undertake] ... and the titles which sanction their results’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 22). He goes on to explain that because of the nature of what is tested (inherited cultural capital) the ‘titles’ (certificates) are really just ‘certificates of social competence, not unlike titles of nobility, [presented] as guarantees of technical competence’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 22). This system of education and testing subsequently ‘separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to

inherited capital ... thus ... maintain[ing] preexisting social differences' (Bourdieu, 1998: 20). The separating (or classifying) of pupils into different ranks based on the results of tests, creates a hierarchy which stems from and is perpetuated in the outside world.

## **2.2 Perpetuating powers and privileges**

The education system is only one half of the sorting process equation however, as familial 'educational strategies' (Bourdieu, 1998: 19) also play an important role in 'reproduction strategies' (Bourdieu, 1998: 19). Families with the means (cultural or economic) can choose to reproduce familial 'powers and privileges' (Bourdieu, 1998: 19) through their choice of educational establishments for their children. Choice of schools 'prestigious' or 'regular' (Bourdieu, 1998: 20-21), dependent on degrees of economic or cultural capital, can offer families (with the means) a way of creating a gap between their children and those in less privileged positions, or closing the gap between themselves and those in privileged positions. Bourdieu refers to this inequality of choice as 'social borders' (1998: 21), not dissimilar to the historical 'social borders' separating 'nobility from gentry and gentry from common people' (1998: 21).

Therefore 'social success' (Bourdieu, 1998: 22) can very much depend on what Bourdieu terms as 'an initial act of nomination ... usually the name of an educational institution ... which consecrates scholastically a preexisting social difference' (Bourdieu, 1998: 22). This is made possible because education establishments, and the experience they offer, are not created equal. Some are imbued with symbolic meaning and status (often with a long history), which are socially understood to hold more power than others. This can also be said of higher education establishments. The divides that are achieved in compulsory education however can influence the levels of success and divisions in further and higher education and subsequently the social status individuals assume in relation to fields of power, and so the chain continues. It is the cyclic nature of cultural (and economic) capital inheritance

and investment, combined with the ‘logic of school’ that, according to Bourdieu merely mirrors (and perpetuates) rather than challenges the existing social order.

At this point it is important to ask who it is that makes decisions about the ‘logic of school’, particularly when it appears to play such a key role in perpetuating the distribution of capital and subsequent positions in society. The answer according to Bourdieu (when reviewing his home country of France) is that the decisions lie with the generations of families who have fared well with the existing sorting system, those who have, more often than not, attended the elite schools and universities. In other words, the people who make decisions about education are those in positions of power who possess the cultural capital that underpin education and educational divides; therefore, the system works in their favour. In the UK (in the present climate) these people are likely to hold positions in government and high ranking positions in education (HE), with many straddling both. They are also likely to have come from a historical line of privilege and privileged education where, according to Bourdieu, noble title has metaphorically been traded for academic title in order to legitimise their position of power and decision-making abilities.

### **2.3 Unequal educational field**

It is not just the inequality of compulsory education that leads to un-equal opportunities in higher education. Higher education itself, according to Scott (2014), has its own inherent practices that perpetuate social divides. Despite up to fifty percent of school leavers entering higher education, Scott believes that ‘little attempt has been made to modernise, still less democratise [it]’ (2014: 2). Instead decisions about the purpose and nature of higher education ‘as a rite of passage’ (Scott, 2014: 2) are still ‘confined ... to a gilded elite with an already over-generous share of cultural capital’ (Scott, 2014: 2) similar to that of compulsory education. Scott states that:

The growth of mass higher education in the UK does not appear to have been accompanied by an enlarged recognition of its capacity to transform the lives of all students, even the most ordinary (and not simply in terms of earnings and employment). Rather the reverse; increasing emphasis on 'top universities' has reinforced the instinctive elitism of higher education ... so the gap remains (2014: 2)

Scott (2014) describes higher education as under the control of the same few people endowed with large quantities of the 'right' cultural capital, capital that they use to maintain control over the education system, thus perpetuating their positions of power. The way this power is perpetuated is through elitism in higher education: inequalities of cultural capital required to engage in higher education and through grading systems that segregates students through their classification of degrees, but also through the hierarchal system of higher education where HEIs themselves are classified, such as 'Oxbridge', 'Russell Group', 'post-1992'. Therefore, according to Scott (2014), despite participating in higher education, there is no 'real' transformation of students, but more of a perpetuation of a disposition from birth. What the students do gain, according to Scott, is an opportunity to apply for a job open to 'graduates' and a chance of a 'middle-class' life style' (2014: 2) which is 'increasingly unavailable to those without some form of 'college' experience' (2014: 2).

Bourdieu states that 'the act of scholastic classification ... [is effectively] an act of ordination' (1998: 21), which 'institutes a social difference of rank, a permanent relation of order: the elect are marked, for their whole lives, by their affiliation of people who are separated from the common run of mortals by a difference of essence and, therefore, legitimately licensed to dominate' (Bourdieu, 1998: 21). This is not unlike the divide between liberal and vocational education, and the philosophers and workers in Ancient Greece. Indeed, Bourdieu believes that scholastic classifications (particular qualifications combined with the nature of establishments attended) are merely a seal of approval and justification for positions of power, power that, to some extent, is already held. This seal of approval has longevity and paves the way for more positions of power, as well as legitimising it. For the less fortunate however, scholastic qualifications and the nature of educational establishments can act as a permanent

boundary and restriction to positions of power and any notions of changing education in their favour.

Bourdieu's views on education and power are quite clear, what was:

Once thought capable of introducing a form of meritocracy by privileging individual aptitudes over heredity privileges, actually tends to establish, through the hidden linkage between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage, a veritable state nobility, whose authority and legitimacy are guaranteed by the academic title. (Bourdieu, 1998: 22)

Scholastic classifications not only act as a seal of approval, or a barrier, for the current generation (as with the generation before), but they implicitly make positions of power, or varying degrees of lesser power, more likely for future generations. Bourdieu's field theory is based on the notion that all fields contain the element of competition and a fight for dominance, dominance in the field of education arguably has an impact on agent's relationships to power in other fields also.

### **3. A Three-Stage Methodology as Defined by Grenfell (2014)**

#### **3.1 Organising structures arising from data**

The world is infinitely complex. Any researcher struggles with representing that complexity. Faced with the multidimensionality, there seems to be a choice between two primary ways of tackling it ... the 'theoretical' approach held to be most robust and 'scientific' seeks to extract, simplify, and hypothesize on the basis of findings, which can then be tested against further data analysis. However, a Bourdieusian approach ... begins with the totality, and accepts the complexity and seeks organizing structures within it and their underlying generated principles (Grenfell, 2014: 15)

According to Grenfell (2014) the theoretical approach: where data are extracted from 'the whole' and categorised in order to form lenses (hypotheses), which then influences the generation and comparison of future data sets, leads to an over simplified (or limited) understanding of the 'infinitely complex' and multidimensional social world. As an alternative, Grenfell (2014) describes the 'Bourdieusian' approach, as a systematic method involving the study of 'the whole', in context, in order to identify 'organizing structures' and the underlying principles generated from these structures.

Bourdieu's approach is based on the principle that the study of social practices - empirical research - needs to be approached free-from prior constructed notions of the social world (Bourdieu, 1998). This means having an acute awareness of one's (the researcher's) position (and practices) in relation to (and within) the social world, including having a keen awareness of preconceptions of the social world (developed through experiences of the social world). Preconceptions and positions influence what constitutes an enquiry and subsequently how data is then collected and analysed. The importance of being a reflective researcher is to 'break' with the assumed (Grenfell, 2014) and pre-existing 'notions' of the social world, in order to study social phenomena as objectively, and as 'position' and 'practice' aware, as possible.

Grenfell offers a systematic approach to using Bourdieu's conceptual tools (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) as a research method, describing it as 'a three-stage methodology' (Grenfell, 2014: 23). This approach starts with considering how the research focus is constructed. Bourdieu (1998) emphasises that the experiences and trajectories of educationists, especially academic experiences, inform decisions. Therefore, educational research could become a symbolic activity which merely fits with and pays homage to the academic frame which shaped the researcher's views (Robbins, 1993). In other words even the very notion and nature of 'research', as well as the focus, enquiry and approach to the research, are a representation of the structures, classifications, relational positions and practices resulting from academic experiences.

### **3.2 Studying verbal responses as a means to understanding practice**

Key terms such as 'research' or 'education', which are commonly used, may be representational of different phenomena dependant on the academic experiences (and affiliations) of individuals (and groups). Terms in the social sciences are often a cause for much conflict, debate and struggles for dominance. Subsequently, the clear message given to the researcher here is consider words carefully

as they are not ‘value-neutral’ and can therefore not be ‘taken-for-granted as expressions of ‘common sense’’ (Grenfell, 2014: 23) or common understanding. Words can merely reflect time-bound paradigms, or ‘constructs’ (terms and associations) mistaken as ‘things in themselves rather than sets of relations’ (Grenfell, 2014: 24) concerning the scenario of origin.

Because words are rarely position neutral, studying their use can reveal the relational positions people assume, not just of research subjects but also of the researcher. It is therefore important to reflect on the underlying assumptions and relational positions when ‘framing’ research (enquiry and object of enquiry), as well as thinking carefully about the values of terms used; it is then important also to consider carefully words and assumptions when generating and analysing verbal or written responses from research subjects (data generation). This awareness of structures (external and inner) and the awareness of positions leading to specific perceptions and practices, including one’s own, is indeed, the fundamental concern of Bourdieu’s (1977) approach.

### **3.3 Three stages of field analysis**

Bourdieu’s method of data analysis can be considered in three stages, these stages follow the natural pattern of Bourdieu’s concept. First it is important to establish the social space or field (Bourdieu, 1984) in relation to the most dominant forces (Bourdieu, 1998); then map out the ‘objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by the agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is a site’ (Grenfell, 2014:25); and finally analyse the habitus of agents ‘an objective relationship between two objectivities’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 101) which has been ‘acquired by internalizing a deterministic type of social and economic condition’ (Grenfell, 2014:25).

Bourdieu explains how the two-way relationship between external and internal spheres can be used to understand the contributory factors leading to practice. The habitus ‘enables an intelligible and

necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition' (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). It is therefore important to start by identifying areas of practices in which to investigate and understand, which is what led to this thesis enquiry. It is then necessary to analyse the bigger picture - from the political and social context - through to the individual perceptions and practices.

When considering the first level of analysis it is important to analyse the relationship of 'competing fields' (Robbins, 1993: 155), 'ultimately, this is political power and government; although there are a number of mediating institutions and fields' (Grenfell, 2014: 25). The field of study in the case of this thesis would be the particular HEIs and how they sit in relation to political agendas within the UK HE landscape. Level two of the analysis, involves mapping the specific HEI as a field in itself with dominant capital, the capital is the currency of exchange for the field with which agents effectively buy positions in relation to the field or fields of power. This may mean ascertaining not just the habitus and capital of academic support practitioners involved in this study – which forms level three of the analysis - but also ascertaining what practitioners consider to be the perceptions and currency of their HEI. Level three involves analysing individual agents and their dispositions affecting the positions they assume (habitus). This level involves studying the:

characteristics of individuals ... in so far as they relate to the field, past and present ... We can then compare individuals, groups and the way structures intersect and resonate in the homologies set up in the course of the operations of this field with other fields. For educational research, this implies greater attention being given to such aspects as biography, trajectory (life and professional) and site practice with respect to the logic of practice of fields in which they occur ... Finally, it is the links between individuals (habitus), field structures, and the positionings both within and between fields which form a conceptual framework for educational research' (Genfell, 2014: 26)

Bourdieu's field analysis emphasises the benefit of the Bourdieusian method as a 'way of opening up ... complexity in order to provide new [reflective] insights' (2014: 30). It is therefore important to use field analysis as a way of also reflecting on one's own position in relation to the research, in order to



be as position-aware as possible, otherwise the danger is that we merely reproduce preconceived ideas that fit with our scholastic knowledge, theory and historical notions of reality (Bourdieu, 1977; Robbins, 1993; Bourdieu, 1998). Bourdieu's field analysis is therefore an approach to be used in order to see and understand the world anew.

## **Conclusion**

Field analysis provides a theoretical framework for the interrogation of practices (relationship between habitus, capital and field) within the very complex and time-bound social contexts such as the field of education and HE. This is therefore a useful tool for analysing the practices of those involved in academic support, particularly the relationship between their perceptions of the work they do and their approaches to evaluating it, in relation to fields of power. A key element of Bourdieu's approach is considering the relationship between fields and power, and what form the power takes (the nature of the capital). Therefore, in order to fully assess the approaches to academic support through Bourdieu's work it will be necessary to ascertain what form or forms of capital practitioners believe they are developing and why. For it is either a lack or difference in capital that defines their work with students and how they may define and measure their successes in this work.

Bourdieu's reflective approach requires the researcher to assume nothing and take nothing for granted, for according to Bourdieu, viewpoints and the very notion of reality is position or perspective led. It is therefore important to consider the position of the researcher in relation to the field of study at all times, including their possession of capital and habitus (feel for the game). For capital and habitus may influence the nature, approach and interpretation of the research being undertaken. This awareness is particularly important when performing the dual role of practitioner-researcher studying phenomena in the same field and similar role as research participants. The relationship between the researcher and the phenomena being researched can be a precarious one, for it could lead to assumptions regarding

the use and meaning of language. A researcher studying an unfamiliar subject may look for clarity due to the unfamiliarity of the topic, whereas a researcher who has a familiarity and an investment in their field of study may fall into the trap of assuming shared ‘insider’ understanding of language, when in fact the different positional variances may prove the contrary. Indeed the point of this study is to gain insight into a variety of perspectives, the benefits of studying others in similar roles is to gain insight and reflect upon one’s own situation, views and practices.

The three stage approach to Bourdieu’s field analysis described by Grenfell (2014), mirrors the order of chapters in this thesis: starting with chapter 1 Introduction - where I established the enquiry arising from my practice; chapter 2 Policy - where I established the views of the political field of power and map the HE field; chapter 3 Literature Review - where I established how HEIs have historically responded to policy, as well as mapping the academic support field; chapters 6, 7 and 8 – where I analyse perceptions and approaches to academic support within institutional contexts. The first layer of analysis (chapter 2 Policy) involved studying the HE field in relation to political power, because the field of HE follows ‘rules’ set out by the dominant political field. There are commonalities between HEIs, however as established earlier in this chapter different establishments hold different positions of power. Part of the purpose of chapter 2 was to establish how these inequalities occurred, however it will also be important to establish how participating institutions (involved in this research) are positioned in relation to each other and political powers. Each participating HEI will then need to be analysed as a field in itself, in order to establish the immediate context of academic support, and how this affects practices. To balance manageability of this research with the mapping of the broader field of HE, approximately five different establishments and five different teams of academic support will be considered.

In studying each HEI field it is important to consider the positions held by agents in relation to internal fields of power - administrative and academic (see chapter 9 Discussion), effectively mapping the hierarchy and authority of the field (a bit like marking the positions of players on a football pitch). A sample of managers and staff involved in academic support were interviewed; the more positions and perspectives considered in a field, the richer the picture of that field. Finally the habitus of agents were considered, this involves attempting to capture the “unconscious” ... forgetting of history ... which itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 78-79). This consideration of agent’s habitus involved a layer of questioning to ascertain the origins of participants’ views, how their own experiences of education (habitus) and capital, combined with their positions within the field, have contributed to their practices. I am effectively gathering and analysing data according to the equation: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984: 101).

## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In chapter 2 I traced the changing, and politically-motivated, expectations of UK higher education (UK HE) through government commissioned reports pertaining to HE; in chapter 3 I traced the emergence and development of academic support in UK HE through literature (practice-focussed and critical); and in chapter 4 I established Bourdieu's field analysis as a framework for understanding the relationship between the perceptions of academic support practitioners and the wider policy context. In this chapter I present the approach and research methods used to generate, collate and analyse data, including a summary of the participants involved in this research, and how I arrived at the themes for this thesis. For ease of navigation this chapter is divided into seven sections:

1. Philosophy and Research Approach
2. Choosing a Sample Group
3. Research Questions and Research Methods
4. Approach to Data Collation and Analysis of Empirical Research
5. Research Ethics
6. The Participants
7. How I arrived at the themes for this thesis

### **1. Philosophy and Research Approach**

#### **1.1 Assumptions**

I see my role as a teaching and learning specialist, with a broad discipline-related background in the subjects that my university teaches. My practice straddles academic support and academic development, tutoring and co-teaching students with course teams as well as supporting the development of curriculum and inclusive teaching practices. I believe the role is currently necessary

because not all subject specialists can be learning specialists, and as the educational psychologist Wankowski (1968) indicated in the 1960s, with the widening of participation and the increase in complex educational and emotional needs, teaching specialists have become increasingly necessary. Therefore, I teach students alongside course teams, as well as offering individual support to students, which enables me to understand the role of academics and more effectively support course teams - and vice versa. I have good relationships with both academic and administrative powers, I am therefore able to contribute to institutional and teaching strategies. However, it is not always possible to predict the perceptions and practices of individuals – students or staff - therefore it is necessary that I adopt both a responsive as well as strategic approach to my role.

In critically evaluating the relationship between the role and practices of academic support and the perceived purpose of HE, I am making four assumptions:

- institutions have academic support
- historical academic support roles may prove different to contemporary roles
- practitioners define and measure effectiveness of their role?
- practitioner perceptions are influenced by the larger policy context

These assumptions emerge from the thematic review of policy and literature in chapters 2 and 3, combined with my fifteen years first-hand experience of working in an academic support role in an English HEI. However, although my assumptions have prompted the research questions that are driving this enquiry, this research is not an attempt to ‘prove what is’ or to identify a single ‘truth’, commonly associated with a ‘positivist’ paradigm (Newby, 2014). Instead this research is exploratory and an attempt to evaluate ‘what is happening’ (Ercikan and Roth, 2006) in the sector, underpinned by the humanistic notion that ‘truth is a social construction’ (Newby, 2014: 37) and therefore ‘multiple truths’ coexist (Newby, 2014). This approach, and the notion of ‘truth’ as a social construction, is consistent with Bourdieu’s position-related analysis. According to Bourdieu (1987), perspectives are

determined by our experience of the social world and how we make sense of those experiences, but also from the position, or positions we assume in the social world. Therefore, ‘social reality’ (Johnson, 1993) is shaped by the origins and ‘representations’ that people use to understand the world and their place within it (Johnson, 1993).

## **1.2 Enquiry rationale**

Over the last two decades different (and shifting) notions of ‘best’ or ‘good’ practice have been discussed by those working in the field of academic support through: academic support conferences, jiscmail forums such as the Association for Learning and Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), and in teaching and learning publications as discussed in chapter 3 Literature Review. According to Bourdieu social practices or ‘acts’ of agents are driven by a combination of ‘habitus, field, capital ... [and] the two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of the habitus)’ (Bourdieu, 1998: vii). Therefore, practices are determined by a combination of position-related perceptions and context. However, academic support practices are rarely presented in relation to perceptions of purpose and situation-specific variations such as institutional origin, subject, funding and student demographics. In order to understand the perceptions and practices of academic support teams, it is therefore necessary for me to consider the practitioners’ perceptions of purpose in context, external and internal to an HEI, both current and historical.

## **1.3 Qualitative methods**

There is limited literature on academic support in UK HEIs, particularly literature that considers practices in relation to perceptions of purpose in context (see chapter 3 Literature Review), a gap I intend to fill with this thesis. According to Ercikan and Roth (2006), enquiries that involve evaluating complex situations require approaches that generate rich descriptions. Rich descriptions could be

defined as detailed accounts of what is happening in a particular social field, through the eyes of agents and researcher observations (perceptions). Qualitative research methods are best known for gathering data rich descriptions about ‘how and why things happen as they do ... [valuing the] empirical observation of cause and effect’ (Newby, 2014: 104). Although I am not necessarily concerned with cause and effect generalisations, as this conflicts with Bourdieu’s (1998) idea that practices are context specific, historically situated (time-bound), dynamic and transformative, I will be taking a thematic approach to data analysis (consistent with previous chapters). Therefore, I will identify any emerging relationships between academic support practices and government expectations of HE (as discussed in chapter 2 Policy).

Qualitative methods are suited to analysing the choices people make and the varied ‘meanings they give to their experiences’ (Newby, 2014: 103), unlike quantitative ‘scientific’ methods, which tend to be more useful for measuring ‘natural phenomena that are stable and uniform across time, space, and context ... [unlike] the human world of teaching and learning’ (Gage, 2009: 152). Although, arguably, teaching and learning is based on some form of common understanding and guiding principles, and scientific methods have been used to evaluate both teaching and learning, qualitative research methods are able to capture the peculiarities of specific situations. Qualitative research methods therefore offer the scope for exploring the details of relationships between contexts, perceptions and decision-making.

## **2. Choosing a Sample Group**

### **2.1 Context-specific research**

As with every teaching session, no two educational establishments are exactly alike (see chapter 2 Policy, chapter 3 Literature Review, chapter 4 Theory and 6 ‘Remedial’). It is therefore necessary to gain a detailed picture of the specific situations that academic support practices arise from, which includes where their institutions are positioned within the wider field of higher education. Perceptions

of purpose, and how these affect institutional and departmental decision-making, are often dependent on how institutions and departments translate expectations defined by policy, therefore straddling both internal and externally-imposed expectations. Differences in positions, perceptions and practices of HEIs subsequently impact on approaches academic support.

Evaluating and comparing individual circumstances is consistent with the humanistic philosophy of multiple truths and qualitative research, although a humanistic paradigm does not necessarily exclude quantitative methods (Ercikan and Roth, 2006). Elliot suggests that educational research is best undertaken through ‘case studies rather than randomised controlled trials’ (2009: 77) because of the ‘indeterminate nature of educational values and principles, and the context-dependant nature of judgements’ (2009: 77). However, this thesis is not undertaking a case study approach, because it is not analysing teaching practices per se, and is instead concerned with comparing and identifying common themes (thematic analysis), as well as identifying sets of circumstances leading to differences in perceptions and approaches to academic support. Equally this thesis is not undertaking randomised controlled trials, for participating institutions are chosen specifically because they are representative of the key differences within the sector (differences explained later in this chapter).

As with a case study approach, this thesis makes use of more than one method to gather data. However, both methods are qualitative, and one is merely used to ascertain pen portraits of each academic support team, in order to contextualise and understand interviewee responses. The main similarity between this thesis and the case study approach, is that this research enquiry is concerned with studying a specific context, therefore the sample group are analysed within, and in relation to, the parameters of current HE policy and expectations of HEIs.



## 2.2 Empirical generalisations

One potential risk of taking a thematic approach to analysing a sample group is that empirical generalisations are made about the larger population (Hammersley, 2012). However, as Hammersley indicates it is possible to study individual universities and identify characteristics and ‘themes’ that may help to understand the behaviours of a much larger population:

if we are concerned with developing theory about why universities change from one organizational form to another ... we will focus only on those features that we take to be generic to the theoretical type ... the theory ... will explain what happens whenever some set of conditions occurs, rather than what happened in that case (2012: 398)

Analysing responses from individual teams can therefore serve two purposes, firstly to understand the characteristics of an individual case and secondly to develop theory about cases with similar conditions. Each approach relies on different types of data: context-bound or generic and context-free. I would argue, however, that in studying the relationship between academic support practices and the role of HE there are two different levels of study and context-bound data, potentially leading to very different conclusions. These levels could be described as immediate field (micro), and broad field (macro). The study of the immediate field (individuals on specific campuses within specific institutions) is likely to result in the identification of differences in practices between teams and between team members; whereas the study of the broader field (academic support within a time-bound political or social paradigm) is likely to lead to similarities in practices across teams, that may prove applicable to the broader field of academic support, regardless of individuals and institutions.

I am interested in both, finding out what is happening in individual institutions and the unique characteristics of particular institutions (singular science), as well as identifying common themes across the sample group as a result of the current political paradigm. Comparing examples is not uncommon in research, for it can lead to identifying the generic features or themes that Hammersley (2012) talks of, which may inform further research and the development of theory. Indeed, the theoretical lens for this research, Bourdieu’s field analysis, emerged from the study of specific social

contexts, and subsequently the identification of themes and characteristics across contexts leading to theory, despite Bourdieu himself stating that scenarios are unique, time-bound and unable to be compared and generalised.

### **2.3 Choosing sample group**

When choosing samples to study choices are often made because they are ‘typical’ ‘unusual’ ‘problematic’ or have ‘worked well’ (Newby, 2014: 53). However, with an under-researched field such as academic support, it is not always possible to know these kinds of quality-driven characteristics and this enquiry is driven by discovery rather than assessing pre-defined notions of quality. According to Guest et al (2012) exploratory research, involving discovery and developing understanding rather than affirming theory, suits purposeful sampling as opposed to random sampling. However, the choice of sample group for this research is both purposeful and random. Academic support teams are chosen by geographic location and historical origin of their institution, therefore the choice of institution is purposeful, however the sample group of academic support teams are a somewhat random and an unknown quantity.

As a researcher and practitioner in an English university, it is important to choose institutions under English policy, particularly in light of this enquiry. This decision is supported and contextualised by the analysis of UK policy documents in chapter 2, and literature on UK academic support discussed in chapter 3. Subjects for this research (universities) are chosen from different regions in England, for different regions could potentially attract different students with potentially different needs, therefore broadening variables without increasing the sample group. Choosing institutions based on their historical origins is important because, as discussed in chapter 2 (policy), the political, social and economic climate in which institutions were conceived, shapes their purpose, subjects, student demographics and structure (*habitus* and *capital*). Therefore in order to gain a richer picture of what is

happening across the HE field, without widening the sample group, institutions are selected from key periods in the development of English higher education: pre-WWII, post-WWII, 1960s and post 1992, choices of institutions also include variations in subjects and status:

- specialist e.g. arts, education and broad subject institutions covering a range of subjects
- traditionally vocational and traditionally liberal-focused institutions
- Russell Group and non-Russell Group institutions

The sample group of universities and interviewees chosen for this research will be discussed using pseudonyms to protect their identities. It is important to protect identities at a time when reputations are explicitly linked to recruitment strategies, in order to elicit candid responses. The protection of participants will be discussed in more detail later in the ‘ethics’ section of this chapter.

### **3. Research Questions and Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research questions**

The following research questions offer a breakdown of the thesis enquiry into its main concerns:

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

Three research methods are used to explore this enquiry, these are: policy analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations.

#### **3.2 A thematic approach**

A thematic approach (Morgan, 2011) was taken to analysing: government commissioned reports pertaining to UK higher education in chapter 2 and literature in chapter 3, and it will be taken to analysing semi-structured interviews and observations discussed in chapters 6 ‘Remedial’, 7 Development, 8 Business and 9 Discussion. Thematic analysis is a ‘systematic approach’ to analysing

‘qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning’ (Lapadat, 2010: 2). Thematic analysis is a useful approach for an enquiry which seeks to discover what is happening, because it allows for themes to arise from data ‘seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles’ (Lapadat, 2010: 2), rather than projecting pre-existing categories onto data, therefore I am adopting an interpretivist paradigm (Swann and Pratt, 2004).

The approach taken to reviewing government commissioned reports in chapter 2 particularly, involved the following stages:

1. trace historical development of the report
2. analyse report
3. review relevant literature relating to the report, resulting in an understanding of how the report was received and interpreted by others
4. ascertain my own interpretations

The government commissioned reports were reviewed with my experience and knowledge of working within academic support in a UK HEI, however the aim of this thesis is to develop theory rather than attempting to prove a hypothesis, thus following the ‘qualitative interpretative framework’ of grounded theory (Thomas, 2007: 118). The approach I took to analysing each report was based on Bryman’s (2008) four stages of analysis: reading to get an idea of the text, re-reading to identify themes, review the themes and then interpret and relate the themes to general theories. Based on this approach the following steps were taken to analysing each government commissioned report in chapter 2:

1. Read, identify and summarise discussions on themes relating to the liberal vocational education debate, the skills agenda or widening participation
2. Note observations and interpretations from relevant literature and draw conclusions based on my own interpretations

3. Re-read the reports in light of my interpretations and conclusions to identify any obvious misinterpretations that need reviewing and rewriting or omitting

### 3.3 Observations

Observations regarding the different contexts of academic support services are used to develop pen portraits of each institution, as well as helping me to understand interviewee responses regarding their working environment. Associated terminology and choices regarding the management and physical location of academic support - centrally located, embedded within course areas, or discreet and hard to find - provide an indication of institutional priority. The following table of questions are indicative of the approach taken to my observations, these observations are presented as contextual summaries at the end of this chapter:

<b>University</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When did it become a university?</li> <li>• If it existed prior to university status, in what form?</li> <li>• Is it an amalgamation of different establishments or single?</li> <li>• Is it a single or multi-campus? (later expansion?)</li> <li>• What is the mix of subjects covered?</li> <li>• How/where is the campus/campuses positioned?</li> </ul>
<b>Physical location of the centre/service</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it central/easy to find or discreet?</li> <li>• What is it near?</li> <li>• How is it sign-posted? (.e.g. around campus, on the building where it is housed, in the building where it is housed)</li> </ul>

- Is it purpose built or existing environment?

**Physical environment of the centre/service**

- What is the first impression on entering the space? (e.g. does it have a reception or straight to offices/teaching rooms? Advertisements?)
- What does the environment contain? (e.g. offices, teaching spaces, resources etc)
- If it is a shared space who is it shared with?

### **3.4 Face-to-face interviews with academic support teams**

The decision to interview several staff members of the same team - at least two members of staff and the manager - is based on the understanding that ‘perspectives’ and ‘practices’ are ‘positional’ and socially constructing and constructed. Therefore, it is important to interview team members individually to ascertain perspectives without the influence of other team members. According to Bourdieu ‘present and past positions [of agents] in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions’ (2013: 82), shape the views people hold and the way they respond to external stimuli – the characteristics in a given field. The choice to undertake interviews across a range of academic support teams helps to identify similarities and differences in contexts, perceptions and practices.

Interviewing staff is not necessarily a naturalistic situation (Newby, 2014), even if it is occurring within their place of work. However, this enquiry is not concerned with assessing practices and their effects, but interested in eliciting and evaluating the relationship between perceptions and practices. This thesis is therefore assessing what is happening (practices) - as interpreted by the staff members interviewed - and attempting to ascertain why it is happening (perceptions and context). Conducting interviews with staff within their place of work allows for more ‘naturalistic’ observations (Newby, 2014) of their

institutions and the position that teams hold within them. Therefore, where possible interviews are carried out face-to-face in the work place of participants'. There are several reasons for choosing context-specific face-to-face interviews:

- to undertake an observational analysis of the physical location of the services
- to observe the interviewee in their work environment where they may be more comfortable, and more able to introduce resources or people into the meeting in order to answer the questions
- to allow for the interviewee and interviewer to clarify questions and responses immediately, and discuss meaning in more depth if necessary
- to ensure that the responses are obtained within a specific time-frame as it is not possible to postpone answering questions that are posed face-to-face

### **3.5 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews offer 'flexibility' 'to expose issues ... [leading to] an understanding of processes, events and emotions' (Newby, 2014: 340), allowing 'space' for the unanticipated as interviewees answer 'in their own words' (Newby, 2014: 300). A structured approach to interviews would mean imposing 'pre-established categories' (Fontana and Prokos, 2007: 40) onto data as opposed to themes arising from it, which would be counterintuitive to an exploratory enquiry. A structured approach would also be inconsistent with the philosophy of 'multiple truths' and Bourdieu's notion that perceptions are position and power dependent, in other words they arise from the position and power of agents within their institution, which is also dependent on the position and power of their institution – interplay between fields, habitus and capital. Although the benefit of taking a qualitative approach to research (observations and interviews) is having the flexibility to clarify the unexpected, a completely unstructured approach to interviews, where questions are developed as interviews evolve

(Fontana and Prokos, 2007), would make it difficult to elicit comparable responses. Therefore, I chose a semi-structured approach to interviews in order to elicit the unknown, at the same time as offering some parity of questioning across teams.

### **3.6 Semi-structured questions**

According to Hodkinson and Macleod (2010), for ‘credible’ data generation during semi-structured interviews researchers need to pose the same questions to all interviewees and the questions need to be interpreted in the same way. However, interpretations are inextricably linked to perceptions, therefore it is not possible to guarantee that all participants will interpret questions similarly. As discussed in the last chapter (Chapter 4 Theory) Bourdieu (2013) would argue that interpretations are position related, and positions are shaped by habitus and capital. However, questions and understanding will be clarified during interviews and any misinterpretations of questions will be addressed. How interviewees choose to answer the questions, including what they choose to emphasise or focus on, will be left to the individuals; questions will be repeated if they have not been answered however.

### **3.7 Interview questions**

The interviewee questions offer a breakdown of the research questions. The interview script, and methodological approach specified so far arise from the review of policy and literature discussed in previous chapters, as well as from my own professional and personal experience and knowledge. For instance, my role has been located in different positions within the institution, both physically and managerially, each change has had an impact on approaches to my role; similarly, with a change in focus there has been a change in title in order to reflect the focus. Therefore, it is important to ask questions regarding the position and terms associated with the role of academic support because they



may indeed have some bearing on, or reflect, both individual and institutional approaches to the role. I am also conscious of how my own widening participation background has shaped my perception and approach to my role, therefore, I will ask questions about the relationship between the educational backgrounds of individuals and their approaches. The indicative interview questions will include:

- How is academic support positioned within the institution managerially and physically? Why? How does that work?
- What do you consider to be the purpose of academic support? Why?
- What do you consider to be the relationship between the title of academic support at your institution and its purpose?
- What are the main duties of academic support at your institution? (e.g. how does it work with courses, students, other departments)
- What do you consider to be the main area or areas of need for academic support? (who and what) and why do you think this need exists?
- How are these areas of need fulfilled?
- How do you define effectiveness of the role?
- How do you measure effectiveness? Why?
- How do your own experiences of education shape your approach to your role?
- What do you consider to be the purpose of higher education? Why?
- What do you consider to be the purpose of your institution in particular? Why?

### **3.8 Relationship between questions and theory**

The following table illustrates the relationship between the research questions, the interview questions and the theoretical framework (Bourdieu's Field Analysis):

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Bourdieu's Field Analysis</b>
1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?	What do you consider to be the purpose of the provision, And why?	Perception of need and why the need exists (relationship between fields of power and perceptions of habitus and the cultural capital gap)
1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?	What do you consider to be main area of need for the provision? E.g. who is it for and why? Why do you think this need exists? How is this area of need fulfilled?	Consider what the sense of need/purpose is driven by and how that relates to individual and/or shared habitus and capital?
1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?  3. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?	What do you consider to be the purpose of higher education? Why?  What do you consider to be the purpose of your institution particularly? Why?	Relationship between fields of power (perception of HE purpose, shared cultural capital) and perception of need (cultural capital gap) and how all of this relates to the position of the agents (habitus and cultural capital)
1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?	How is the provision positioned within the institution, managerially and physically? Why is that? How does it work? What do you consider to be the relationship between the title of the provision and its purpose? What are the main duties of the provision? E.g. how does it work with courses, students, other departments	Relationship between perceptions of the role, purpose and practice (how the capital gap is perceived and how this relates to the practices/approach the service/institution takes to address these) – coupled with the position of the agents within the field (habitus and capital)

<p>1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?</p> <p>2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?</p>	<p>How would you define effectiveness of the provision?</p> <p>How would you measure effectiveness of the provision?</p> <p>And why?</p>	<p>Relationship between perceptions of purpose, practice and measures of achievement and the positions agents assume within the field in relation to fields of power (habitus and capital)</p>
<p>All three research questions</p>	<p>How do your own experiences of education shape your approach to your role?</p>	<p>Relationship between habitus and capital of agents and how this informs the position they assume in the field, perceptions and subsequent practice</p>

#### **4. Approach to Data Collation and Analysis of Empirical Research**

##### **4.1 Researcher versus software**

Exploratory research tends to be ‘content-driven’ (Guest et al, 2012: 7) with codes and themes arising from data, as opposed to classifying the social world through pre-determined categories. The decision not to use research software, such as NVIVO, to categorise interview responses was made on this basis. Although assistive software could be considered more ‘neutral’, ‘consistent’ and faster at organising and comparing data than a researcher, software requires a set of pre-established criteria or themes with clearly defined terms and sets meanings. With exploratory research and the philosophy of ‘multiple truths’ it is important that themes arise from the sorting process and are not confined by it, thus allowing for new knowledge to surface.

With a method such as the semi-structured interview, answers may not be constructed with consistent terminology and meaning, whereas a researcher can ensure that nuances and the essences of meaning are captured from data, with themes arising from data rather than being shaped by it. Not only does

the researcher have first-hand experience of the interviewees and their surroundings, but also benefits from extensive knowledge of the English language and its varied use, particularly, in this case, with regards to HE and academic support. However, the choice to undertake data collation myself rather than use software was not just about the validity and quality of analysis but also about gaining the first-hand and intimate working knowledge of my research material, which enabled me to establish, and defend with more conviction, the conclusions that I drew.

#### **4.2 Thematic analysis of data**

Thematic analysis is commonly associated with exploratory research, with codes arising from the analysis. The following steps were taken to analyse the data generated from the interviews:

1. Transcripts were read and responses to questions highlighted. Due to the ‘conversational’ nature of semi-structured interviews responses to questions may not always follow directly after questions, therefore it was necessary to undertake ‘text segmentation’ (Guest et al, 2012) in order to highlight and code responses to questions.
2. Summaries of responses per institution were drafted and then compared.
3. Potential themes were identified. Guest et al states that in order to ‘help outline the analysis before analysis takes place’ (2012: 8) the researcher needs to ‘carefully’ read and reread responses looking for ‘keywords, trends, themes or ideas in the data’ (Guest et al, 2012: 7).
4. These themes were substantiated through wider reading and through critical discussions with my PhD supervisor and other researchers, as well as through critical debate in professional forums, conferences and networks.
5. Themes were compared and structures amongst them identified. Theory was developed, and continuously checked and re-checked against data, literature and through critical discussions with my PhD supervisor, fellow researchers and HE practitioners (academics and academic support)

The drawback with undertaking exploratory research with thematic analysis, is that it is not possible to know whether the lines of questioning are the most appropriate to probe in detail unknown themes. Therefore, themes may emerge at the analysis stage that require more questioning. Ideally, in cases such as these, a two staged approach to interviews would prove more beneficial, however, because of the constraints on both the researcher's and participant's time this thesis can only be considered as the first tier of enquiry.

### **4.3 Interpretivist approach**

In order to undertake thematic analysis it was necessary to adopt an interpretivist approach, this is consistent with the method taken to policy analysis (chapter 2) and the literature review (chapter 3). An interpretivist approach means looking past the 'face value' of data and instead undertaking what is termed as 'latent level analysis' in order to 'identify hidden meanings' (Newby, 2014: 463). Gage states that 'interpretive researchers regard individuals as able to construct their own social reality, rather than having reality always be the determiner of the individuals perception' (2009: 153). In other words this means recognising that individuals may not necessarily see, understand, or respond to similar situations in the same way, including their use, and interpretation of language – the researcher included. Part of this research is to analyse the use of language (terms) and their associations as objectively as possible to avoid misinterpretation. Misinterpretation can come from researcher and participants using the same terms but attributing different meaning and associations, or using different terms interchangeably but attributing the same meaning and associations. Therefore, to ensure that the integrity of the research is protected (BERA- British Educational Research Association, 2011), it will be important to attempt to take an objective observer approach as far as possible. What this means is, clarity of responses will be sought at all times in order to reduce researcher assumptions, my opinions will be kept to a minimum in order to avoid influencing responses.

## **5. Research Ethics**

### **5.1 Anonymity and pseudonyms**

In wishing to ascertain approaches to academic support across the sector, there is a dilemma. In a climate of university league tables, funding cuts, raised expectations and high competition between institutions, accessing participants and obtaining honest responses may prove difficult. As a UK researcher bound by UK ethics, I have a duty to protect participants (BERA, 2011) at the same time as ensuring that the research is of ‘quality’ (BERA, 2011) and of value to the sector. Therefore, anonymity will be granted to the universities and practitioners involved in this study. Potential participants will be reassured on initial contact, and in person, that although interviews will not be anonymous as they will be face-to-face, pseudonyms will be assigned to observations and interview transcripts post interview. Pseudonyms will enable me, and the readers, to distinguish between participants and institutions, without revealing specific identities.

Establishment names will be replaced with unrelated titles of stately homes .e.g. Arniston, Blenheim, Chartwell, Downton, Elvaston, Fairfax. Interviewee’s names will be replaced with unrelated pseudonyms e.g. Arron, Beatrice, Carl, irrespective of gender. This is because gender is not relevant to this research, however protecting the identities of participants, where possible, is. In order to make it easier for the reader to distinguish between institutions and trace related interviewee responses, pseudonyms for each institution start with a different letter of the alphabet, the pseudonyms for related staff start with the same corresponding letter e.g. Arniston (institution) – Arron, Antreas, Anna, Anton (interviewees). To ensure each transcript is correctly coded, the names of interviewees and universities remained with the digital recording of each interview and any physical notes until the transcriptions were completed. Any physical information pertaining to interviewees and establishments were stored in a locked cupboard at the researcher’s home, which only the researcher could access, and any digital material kept in a password-protected file. After the interviews were transcribed all recordings and

notes relating to universities or interviewees were destroyed. It is possible that descriptions of establishments and interviewees may lead to suppositions regarding them or their institutions, however only the very necessary information or descriptions of institutions were used in order to ascertain variations in purpose, structure and student demographics. Most establishments have multi-campus and colleges, making it less likely for suppositions to lead to identification of overarching establishments.

## **5.2 Gaining consent**

It is hoped that confidentiality would reassure interviewees and their institutions enough to consent to participate, as well as to elicit ‘honest’ responses from interviewees about their individual perceptions. Potential participants were reminded of the purpose of the research, which was to evaluate the relationship between context, perceptions and practices rather than making quality-related judgements about practice. Researcher responsibilities of ‘openness and disclosure’ (BERA, 2011:6) are important to gaining ‘voluntary informed consent’ (BERA, 2011:05). In other words, consent to participate was given with full knowledge and understanding of the ‘process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation was necessary, how it would be used and how and to whom it will be reported’ (BERA, 2011:5). Potential participants were therefore contacted by email to introduce the researcher, the research focus and explain briefly why they had been contacted. A consent form (included in the appendix) and participants’ information sheet (included in the appendix) was attached to the email. The participants’ information sheet explained:

1. The research questions
2. The rationale for the research
3. The research methods that will be employed
4. Ethical approach to data storage, analysis and use, including how anonymity and confidentiality would be granted to participants and their institutions

## 5. The interviewees' involvement in the research and the duration

The consent form stated that participants agreed to take part in the research and agreed to material from the interview being used for this PhD thesis and in future publications relating to this research. The consent form for managers (gatekeepers) was slightly different as managers were consenting for the research to take place within their department with their staff, as well as consenting to being a participant.

The ethics of this research are closely bound by the nature and purpose of this enquiry. This enquiry comes from a genuine desire to find out what is happening in English universities and in the field of academic support specifically, ascertaining the criteria by which people make decisions, exploring the relationship between context, perceptions and decisions. Therefore, there is no benefit to constructing data or re-presenting it in a way to support some form of hypothesis, there is no researcher hypothesis other than previously highlighted (unfixed) assumptions. Finally, it is important to reassure readers that the integrity of this research is not compromised by the anonymity of participants, for this research is concerned with contextual characteristics, themes and relationships between themes across cases. Conclusions are therefore not dependent on knowing exactly who establishments or participants are.

## **6. The Participants**

### **6.1 Interviewees and rationale**

Five academic support teams, serving six different institutions - different in origin, subject mix, structure, size and geographic location - agreed to participate in this research. The following is the institutional breakdown of 17 interviewees, pseudonyms and roles:



<b>Institution</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>	<b>Manager role &amp; pseudonym</b>	<b>Staff role &amp; pseudonym (irrespective of gender)</b>
<b>Arniston</b> 1960s, broad subject institution	Manager and whole team of 5 core staff members = 6 interviewees	<b>Manager:</b> Aaron	<b>Staff:</b> Antreas, Anna, Anton, Adie and Asaad
<b>Blenheim</b> Pre-WWII social sciences institution	Manager and 2 out of 4 core staff members = 3 interviewees	<b>Manager:</b> Brynne Brynne is also a faculty director	<b>Staff:</b> Beatrice and Boris
<b>Chartwell</b> Pre-WWII Russell Group institution	Manager and 1 out of 3 core staff members = 2 interviewees	<b>Manager:</b> Carl	<b>Staff:</b> Chey
<b>Downton</b> Post-1992 broad subject institution	Manager and 2 out of 4+ core members of staff = 3 interviewees	<b>Manager:</b> Dylan	<b>Staff:</b> Desiree and Dimitriou  Desiree is a module leader & provides 1:1 support for staff  Dimitriou provides 1:1 student support
<b>Elvaston/Fairfax</b> Elvaston – post 1992 arts institution Fairfax – post-WWII Russell Group institution	Manager and 2 out of 3 core members of staff = 3 interviewees	<b>Manager:</b> Effie Effie is also a member of staff who supports both Elvaston and Fairfax students	<b>Staff:</b> Ethan and Eileen Both Ethan and Eileen mainly support Elvaston students

It is important to start by explaining why the sample group of interviewees per institution may appear skewed. The partial reason for variations in interviewee numbers per institution reflects team sizes and

availability of team members as many were employed on part-time contracts. More importantly however, after interviewing the whole team at Arniston, I had to lower my expectation to interview whole teams, because it was proving difficult to get past managers (gatekeepers) at some institutions. I felt that requesting interviews with only one or two staff members, as well as the manager, may be more appealing for it posed less of a strain on staff resource. It is also important to point out that while only single site observations were carried out at four of the institutions in order to contextualise working practices, observations were carried out at two sites at Arniston. This was because the interviewees at this institution were split between two sites, therefore, in order to contextualise responses it was necessary to observe and make notes on both campuses.

Is it not possible to know why managers from some institutions that I contacted did not respond to email requests to participate, or why several who did agree to participate did not confirm dates and therefore are not included in this research. One can surmise that time availability is an issue, however a more pertinent reason could be that institutions (and academic support managers) are possibly concerned about sharing their perceptions and practices, at a time when reputations of universities and teachers are paramount to economic survival. Indeed all participants involved in this research were from institutions placed within the top forty of the university league tables, whereas the institutions that did not respond to requests to participate all currently fall outside of the top forty.

## **6.2 Arniston**

Arniston is a 1960s research-intensive broad subject university, with multiple campuses. Observations were carried out on two sites: 1. the main founding and purpose built campus (multiple buildings) in a fairly affluent area, offering a mix of liberal and professional subjects; and the 2. newer shared (with other universities) campus, consisting largely of pre-existing buildings (not purpose built), in a more deprived area, covering largely vocational subjects e.g. pharmacy, social work and sports science. On

the newer campus the service is situated at one end of a shared campus, there is no obvious mention of the building or the service on any of the campus signs. The main reception area of the building is 'where students hand in their work' (Antreas, 16/12/15) so the building is known to students, however the only signage for the academic support service is situated at the very end of a long corridor where the offices for the service are located, barely visible from reception. The office location was described as not really ideal, despite being with other 'student support' services such as 'disability, mental health, dyslexia, learning disabilities ... also careers' (Antreas, 16/12/15) Antreas (16/12/15) suggested this because the corridor looked closed to the public.

On the founding campus the consensus amongst interviewees and observer was that the service is 'centrally located' (Antreas, 16/12/15) and 'prominent' (Antreas, 16/12/15) in a 'public place where people go' (Antreas, 16/12/15), because of its proximity to student-facing facilities (Antreas, 16/12/15) However, it was mentioned that the service is 'all on its own' because there are 'no other [student] services around it' (Antreas, 16/12/15). It was also pointed out that the service is 'still not on any of the sign-posts around the university' campus, which means tutors 'still need to advertise' it to students (Asaad, 4/2/16). However the service has its 'own' signed entrance into a refurbished part of an existing building (Asaad, 4/2/16); the team apparently 'fought long and hard for' the sign (Asaad, 4/2/16). Inside the building there is a purpose-built reception where students can book one-to-one tutorials, and permanent offices for each of tutor. The physical location of the service before this, was considered to be 'disparate' (Anton, 7/1/16) or 'a dirty secret behind the building' (Asaad, 4/2/16), however, having a dedicated space and more visibility had 'had a tremendous impact on the [student] footfall' (Asaad, 4/2/16). The rest of the building including upstairs largely consisted of offices and seminar rooms dedicated to the wider department of learning and teaching. The academic support service was originally set up as a retention service (Asaad, 4/2/16), and takes a broad skills approach to supporting students as opposed to academic writing only. Managerially the service sits within the

‘learning and teaching’ (Arron, 21/1/16) department for the university with staff-facing services, despite the academic support service being solely student-facing.

### **6.3 Blenheim**

Blenheim was established as a college pre-WWII, becoming part of a university prior to WWII. Despite the overarching university being made up of a diverse range of institutions and subjects, Blenheim has a specialist focus of largely postgraduate research in education and social sciences with its own distinct campus of one building.

Because of the design of the building (two wings and multiple floors), all departments apart from the library are invisible from the main entrance, therefore the academic support service can neither be considered discreet nor central - consistent with all other departments. The service is listed on all the main signage in the relevant wing and is situated in the same part of the building with the rest of the overarching department (Brynne, 20/1/16). The specific service offices are in a ‘separate corridor’ (Brynne, 20/1/16) housing an ‘administrative’ office and individual ‘staff offices’ (Boris, 29/2/16). The manager of this team considered it ‘quite important’ that all staff have their own offices ‘because they do a lot of one-to-ones’ (Brynne, 20/1/16).

The service shares the corridor with hospitality - hospitality has two offices to academic support’s four - despite this, the academic support offices seemed to be prominently located, and all notices in this corridor related to the academic support service. A teaching room in the corridor used to be for the sole use of academic support (Brynne, 20/1/16), however staff now have to book teaching rooms just like everyone else (Boris, 29/2/16). The manager felt that it was better for the service staff to book teaching spaces around the campus because it helped to familiarise students with the place ‘especially

the pre-sessional' students (Brynne, 20/1/16); it was also considered to be a way of giving the service a more 'integrated' (Boris, 29/2/16) feel.

The service originated as a research centre (Brynne, 20/1/16), focusing on 'academic writing support' for students (Brynne, 20/1/16). Although it is listed in the institutional directory as one of the small 'stand-alone' 'centres' (Boris, 2016) it is managed by an academic department 'Culture, Communication and Media' (Brynne, 20/1/16) along with 'TESOL and ... applied linguistics' (Brynne, 20/1/16); staff often crossed over or worked together. The head of this department is also 'director' of the academic support service (Brynne, 20/1/16), all directors of this service have previously been academic staff, therefore the support staff subsequently have 'lecturer' status and are on 'academic salaries ... at varying stages of doctorates' (Brynne, 20/1/16). The manager considered the 'scholarship' and status of their staff as 'important' (Brynne, 20/1/16).

#### **6.4 Chartwell**

Chartwell is a Russell Group institution, established as a university prior to WWII, sitting on the fringes of a city. Although it has a few campuses it has one main large site (the campus I visited) consisting of multiple buildings. The subject areas covered by this institution are: physical and social sciences including medicine, environmental and life sciences as well as law, engineering and art; therefore it straddles both liberal and vocational education.

The academic support service is located in the main campus library, which was described as central to all student study, and central to the campus within a large building. Whilst the library is sign-posted around campus the academic support service is not, however there are 'different screens in the library and across campus' (Carl, 22/4/16) advertising the service and its location along with other related services. The current location of the service, on the first floor, is described as 'a little bit tucked away

at the back so students don't necessarily stumble' upon it (Chey, 22/4/16). However, when on the correct floor there is 'a big logo on the wall' (Chey, 22/4/16) to point out the service, which also acts as a brand, the manager has attempted to brand all teaching spaces that the service uses regularly with the same motif or colours (Carl, 22/4/16). There are 'appointment rooms' in the library building (Carl, 22/4/16) but not all necessarily on the same floor, other 'teaching space[s]' are in different buildings on campus (Carl, 22/4/16).

The current physical situation for the centre was considered less than ideal and a bit of a 'mishmash' (Carl, 22/4/16); however a new library was in the process of being built with purpose-built spaces for the service and maths centre (Carl, 22/4/16). The service was supposed to be in 'a more prominent position' in the new building (Chey, 22/4/16), with purpose built appointment rooms and teaching spaces (Carl, 22/4/16). The downside of the new build is that the new space will be 'behind a swipe door' (Chey, 22/4/16) so although the centre 'will be more visible' it 'won't be as informally accessible to students' as the service had been previously (Chey, 22/4/16).

The service originated as writing support for first year undergraduate students, however it quickly expanded to a broad skills service for all years and levels because of demand. Managerially the service sits within 'a division [of] Library Services called Academic Engagement ... [which also includes] the Subject Librarians ... and Digital and Technology Skills team' (Chey, 22/4/16). Library Services themselves are then situated 'within Academic Services [with] ... careers, learning support [disability support and dyslexia etc.]' (Chey, 22/4/16). The centre manager reports to the 'assistant director' of the Academic Engagement division and this assistant director 'reports directly into the director of Library Services' (Carl, 22/4/16).

## 6.5 Downton

Downton was a polytechnic prior to being awarded university status post-1992. It is largely made up of one establishment with one main founding campus consisting of a series of buildings located in one area of a city; recently it has developed a couple of satellite campuses. The subjects tended to lean towards vocational education e.g. engineering, computing, business, health, although there are also aspects of more liberal education such as social sciences, arts and humanities.

The academic support service 'is centrally located on campus' (Dylan, 15/4/16) in a purpose-built 'annex' beside the main library (Dylan, 15/4/16) with its own entrance and signage, located on a main route through campus. The annex is a self-sufficient hub for the sole use of the service, it has 'a large reception area' with a receptionist (Dylan, 15/4/16), its own toilets, shelves of books for both staff and students, and a digital sign-in provision for one-to-one tutorials. All of the rooms and offices lead off the reception area, which include tutorial rooms as well as a large purpose built teaching or seminar room with tables, chairs, projectors and screens (Dylan, 15/4/16).

The service originated as, and focuses on, academic writing as opposed to broad skills. For admin purposes this service is managed 'within Library and Learning Services', however the service manager reports directly to 'the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Experience' (Dylan, 15/4/16). This was considered important as it gave them 'a very close link into the senior management' (Dylan, 15/4/16) of the institution, so they were informed of 'strategy' (Dylan, 15/4/16). Two tutors saw the managerial position within the library as problematic, for different reasons, the differing reasons seemed to coincide with the differences in the two tutoring roles: 1. senior lecturers in academic writing who are largely staff-facing with a responsibility for institution-wide credit-bearing units, and 2. 'academic writing tutors' (Dylan, 15/4/16) who offer one-to-one support for students only. The academic writing tutor felt that the service was 'isolated' because although it sat with library in terms of administration

it was somewhat isolated from the library and any other main department (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). The academic writing lecturer however felt that the service belonged more in an educational research department; it had previously been part of a higher education research department (Desiree, 15/4/16), involved in running staff training and the 'PGCert in HE' (Desiree, 15/4/16), however this centre was dissolved, 'as with many other staff development centres' (Dylan, 15/4/16) across the sector, with the reduction in funding in '2010/2011' (Dylan, 15/4/16).

## **6.6 Elvaston and Fairfax**

Although the broad skills service is for the whole of Elvaston - a post-1992 multi-campus arts institution - on the main campus the site and the services (including academic support) are shared with Fairfax - a post WWII Russell Group multi-campus institution. Both Elvaston and Fairfax were colleges prior to obtaining university status; however they now differ dramatically. Fairfax is a much bigger institution with a main campus in another area of the country (not included in this study), with its own in-house academic support team completely separate to the one involved in this research.

This academic support team is also unique in that they are managed, along with all services outside of courses, by a company external to, but funded by, the two institutions. The company board is made up of 'representatives from the two universities' (Effie, 25/6/16), however a 'CEO' runs the company with 'an executive team' (Effie, 25/6/16) and 'six directorates' (Effie, 25/6/16): IT; library; student services; estates; campus services. Academic support is managed as part of 'the library directorate' (Effie, 25/6/16). Having managers external to the universities and courses was considered problematic by the whole team because it was harder to know what was happening within the institutions and courses and become involved. It was also considered impossible to bring about fundamental and strategic changes.



On the main campus academic support is positioned in a central hub near the library, the main social areas and some shared teaching spaces. Although the building does not appear on any signposts, it is well known to both students and staff because of its historical significance and location (Effie, 25/6/16; Ethan, 25/6/16). The building itself is clearly labelled in the same style as the rest of the campus signs, and there is a large sign by the entrance listing all of the residing services. Although the building is a reasonable size with several floors, it was very easy to find academic support due to the many explicit signs indicating the location of all roles.

The service itself is physically located ‘alongside other aspects of student services’ (Eileen, 25/6/16); there are also ‘lecturer spaces’ (Ethan, 25/6/16) and an ‘academic office ... [which] a lot of people know’ (Ethan, 25/6/16). One interviewee felt the location was not ideal, however, because academic support did not necessarily fit with the other services, and the building was not a through route (Eileen, 25/6/16), academic staff tended to undertake teaching around campus in other spaces only using this space for bookable tutorials (Eileen, 25/6/16). The service space had a reception desk and receptionist, a small waiting area, an open-plan office and five tutoring spaces (Ethan, 25/6/16), all of which were shared with the language specialist team. This was the team’s third location in 11 years (Ethan, 25/6/16) and, due to the expansion of courses, the campus was likely to be reconfigured and services such as theirs pushed to the outer rims (Effie, 25/6/16). However, there was the risk of losing space altogether at their smaller Elvaston site (Effie, 25/6/16).

## **7. How I arrived at the themes for this thesis**

### **7.1 Method**

In order to arrive at the themes for this thesis, and the quotations and references that I have used to explore these themes, I initially summarised responses of interviewees per institution in relation to each interview question (see appendix 4). From this I then brought together responses to specific

questions across institutions (see appendix 5), in order to compare responses and identify themes, referring to the full transcripts in order to double check the conclusions drawn. At this point, I then read back through the previous policy and literature chapters, which had already been drafted, in order to pinpoint where, and if themes correlated with government commissioned reports as well as practice-focussed and critical literature, which they did. This process also involved my own reflections based on my prior knowledge, experience and wider reading, coupled with critical discussions with my PhD supervisor, fellow researchers and colleagues, the main overarching themes of: *business*, *'remedial'* and development, and their characteristics, were thus defined. With an idea of the main overarching themes I revised my policy chapter and literature review to make more explicit what seemed to be apparent across the government-commissioned reports, academic support literature and interviewee responses.

In order to arrive at the sub-themes that make up the discussions of: *business*, *'remedial'* and development, I again reviewed the cross-institution summaries and referred back to the raw transcripts to ensure that I had not missed anything. For a theme to make it into the data analysis chapters (Chapters 6 – 8) at least 3 participants out of 17 would have had to have raised it as an issue (see appendix 6 – table of sub-themes and extent of agreement). However, the process of identifying themes and data reduction was not an easy straightforward process, I had several attempts at devising the data analysis chapters that did not work. Appendix 7 is an example of an early attempt to identify and discuss sub-themes before identifying the overarching issues, what I was effectively doing here was collating and describing interviewees answers with very little aim, criticality and structure. Appendix 8 is another, but later, example of an attempt at data reduction and analysis prior to identifying overarching themes, although development did seem to be emerging at this point. In this example I seemed to have a clearer focus and clearer structure, which meant it was less confusing to read, however due to a lack of overarching theme, I lacked the purpose needed to drive critical debate.

## **7.2 The emergence of Business, ‘Remedial’ and Development**

The business approach to academic support emerged from the policy analysis chapter, particularly the recent BIS reports: *Students at the Heart of the System* (2011) and *Success as a Knowledge Economy* (2016). Whereas holistic development and ‘*remedial*’ work seemed to largely emerge from the review of literature (critical and practice-focussed) on academic support (chapter 3). However, both ‘*remedial*’ work and development also emerged from HE policy. Holistic development was alluded to by Robbins in his 1963 report regarding the benefits of HE in fostering good, resilient citizens and social harmony; whereas ‘*remedial*’ work was, arguably, alluded to by the 1993 DfE Student Services report and the remedying of student skills gaps in HE colleges and polytechnics. It is important to reiterate that the following approaches to academic support: Business, ‘*remedial*’ and development, were also shaped through extensive reflection, critical discussions and wider reading on education and purpose, as mentioned earlier.

## **7.3 Discussing the themes in the thesis**

Once the themes were established it then made sense to explore each theme (academic support approach) individually in its own chapter, presenting and interrogating the related views of interviewees with the use of wider social and educational theories, critical perspectives and Bourdieu’s field analysis. It is important to point out at this stage the interrelatedness of the themes discussed in the following chapters, therefore, there will at times be some overlap in discussions between the following three analysis chapters. This analysis will culminate in a discussion chapter where power and capital, and how these shape the positions of institutions (administrative powers), academic powers, consumer powers and academic support services, are analysed; therefore exploring all approaches Business, ‘*remedial*’ and development together.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined my philosophical approach to exploring this research enquiry, including the choice and rationale for the research questions, research methods, sample group, obtaining consent, approach to data collation and data analysis. I have also outlined who the participants are and how I arrived at the themes that are analysed in the proceeding chapters. The following chapter 'Remedial' is the start of my data analysis chapters; I am starting with 'Remedial' because whilst it is the most contentious approach, the idea of remedying deficits has been the most prevalent expectation of higher education in successive HE policies and reports from the time of Robbins (1963).

## Chapter 6: 'Remedial'

### Introduction

Official[ly] ... [academic support is] about trying to encourage people to reach their potential and support their own learning development, and at that very abstract generalised level I am very happy to support that[,] and I do think that's what we're there for; ... the unofficial answer is "remedial work", [we are] supporting students who, one way or another, are struggling (Anna, 21/1/16)

In this chapter I will explore the perception that the role of academic support involves 'remedial work', and that the role exists to remedy deficits in order for students to be able to access the higher education curriculum fully and ultimately develop the graduate skills expected by national policy (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016). Whilst all interviewees largely considered their purpose to be facilitating students to reach their potential, as presented on institutional websites and academic support materials, many interviewees described themselves as attempting to 'bridge' the space between the 'capabilities' of students – capabilities which students 'may or may not be able to access' (Effie, 26/5/16) - and course expectations. Phrases like 'problem solving', 'fixing', 'academic nurse[ing]' and providing 'a safety net' were all used to describe 'remedial work', reflecting the re-active response to individual student 'needs' as the needs are presented.

The term 'remedial' was mentioned by at least one interviewee from each institution. Some used the term only to define what their service was not, thus distancing their practices from the idea, whereas just under half of interviewees used it to describe the work they found themselves 'unofficially' doing, despite sharing with me that they were not supposed to describe the work as such. Although interviewees implied that 'remedial work' was an unacceptable phrase to use in HE, neither the staff nor the one manager who described their work as such, elaborated on where these guidelines were coming from, although from their responses it became apparent that this rule appeared to be enforced from within institutions. Therefore, there seemed to be two different narratives at play – the official purpose for the role of academic support and the unofficial purpose - with tensions between the two.

Regardless of the philosophies of teams, and despite the views of authors and researchers on ‘best’ or ‘inclusive’ practice (discussed in chapter 3 Literature Review), academic support in practice encompasses both ‘remedying’ deficits, in one form or another, as well as the holistic development of individuals (see chapter 7 Development).

The notion of ‘deficits’ on a wider scale arose from government perceptions that UK education, at all stages of learning, was not equipping the nation with what was needed to ensure a thriving economy (Dearing, 1997; BIS, 2011; BIS 2016). This ‘dystopian economic ideal of a self-adjusting market’ (Ainley, 2016: 6) has redefined education at all levels, through the use of predefined targets and a more generalised and economically-driven sense of purpose and success (see chapter 2 Policy). Although skills ‘deficits’ tend to be framed as an issue residing within the nation’s school leavers and graduates, it is questionable whether deficits really lie within individuals or whether they lie within education and the confines of national government policy (see chapter 2 Policy). Academic support has however, arguably emerged as a result of confines and conflicts, in the space where the habitus and capital of individuals (Noble and Davies, 2009), the practices of HEIs (Wingate, 2015), and policy-driven expectations of education, all collide (see chapter 2 Policy; chapter 3 Literature Review and chapter 4 Theory).

Several interviewees described academic support as the ‘moral’ ‘duty’ of institutions to support unprepared students to meet pre-defined expectations of their courses. However one person described the creation of the role as their institution’s way of demonstrating that it was attempting to do ‘something’ about ill-equipped students, implying that their role was possibly inadequate and at too late-a-stage in the development of some individuals in order to bring about the significant changes expected by their academic department – and ultimately national government. Three different forms

of ‘deficit’ were commonly identified: 1. Academic skills; 2. Emotional Resilience and Self-management and 3. Motivation. These three categories will be used to sub-divide this chapter.

## **1. Academic Skills**

### **1.1 Gaps in student learning**

A common theme across interviews was the inadequacy of students’ academic skills on entering HE, as well as, in the case of some institutions, high numbers of students lacking basic skills in literacy, learning and maths. Similar to the views analysed in chapter 3 (Literature Review), prior educational experiences of students were described by many interviewees as either too long ago - in the case of some mature students, or too different or inadequate – in the case of both mature students and school leavers. Therefore, interviewees considered academic support to be necessary in order for a wide range of students from different backgrounds to be able to meet the expectations of their course tutors, without lowering the standards of degrees. One interviewee from Arniston (the 1960s broad subject institution) reported that mature students even in their final years of study ‘often’ complained about the inadequacy of their prior education, particularly when it came to written communication, raising questions about the content of the national curriculum and its applicability to HE, and beyond.

Tett (2016) talks about ‘learning identities’ – shaped by prior education and familial experiences - and the role they play in ‘determining whether the process of learning [for an individual] will end up with what counts as success or with what is regarded as failure’ (Tett, 2016: 428). Therefore, if individuals do not develop ‘the expected skills and competencies required by their society’ (Tett, 2016: 427) within the expected time frame - i.e. within compulsory education - social positions and inequalities are potentially reinforced post-school (Simpson and Cieslik (2007); Bathmaker et al, 2013). Several interviewees described attempting to remedy the gaps in knowledge and skills regarding both writing and maths in particular, despite both being essential subjects and skills included in the national

curriculum. For instance, in Arniston about 50% of first year pharmacy students were reported to be failing their maths exams and about 50% of law students did not meet the writing test threshold to cope with a law degree. Whilst writing was the remit of academic support teams, maths was usually the domain of specialist maths centres, therefore only receives a brief mention in this chapter.

## **1.2 Academic Literacies versus Broad Skills**

Participating teams fell into one of the two models of academic support emerging from chapter 3 (Literature Review): 1. ‘academic literacy’ (Ivanic and Lea, 2006; Wingate, 2015) and 2. Broad skills (a phrase I coined). Downton (post-1992 broad subject institution) and Blenheim (the pre-WWII social sciences institution) adopted the academic literacies model, describing themselves as ‘writing centres’. This model, which is underpinned by an academic literacy philosophy, focuses on the development of student literacy and inductions into academic practices. Ivanic and Lea (2006) describe the origins of this model as stemming from supporting students with ‘difficulties’ in HE colleges and polytechnics in the 1980s. This form of support was described as ‘only’ existing in polytechnics for ‘less academic’ students ‘or in universities taking in large numbers of students for whom English is a foreign language’ (Ivanic and Lea, 2006: 9). Indeed, Blenheim (pre-WWII social sciences) interviewees largely had backgrounds in linguistics and offered summer courses as inductions for students whose English was a second language. Therefore, ‘writing centres’ seemed to originate from teams dealing with widening participation and English as a second language.

The broad skills model also includes support for academic literacy with the addition of learning support more generally - such as learning how to organise and manage oneself and one’s learning. This broad skills model also seemed to emerge from widening participation as well as skills agendas (Blythman and Orr, 2002; Barkas, 2011). As previously identified in chapter 2 (Policy), ‘study skills’ seems to get its first mention in the 1993 DfE ‘student support’ report, which highlighted the needs of diverse



student groups entering HE colleges and polytechnics in the 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, notions of ‘study skills’ (Shreeve, 2007), or ‘academic skills’ (Hill et al, 2010) or ‘skills centres’ (Barkas, 2011) are all mentioned by practitioners in chapter 3 (Literature Review). However, I would argue that the broad skills model of support seems to have origins that date back to the 1960s in universities, prior to skills agendas. Despite being referred to as ‘skills’, there are similarities between the broad skills model described by interviewees and the loco parentis and learning psychology models mentioned by Wankowski (1991a, 1991b, 1991c) – University of Birmingham, and Peelo (2002) – University of Lancaster, which take into account the habitus of individuals and the impact this has on learning (Tett, 2016).

Although Barkas (2011) considered ‘skills centres’ to be unnecessary and therefore non-existent in Russell Group institutions (see chapter 3 Literature Review) both participating Russell Group institutions, Chartwell (pre-WWII) and Fairfax (post-WWII), involved in this study had centralised broad skills support teams. However, it is important to point out that the oldest institution of the two did not adopt centralised support until 2012, which although set up as a writing centre, broadened its remit almost immediately to meet growing student needs. The emergence of this service coincided with the 2011 policy Students at the Heart of the System, and indeed interviewees referred to access agreements and the need for academic support; vocational subjects and employment agendas; and the need for the team to enhance the student experience. Therefore, academic support at Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group) seemed to be in direct response to the rise in student fees and expectations of students and central government.

The other institutions adopting the broad skills approach to academic support included Arniston (1960s broad subject institution) and Elvaston (post-1992 arts institution); the idea of ‘remedying deficits’ emerged largely from interviewees supporting these two institutions, as they reported higher numbers

of students lacking the general independence and motivation to manage themselves and their learning. Although Dearing (1997) may have defined this as a key skill ‘learning to learn’, I would argue that it is not a skill and not something that can be quickly ‘fixed’ with a few tips and a bit of practice (Wingate, 2006). Instead, it involves a change in an individual’s understanding, perceptions and behaviour around learning more broadly, in other words a shift in familial and educational habitus (Reay, 2017). It is also important to recognise the role that one’s habitus and capital can play in shaping the options and choices of discipline and institution open to students (Reay et al, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998). Indeed interviewees supporting both Russell Group institutions (Chartwell and Fairfax) described higher numbers of better prepared students; differences between institutions, however, will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### **1.3 Academic literacy versus basic literacy**

Despite the difference between the academic literacy and broad skills models, all interviewees predominantly talked about supporting writing, and the development of knowledge, thinking and all ‘skills’ involved in the ‘whole’ process of producing written work (Carl, 22/4/16). Some of the broad subject institutions, particularly the more research intensive, were described as having ‘oversubscribed’ (Chey, 22/4/16) in-house writing support roles embedded within some of the schools, in addition to centralised academic support. However, the purpose or extent of need for these roles is unclear; two roles existing side-by-side could perhaps indicate a role differentiation or a lack of coordination.

While some students were described by interviewees as being able to develop their writing through ‘imitating others or just by responding to feedback’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16) others were described as needing ‘more objectives, obvious strategies’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16) and more basic levels of support. However, it is important to make the distinction between ‘academic’ writing or literacy and basic

literacy as each involve different activities, carrying different perceptions, with different ramifications for both universities and those involved in academic support. While basic literacy pertains to general societal conventions and standards of reading and writing (Lebus, 2010; Tett, 2016), ‘academic literacy’ tends to be related to academic and discipline-specific ‘meaning making’, ‘knowledge production’, ‘criticality’, learning how to ‘make claims and substantiate them’ (Brynne, 20/1/16). The general inference in interviewee responses, and literature discussed in chapter 3, is that ‘academic literacy’ is something that everyone needs to be inducted into (Wingate, 2015), whereas basic literacy is something that individuals were generally expected to attend university with, particularly if having attended school and left with expected English qualification.

#### **1.4 Reading, writing and knowledge development**

Murray and Klinger state that ‘widening participation [and] ... the emphasis on segments of society traditionally under-represented in higher education[,] ... [has brought with it] numerous tensions, one of which concerns language and literacy skills’ (2012: 27). Although Murray and Klinger point out the importance of institutions providing appropriate support to ensure that students ‘within ‘non-traditional’ cohorts are not incorrectly labelled as ‘lacking academic quality’’ (2012: 27), Simpson (1996) points out the difficulties of supporting such diverse learners on ‘decreasing resources’ coupled with increasing pressure to meet conflicting expectations set by government agents. Although Simpson (1996) proposed a re-think of the HE student experience from entrance to exit, there are some educationalists and philosophers (such as Bourdieu) who feel that students’ propensity for learning is shaped prior to HE by their familial, social, cultural and economic status (Carr and Rayment-Pickard, 2010). If this is the case, then universities (academic support services) are being tasked with helping individuals to redefine their perceptions and relationships with learning, on top of helping them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to meet course (and central government) expectations.

When interviewees talked about supporting writing abilities specifically it was with reference to three key areas: 1. reading and use of research to support ideas, 2. critical thinking, and 3. use of language to communicate ideas plainly and explicitly (Effie, 26/5/16). A couple of interviewees highlighted an important relationship between reading and writing and knowledge development, highlighting the importance of ‘critical’ reading, which they felt was often overlooked. When talking about growing concerns with plagiarism, interviewees tended to describe cases arising from students who avoid (consciously or unconsciously) ‘critical’ reading, subsequently lack the experience of developing knowledge as well as lacking knowledge itself, having then very little to write and consider in HE assignments. A lack of motivation for study or an inability to manage themselves, was also considered by interviewees to be a contributing factor leading to plagiarism. In the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) paper: Plagiarism in Higher Education, students’ were described as plagiarising for a number of reasons, such as:

[differences in] cultural values and conventions[,] ... poor command of the English language[,] ... external pressures – be they financial, or relating to family or work[,] ... parental pressure and fear of failing, ... the need to get a particular grade or mark to progress into employment or onto higher level qualifications[,] ... poor time-management skills[,] ... other commitments[,] ... [S]tudies agree that some students resort to plagiarism simply because they are lazy and want to find the easiest route through the assessment process (QAA, 2016: 9)

There appear to be four key issues driving plagiarism: 1. the inadequacy of prior education experience of some students, particularly skills, knowledge and emotional maturity; 2. the expectation and current ‘need’ for a degree (and specific grades) to compete in the market place, rather than a desire for HE study and a desire for knowledge and personal development; 3. and the current need for some institutions to accept all students without adequate standards of language, education and motivation. According to the QAA, in a three year period 0.7 per cent of students had committed ‘academic offences’ however ‘the numbers of students who plagiarise and are not discovered’ was considered to be much higher.

Despite expectations of both central government and employers that graduates should be able, and motivated, to read, think and write independently, coupled with the societal convention of acknowledging sources (for material produced and circulated in the public realm), some interviewees described the idea of reading, referencing and critical thinking as alien concepts to large numbers of students entering HE. This seemed to be particularly prevalent in students entering HE straight from school, where long established practices of copying and pasting information was considered evidence of reading, synthesis and application in their secondary schools (Westminster Higher Education Forum, 2018). Conflicting practices arising from compulsory education, such as these, raise questions about the way in which the national curriculum (and examinations) shape views and values regarding learning and knowledge, subsequently shaping the way individuals' engage with learning and knowledge post-school.

### **1.5 Thinking critically**

Helping students to think 'critically' was one of the most important areas of support mentioned by all teams. Interviewees described 'common criticisms' raised by undergraduate and postgraduate course teams regarding students' tendency to be too descriptive in approaches to work. Interviewees highlighted that a lot of students did not know the difference between description and analysis or understand what was meant by being 'critical'; many students were also often described as unable to research, read and draw their own conclusions, finding it difficult to argue, support or develop informed ideas. Interviewees also highlighted a tendency for students to believe that written assignments involved right or wrong answers, rather than there being a number of viewpoints and approaches, therefore tending to expect prescriptive instructions. This over-reliance on being told what to write was described by some interviewees as a legacy from school and the idea of what several authors describe as being taught 'to the test' (Lebus, 2010; Thomas et al, 2015). Lebus considers this to be 'one of the consequences of the widespread use of exam and test results for accountability' (2010:

37). Thomas et al (2015) blames the ‘emphasis on exam results (and league table performance)’ for creating ‘a climate’ where teachers may feel the need to guarantee their pupils pass rates, by giving explicit institutions on how to pass the examinations. This practice is then described as impairing the development of learner independence (Thomas et al, 2015) – this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As well as ‘criticality’ being deemed important to idea development, so too was the means to communicate ideas when they have been formed. Although many teams talked about aiding students to verbalise and present ideas, most of the time interviewees talked about needing to support students in their written communication. However, not all interviewees were talking about the same types of writing or the same level of writing. Some interviewees talked about supporting both students and staff in their development of academic writing and writing for publication, as academic writing was described by one interviewee as no one’s ‘first language’ (Desiree, 15/4/16). In contrast, other interviewees described supporting the development of very basic literacy in order for students to be able to communicate in any coherent manner, just to be understood. These differences seemed to arise largely between different institutions and different subjects, although there were also occasions where different staff from the same team presented slight variations in views. Variations in viewpoints could arise from interviewees coming into contact with different subjects and students groups, but they could also arise from conflicts between official and unofficial - institutional and personal - perceptions of need and the role.

## **1.6 Different institutions different types of students**

Several interviewees pointed out the importance of having a ‘good’ level of written communication for life as a means to express oneself, it was also described as important in employment, as well as a means to access employment (applications, CVs and interview processes). One interviewee described

a good level of written communication as being high on ‘employers’ lists with ‘letters of application’ only receiving ‘about four seconds’ of attention before going ‘in the bin’ (Anton, 7/1/16). Nearly all interviewees felt that a lack of experience and confidence in written communication was a disadvantage to all individuals. Lebus, in *Learning and Control: Towards an Improved Model for Curriculum Development*, highlights employers’ complaints regarding ‘woefully low’ (2010: 36) standards of school leavers’ who cannot read and write in ways expected. Indeed some teams found themselves dealing with much more complex and fundamental issues with literacy, at much more basic levels, in comparison to other teams; there seemed to be a vast inequality of HE preparedness of students across institutions.

Indeed, according to Bourdieu educational institutions are not equal, for they hold different positions with varying levels of status and power, determining whether they can afford or not afford to choose who studies within them, thus reinforcing positions and status. Bourdieu gives Japan and France as examples:

those leaders who, coming themselves from the great public universities in Japan or from the *Grandes Ecoles* in France, advocate the revaluation of a technical education which has been reduced to the state of “fall-back” or dumping ground (and which, especially in Japan, also suffers from the competition of business schools) would regard as catastrophic the relegation of their own sons to technical school (1998: 29)

Bourdieu highlights inequalities between the ‘great’ and well established academic institutions known for producing ‘leaders’, and the ‘technical’ institutions catering for future subordinates who are unable to meet entrance expectations of the more salubrious establishments.

This echoes the binary divide between the polytechnics and universities in the 1960s, which arguably still exists between the Oxbridge, Russell Group, and some of the post-1992 establishments. Nixon states that:

older universities [in the UK] have almost permanent and undisputed occupancy of the premier league, the post-1992 universities are well represented across the broad span of second league institutions, and the bottom league is occupied almost entirely by institutions that have gained university status more recently. League tables are a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby those institutions located at the top recruit high-profile academic staff, attract the bulk of available research funding, and select students from a small and highly privileged pool of often privately educated applicants (2011: 63)

Social fields are sites of power-play, with agents (institutions and students) attempting to accumulate the desired capital of the field in order to hold stronger positions in the market place. Students who hold the educational status (Reay et al, 2005; Carr and Rayment-Pickard, 2010; Crawford et al, 2017) which enables them the choice of high ranking HEIs, have their educational status and position within society reinforced by association. Institutions with established status are equally able to attract and recruit the most able students, thus reproducing their status (Bourdieu, 1973) through the standard of graduate they produce. Therefore, different academic support teams will experience different levels of student literacy, depending on whether their institution can afford to choose the most appropriately qualified students or need to accept all applicants in order to bridge funding deficits.

The perceived deficits and needs of students raised by interviewees' were largely based on experiences of 'self-selecting' courses and students. For example, tutorial statistics for Downton (post-1992 broad subject) highlighted that their team's 'biggest users' were 'Health and Life Sciences' partly because this faculty was considered to be 'very proactive' and tended to refer students to the academic writing centre (Dylan, 15/4/16). This faculty was also described as quite large and academic staff were also described as proactively seeking guidance themselves on how to support their own students. Therefore, statistics alone cannot be considered an indication of 'student deficits' and needs but largely an indication of service use. For instance, at Downton fewer students were seen from art and design because, as the manager of this support team pointed out, the art and design department was much smaller in comparison to Business or Health and Life Sciences, plus their curriculum had less emphasis on particular types, and amounts, of writing. Therefore, the lack of art and design students engaging



with this team at this institution did not necessarily indicate that these students had a higher proficiency in written communication. As the team supporting Elvaston (post-1992 arts institution) highlighted, many of their art and design students struggled with different forms of writing. The use of statistics to evaluate need for, or impact of, academic support services, will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8 Business.

### **1.7 Access agreements and writing deficits**

On the whole, according to the academic support teams supporting them, creative and vocational subjects seemed to present higher numbers of students with much larger gaps between the skills and abilities they enter HE with and the expectations of their courses. Effie, manager and staff member for the Elvaston team, described high numbers of their art and design students as ‘typically’ struggling with writing, with a proportion of them being possibly dyslexic and lacking the ‘skills’, ‘confidence’ and prior educational ‘experience’ of writing in school (26/5/18). Effie went on to explain that these students ‘are just the sort of people who don’t like writing or not interested in writing ... and it’s a bit of an imposition for some of them to be expected to do something they really hate, they never paid any attention to it at school or never wanted to do it’ (Effie, 26/5/16).

Despite around 20% of academics at Elvaston (creative institution) also being described as dyslexic, the academics were not necessarily in a position to understand the needs of their students because each case was described as quite unique (Eileen, 26/5/16). Therefore, different students and academic staff, and the ‘deficits’ presented, often required individualistic consideration and tuition, thus driving the desire and need for personalised one-to-one support.

Poor written communication at Elvaston (post-1992 arts institution) was largely attributed to students gaining entry through access agreements:

students are being accepted onto courses from non-traditional academic backgrounds – BTEC or whatever, having never really written an essay[,] ... they thought they were just going to be taking photographs or watching films, not having to write about process, so it's unfair that they are not being equipped (Eileen, 26/5/16)

A 'fair number' of Creative English students at this institution, where writing was considered 'crucial' to the subject, were also described as not 'ready' to take on this kind of work; qualifications defined as 'access to HE' were highlighted as driving these inadequacies. Similarly, interviewees from Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group institution), Downton (post-1992 broad subject institution) and Arniston (1960s broad subject institution) mentioned that nursing and mature social work students, entering HE through access routes, commonly struggled with writing also. However, at Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group institution) the issue was defined as merely 'low confidence', whereas at Arniston (post-1960 institution) the issue was described as very low levels of literacy, indicating a possible difference in student abilities between the different institutions.

'Access' routes such as 'BTECs' were described by interviewees as inappropriate to many HE courses of study, and tended to give students a false sense of what to expect in HE (Webb et al, 2002: 21), thus setting some of the most academically vulnerable students up to fail. Although this raises questions about whether the deficit lies with the individual, or the institution, or even particular types of 'access' qualifications, several interviewees blamed political agendas for driving institutions to accept students on entrance tariffs below the necessary 'standard' for the courses or subjects (Antreas, 16/12/15). Interviewees at Arniston (post-1960 institution) particularly, felt that a lot of their work was as result of political agendas: 'we are drawing people in who are ... not yet intellectually ... equipped to be able to benefit [from HE] ... we are having to try and play catch-up ... in terms of ... basic skills' (Anna, 21/1/16). Indeed, one of the criticisms made by Success as a Knowledge Economy (2016) was about the financial waste involved in accepting students who are unable to benefit from HE. However, this scenario is arguably perpetuated by the removal of funding, coupled with the expectation that

disadvantaged students be accepted by institutions, all of which are reinforced by the 2016 document *Success as a Knowledge Economy*.

### **1.8 Inadequacy of traditional qualifications**

Students with traditional qualifications were also described as requiring academic support, even when writing was considered to be fundamental to their university degree. At Fairfax (post-WWII Russell Group institution) politics students, history students as well as English students with top grades in GCSE and A-level English, were described as sometimes struggling to write in sentences or clearly express points they are trying to make. Students were described as not ‘arriving at university’ with the set of ‘skills’ in order ‘to survive a traditional university degree’ (Eileen, 26/5/16) thus bringing into question yet again, the relevance or validity of compulsory education qualifications (Lebus, 2010), particularly English language. Graeme Paton (2016), reporting for *The Telegraph*, highlighted complaints about the national curriculum:

Prof Tombs said many undergraduates had been taught to write essays at school simply to pass tests ... “They've been drilled into writing a particular way, making particular kinds of arguments in a particular order and not writing their own ideas or responding to questions in a fresh and original way, and that's very damaging, and it's very visible” ... Prof Abulafia said he was “worried about the increasing evidence that undergraduates when they arrive, even at Cambridge, don't seem to know how to write essays. People who are undoubtedly extremely bright are grappling with difficulties in that area”

This followed with comments by the previous head of an exam board who stated that A grades in both GCSEs and A-levels were being achieved at school through teaching to the test: ‘Jerry Jarvis, who led the Edexcel board for four years, called for a radical overhaul of the grading system because top marks “no longer automatically mean top students”’ (Paton, 2012). However, students with more traditional qualifications such as A-levels were described by interviewees as requiring lesser amounts of support over a shorter period of time in comparison to students entering via non-traditional access routes.

## 1.9 Educational targets and collusion

Over fifty years on from Wankowski's (1968; 1991a) research into attrition (see chapter 3 Literature Review), the gap between prior learning experiences and the expectations of HE still prove to be an issue. Interviewees, particularly from Arniston (1960s broad subject institution) and Elvaston (post-1992 arts specialist institutions), talked about the 'huge' gap between the 'skills' or abilities that pupils leave school with and what lecturers and academic support services expect students to be capable of. Institutional targets in the compulsory sector were described as one of the key reasons for this gap: 'Our main clientele are those students who were encouraged by ... secondary schools ... to apply for university because the secondary school wanted to boost their ratings ... [however the students] are clearly unprepared ... and don't really know what they're doing' (Asaad, 4/2/16).

School teachers were described as being too 'keen' to get students through examinations, that they 'probably helped ... [the pupils] too much' (Asaad, 4/2/16), thus contributing to students' inability to 'cope' on their own in HE. This was echoed by another interviewee who explained that pupils in secondary schools tended to be 'templated to get through exams, so ... [were] not necessarily able ... to work independently' (Eileen, 26/5/16). Therefore, rather than compulsory education empowering individuals and facilitating the growth of independence, it was often considered by interviewees to be creating dependency and false expectations of what it means to learn.

Indeed, at a recent Westminster Higher Education Forum on Priorities for quality assurance in UK HEIs - grade inflation, tackling plagiarism, and the future of degree classification (2018), several speakers presented evidence that some pupils at GCSE and A-level were lacking assessed coursework, being helped too much, being taught too closely to exam papers or being actively encouraged to plagiarise, in order to guarantee pass rates. This lack of academic integrity experienced in secondary school was likely to be carried forward into HE either because students' were unable to cope with

working independently in HE and therefore would turn to other illegitimate methods to meet HE assessment criteria, or because illegitimate approaches had been normalised and were easier than undertaking the work independently (Westminster Higher Education Forum, 2018).

Similar to policy-driven examination targets in the compulsory sector, targets in some further education institutions were also described as contributing to examples of learner dependency. One interviewee at Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group institution) talked about their first-hand experience of teaching functional English and GCSE resits in an FE college:

it's a bit like "write like this because this will help you pass" and I think that's because the [FE] tutors are under such pressure – they do have really strict targets to hit ... all of our students had to pass the level that we had said they would pass and I think subject tutors were the same – they were held to account if any students failed, but because they have so many students and so many classes to teach I think they probably sometimes did spoon-feed the students ... "you should write this, and you should write it like this" which is then problematic when they [the students] come to university ... there's loads of different ways they could approach a question [in HE] and ... [the students have] got to go out and research by themselves (Chey, 22/4/16)

Spoon feeding students was described as sometimes the only way for teachers to meet examination targets, particularly when faced with large knowledge and skills deficits, low pupil motivation, and large cohorts. Therefore, examinations targets run the risk of perpetuating the very deficits and social divides that the very targets were designed to address (Grove, 2014; Blumenfeld, 2015).

### **1.10 Education and the reinforcement of social divides**

At Arniston (post-1960 broad subject university) interviewees highlighted a higher need for writing support coming from ethnic minority groups from economically deprived areas, studying on more vocational courses. The two main campuses for this institution seemed to present both a social and academic divide. The originating campus, in a more economically affluent area, consisted largely of liberal subjects and a 'mix of ethnicity[,] probably predominantly white UK ... from grammar school A-level ... middle-class' (Adie, 20/1/16) with higher levels of written communication. The newer campus, in a more economically deprived area, was described as 'providing a lot of local students with

a vocational course that they can do' (Antreas, 16/12/15) consisting of a 'much higher level of [UK] black ethnic minority ... [with a] broader range of educational backgrounds and levels of attainments' (Adie, 20/1/16). These students were described as having poorer levels of written communication, with much more 'basic' and time consuming needs for support.

Similarly the academic support team for Downton (post-1992 broad subject institution) experienced a high percentage of students accessing one-to-one writing support from 'economically deprived areas of the UK' (Dylan, 15/4/16), with a higher percentage of black and ethnic minority students. This institution was described by one interviewee as offering technical and vocational courses for student groups without the academic means to access research intensive universities. Both the 2011 and 2016 policies define HE as a means to social mobility and equality, however unless the inequalities in economic capital and subsequently compulsory education experiences are addressed, then the academic experience of poorer students in HE is likely to mirror earlier educational experiences (Crawford et al, 2017; Reay, 2017). Universities are therefore caught between widening participation agendas, and economic and educational inequality and diversity, with academic support - in some cases - being used as a means to rectify these social-economic inequalities.

### **1.11 Summary**

Academic support teams are trying to remedy academic skills deficits arising from prior learning and access agreements in order for students to engage with their HE studies. The key areas requiring remedying were around reading, writing and critical thinking. Standardised educational priorities, examinations and targets in the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors were described as driving some institutions and teachers to get pupils through qualifications at the sake of developing learner independence, rather than face the consequences of missed targets or loss of reputation (Grove, 2014; Blumenfeld, 2015).

Similarly in HE, academic support is the means to which HEIs try to meet institutional priorities and targets. Differences in power and funding between institutions and subjects has led to differences in priorities. However, differences in institutional priorities between recruiting the most academically suited students to maintain academic standards as opposed to recruiting all students to bridge funding gaps, has led to an inequality of experience between academic support teams, with some experiencing much wider and diverse deficits between the academic skills of students and the expectations of courses. Differences in institutions and students have led to differences in approaches to academic support, such as the academic literacies model (Lea and Street, 1998; 2000) focused on writing, and the broad skills model which includes learning how to learn as well as developing emotional resilience and self-management skills. The next section in this chapter will explore perceptions that students' emotional resilience and abilities to manage themselves requires remedying.

## **2. Emotional Resilience and Self-Management**

### **2.1 Time management and performance agendas**

Aside from specific 'academic skills', deficits in students' emotional resilience and ability to manage themselves, their time and resources also emerged from the interviews. Time management and anything to do with managing one's self was only supported by teams who adopted the broad skills model, therefore these teams mainly raised this as an issue. This could be for two reasons: 1. students will present deficits to teams where they know they can get support with them; 2. institutions that take a broad skills approach do so because the needs of students entering their institution require it. As raised by literature in chapter 3 (Literature Review), as widening participation strategies are successfully employed, the 'range of issues' presented to academic staff tend to increase and diversify (Barkas, 2011: 8).

Although largely focused on writing support, one interviewee at Blenheim (pre-WWII social science institution), mentioned the challenge of time management facing their mainly mature part-time students. He explained that mature students were often ‘juggling’ both work and children alongside their studies; as one interviewee indicated: ‘I totally get the just-in-time submission and the “do the best I can”’ attitude (Boris, 29/2/16). Mature students on part-time postgraduate courses were often described by interviewees as having less time to develop their skills and undertake their assignments while managing jobs and families. They were therefore just doing ‘the best’ they could with the time they had as opposed to being supported to reach their full potential. However all students of all ages were described as often juggling study alongside employment even when studying fulltime. This amplified pressure on students, and academic support teams, was largely attributed to increased participation from economically poorer groups, who needed to work alongside study to meet rising costs of living and education. Thus reinforcing the idea that a lack of economic capital reduces the capacity for accumulating cultural capital (Reay et al, 2005; Crawford et al, 2017; Reay, 2017), as well as leading to a problematising of non-traditional HE students.

## **2.2 Managing social activities and study**

Rising costs of HE study and the pressure on institutions to provide an ‘enhanced’ ‘social experience’ presents students with yet another activity to divide their time between. One interviewee explained that the students at their institution ‘are increasingly told ... that the university is meant to be a fun experience, ... [however with] the growing emphasis on the ... [social online hub] ... the student union ... [and] the party scene[,] ... academic study is seen as secondary’ (Anna, 21/1/16). This broad skills team was therefore not just supporting students who were struggling to manage their time and resources between study and a job, but taking on the role in loco parentis (Furedi, 2017) and reminding students of their responsibilities so as not to get too immersed in their social lives.



Furedi (2017) considers there to be a social phenomenon driving student dependency and an extension to parenting occurring within Anglo-American universities. Furedi gives the example of the shift from students attending university interviews independently to being accompanied in the present by parents, with ‘many’ students regarding university as a ‘more difficult and challenging version of school’ (2017: 6). Furedi’s mention of school is interesting, for, arguably, student dependency could be attributed to the thirteen years experience - from five to eighteen - of following a predefined curriculum and continual testing regime, devised by what could be conceived as an ‘unknown’ power or parent figure. The notion of an unseen, unknown and unquestionable power determining what is correct and incorrect knowledge and standards, shaping and determining the futures of young people, could indeed affect the development of autonomy. This control and overt focus on curriculum and examinations at school could also overshadow forms of experiential learning that may be crucial to developing criticality and independence.

Students struggling to manage time between social activities and study was often described by interviewees as an issue for those who have entered HE straight from school, lacking the independence, maturity and experience of prioritising and managing one’s own time. However, one interviewee pointed out that the ‘student experience’, rather than subject study, is being used as a marketing tool by institutions in order to compete for school leavers:

My kids are in secondary school now ... they are in year 10 and forever get visits from the university, and the university tells them how fabulous the sports facilities are and you can have a gap year and you make loads of friends, they kind of seem to hide the fact that actually you need to do some work ... I think a lot of students are lulled into this false sense of “oh you’ll be alright” and then here of course they’re not because there’s nobody there who tells them what to do all of the time (Asaad, 4/2/16)

This interviewee highlighted a relationship between false expectations, school-induced dependency and poor time management, which subsequently affected students’ ability to manage their learning. The manager of the Chartwell academic support team (pre-WWII Russell Group institution) sent all first year degree students a booklet on time management because time management and organisation

was described as ‘one of the key things that students struggle with’ (Carl, 22/4/16). This interviewee ‘surreptitiously’ added time management tips ‘on everything’ for first year undergraduates, ‘to try and get it embedded’ (Carl, 22/4/16) into the ‘consciousness’ and practices of students (Johnson, 1993; Shreeve, 2007).

### **2.3 Imposter syndrome and habitus**

Although an inability to manage oneself was described as presenting a barrier to learning and a subsequent breakdown in emotional resilience, some students were described as entering HE with very low emotional resilience to start with. Cotton et al define resilience as a ‘positive adaption to threat or adversity, ... [that] may lead to ‘surviving’, ‘coping’ or ‘thriving’ (2017: 65). Several interviewees talked about the increase in students suffering with anxieties and mental health issues over the last few years. Very low emotional resilience was highlighted as a barrier to even the most basic engagement in learning. Although ‘confidence’ building was mentioned by at least one member of every team and featured in some service statements, as it was considered to be integral to all aspect of learning, low emotional resilience, at times, proved to be a barrier to the very basic engagement in learning environments.

Despite interviewees highlighting student difficulties with writing and communication as affecting students’ academic confidence, a lack of confidence was not always necessarily as a result of a specific skills deficit, but more of a general belief and outlook (Furedi, 2017). Several interviewees talked about students believing that they were not good enough for HE study, described as ‘imposter syndrome’ (Antreas, 16/12/15). Imposter syndrome is a belief that a person does not belong within the position they hold and therefore believes that they cannot fulfil the expectations of that position (Ramsey and Brown, 2018). However, these individuals generally have the desire to belong and will therefore, where possible, do everything they can to hide their perceived inadequacy. The issue occurs

when individuals attempt to hide what they perceive as their inadequacies rather than engaging with all of the learning activities designed to develop their abilities; therefore their beliefs become reinforced through a lack of engagement. This is arguably the same for students who present low emotional resilience who consciously exclude themselves from learning activities and learning environments through fear that their emotional equilibrium may be damaged in some way (Furedi, 2017).

Bourdieu supports the notion that a person's ability to grapple with anything challenging is dependent on historical 'dispositions (or habitus)' (2001: 7); therefore dependent on prior experiences and conditioning (formal and familial), and the 'structures' and perceptions of themselves, constructed through these experiences. Therefore, students can be open to challenge and change, or struggle and resist anything that challenges long-held perceptions of themselves, regardless of how the belief may limit their potential or maintain an undesirable status quo. Possessing confidence, in a lot of cases, was therefore described as making the difference between students being receptive to teaching and learning or unreceptive. For some students the best support was described by several interviewees as showing some empathy for a student's current thinking but then enabling them to view their thinking as position-related, therefore encouraging and guiding the individual to take a different view and alter their position. Empathy alone, however, may reinforce established positions as fixed and immovable. Activities and policies that reinforce dependency and disempowerment (albeit inadvertently) go against the purpose of 'education' as a means to holistic development and fundamental change for the good of the individual and society.

#### **2.4 Different students and different pressures**

Interviewees highlighted a correlation between widening participation students and a 'lack of confidence' (Beatrice, 29/2/16). This lack of confidence seemed to be particularly prevalent amongst

mature students enrolled on more vocational-type courses, even if their work was considered to be of an acceptable standard. Therefore, in many ways the role of academic support, particularly the broad skills teams, was to help raise students' 'confidence levels' (Chey, 22/4/16) or, arguably, develop confidence in learning where it may have been non-existent. Developing confidence in learning in HE is an interesting concept, for I would argue that the role of education from the moment individuals enter school should be to develop confidence in learning, if education is truly holistic. However, interviewees regularly recounted student experiences, and their own, where feelings of disempowerment and academic inferiority were fostered in compulsory education. This then places a lot of pressure and expectations on HE establishments to undo the 'damage' of school (Anton, 7/1/16; Asaad, 4/2/16). This theme of school education disempowering individuals reoccurs throughout this and the following chapters.

Indeed, it was not only widening participation students struggling with confidence, as one interviewee highlighted; for more 'traditional' students were also presenting anxieties. 'First year medics' at Chartwell (pre-WWII Russel Group institution), who had taken science A-levels and were used to achieving top grades in school (Chey, 22/4/16), often found their first assignment challenging because it was 'reflective' 'touchy-feely', with not necessarily an obvious or single answer (Chey, 22/4/16). The combination of being taught to task in school meant that students often required a lot of reassurance when faced with anything outside of their past experience and comfort zone. Anxiety to understand an assignment that is less structured and formulaic than previously experienced in school is then compounded by the desire, or pressure, to maintain high grades. Performance anxiety was echoed by another interviewee at another institution who described more traditional students on more academic courses as the 'worried well' (Eileen, 26/5/16), in other words, they were doing 'okay' but were anxious about either a particular assignment or generally anxious to maintain the best grades possible. The increase in graduate numbers has undoubtedly intensified competition for jobs, therefore

grades can be a distinguishing feature in the market place. However, I would argue that the political paradigm of ‘performativity’ and ‘competition’ (see chapter 2 Policy, chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion), which seems to be the dominant discourse in UK education, is creating anxieties at all levels including educational leadership. This anxious drive towards targets narrows the focus of education down to a means to compete rather than develop.

What is noticeable about the anxieties of high achieving traditional students and the low confidence of widening participation students, is that both groups are first year students experiencing conflicts between external and internal structures. However, the extent of conflict differs between the two groups. Whilst the habitus and capital of the traditional ‘high achieving’ A-level student may conflict only with a specific type of assignment, the habitus and capital of the unconfident widening participation student seemed more likely to conflict with the very notion of studying in HE. This would therefore have much more of a debilitating effect on a student’s ability to learn, as it would mean having to move beyond inner structures (Bourdieu, 2013: 7) and perceptions of themselves as learners.

## **2.5 Transition into HE**

Several interviewees considered the development of a student’s sense of belonging within HE as key to retention and achievement. Interviewees at Arniston (post-1960 broad subject institution) talked about a series of academic acclimatisation programmes for different groups of students such as: mature part-time, international and first year undergraduates straight from school. The purpose was described as ‘not only to build skills but ... to build confidence’ (Anton, 7/1/16). However, for a lot of students this may also involve one-to-one tutorials with a team member:

They come in [to academic support] often they are very stressed they are very worried and when they go out they are completely different, I had a student come in and see me in the library last year ... she hadn’t slept for about three days she was so worried about this work ... she was Italian so she just didn’t know where she fitted in here or what was expected of her (Anton, 7/1/16)

Understanding expectations and developing a familiarity and belonging within a social system, according to the research of Bourdieu (2013), is about understanding the unwritten rules of the game (doxa), which educational institutions and those familiar with such systems, may take for granted. Shared habitus and cultural capital, stemming from one's educational and cultural background, can put people in positions of power, with those outside of the 'know' being viewed, and viewing themselves, as having some form of deficit or 'gap' (Bourdieu, 2001) requiring a remedy. Interviewees described themselves as having to aid international students to negotiate not only different educational systems but also different social systems. Wingate (2015) considers it to be the duty of institutions to ensure that students are fully integrated into HE, problematising the institution rather than the student if expectations are not transparently communicated and skills and knowledge not incrementally developed – institutional deficits will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9 Discussion.

Mature students were also described by interviewees as arriving in HE with anxieties, however because many were often studying part-time, due to other commitments, it was difficult for them to integrate into university life. However, mature students were described by some interviewees as more emotionally resilient than a lot of younger students, therefore more likely to persevere with their studies than younger, struggling, students. Although school leavers were described by interviewees as needing a transition from compulsory education into 'independent study' (Antreas, 16/12/15), stage one of HE was defined by the post-1960 team as a 'hurdle' for lots of different student groups. Therefore, most interviewees considered it imperative to aid first year undergraduates with their transition into HE, regardless of background, if institutions are to retain them.

## **2.6 Increase in mental health, anxieties and demand for tutorials**

Students suffering with mental health issues, like any other students entering HE, may suffer anxieties, however students suffering with a mental health issues were described by interviewees as being more

sensitive to pressure at any stage of their studies. Several interviewees talked about a rise in student anxiety and mental health issues over the last few years, one team in particular experienced a sharp rise: ‘I don’t know whether ... [it] is to do with the level of financial investment ... or whether it’s aligned to greater awareness of mental health issues and people disclosing more readily than they used to’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). Subsequently this team were experiencing a much higher number of students seeking extensions on assignment deadlines ‘on the back of mental health issues’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). The support needs of these students were described as ‘very complex’ (Eileen, 26/5/16), thus increasing demand for one-to-one academic support over a much longer period; this was then having an impact on staff ‘energy levels’ and ‘quality’ of delivery (Effie, 26/5/16). Demand for individual tuition was described as rising beyond staffing capacity, therefore despite the developmental benefits of individual tuition, this team was going to limit tutorial availability and instead return to weekly ‘generic classes’ on the ‘basics’ of study in order to achieve efficiency (Effie, 26/5/16). This is a move from what Peelo (1994) would have described as individual-centred support - personalised consideration of emotion and intellect - to generic pre-defined skills tuition on mass. This highlights the conflict between teaching efficiency (BIS, 2016) - teaching within the financial constraints (business model) of the institution and department, and teaching quality (BIS, 2016) – aiding individuals to evolve beyond complex and deep-rooted barriers to education.

Although demand for tutorials across all participating academic support teams were described as high, particularly where the offer was limitless, several interviewees talked about the emotional needs of students:

we’re an academic service really but actually people come here because ... they have got mental health problems ... some students come here to see me because they feel safe and they just think “good I can talk to ... [the adviser] ... and that would be helpful rather than being out there ...” [in] may be a more judgemental environment (Anton, 7/1/16)

This interviewee described some students as clinging to the service like ‘drowning’ people, obtaining and attending as many tutorials as possible regardless of whether their work is developing or not. This team was split however, some team members felt that this was not an appropriate form of support as it colluded with students and supported their position of dependency rather than challenging it (this philosophy is discussed in more detail in chapter 7 Development). Other team members, however, were concerned with ensuring they offered a service to students, ensuring (for professional as well as personal reasons) that they maintain their availability regardless of how students were using the service (this philosophy is discussed in more detail in chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion).

## **2.7 Summary**

Academic support teams, particularly those dealing with students straight from school, assumed a parental role (Furedi, 2017) long side academic support. This involved reassuring anxious students who are unsure of what is expected of them, guiding some to challenge limiting perceptions and beliefs, and emotionally propping up those who appear unable to manage HE study without continuous one-to-one support. Despite interviewees from most teams talking about providing academic acclimatisation workshops and seminars, demand for one-to-one support was described as high and increasing, raising questions about the relationship between student preparedness (academic and emotional) and levels of responsibility for their own learning. The next part of this chapter will discuss student motivation.

## **3. Motivation**

### **3.1 Student engagement and failure**

Several interviewees highlighted a relationship between student motivation, student engagement and attainment. As one tutor at Arniston (1960s broad subject institution) expressed:



there's a majority position and a minority position, the minority position will be the students I want to salute who come to us, these are ones who are struggling but are aware of it and are really conscientiously, concerned to improve their performance, and it's a delight to work with them. The majority position I think will be the number of students who are bouncing along the bottom in danger of failing not in the slightest bit interested in putting in any hard work that they need to put in, but have been told that they need to come and see us; I am afraid I sit here on many occasions wondering why we are going through the motions, but that's what we're doing (Anna, 21/1/16)

This interviewee, and other team members, described the 'minority' position as largely mature students because these students were generally described as taking their studies 'much more seriously [because] they've got a much higher investment in it' (Anna, 21/1/16); studying as a mature student with various responsibilities was thought to be a 'big ask' (Anna, 21/1/16). The 'majority', on the other hand, were more typically described as younger students entering straight from compulsory education 'wanting to get through [university] with minimum effort' (Anna, 21/1/16), lacking the self-discipline and 'interest' needed to study (Anna, 21/1/16; Asaad, 4/2/16).

Some mature students, particularly those who hold positions of authority in other areas of their lives, were described as being more likely to experience 'cognitive dissonance' - conflicts in status and power:

[as a mature student] you don't know where you are in the pecking order because in your professional life you are in a position but in your student life you are in a different position and you're getting, I think the correct word is 'cognitive dissonance'; you don't know where you are in that pecking order and it does funny things to you ... you tend to overcompensate ... so you either become very infantile or you become very aggressive and assertive ... because you're in very different roles (Anna, 21/1/16)

Cognitive dissonance can be understood through Bourdieu's field analysis as a psychological discord arising from assuming different positions, levels of power and status within different fields. Individuals who enter an unknown field may respond uncharacteristically to a loss in power, particularly if assuming positions of power in their professional or home life. Becoming overly assertive and authoritarian in a field without holding the relevant capital (knowledge) of the field could, arguably, be an example of an individual attempting to transfer authority held in other roles (fields). Either way

this unconscious reaction can affect how a student engages with their course, and their openness to challenge and change, something which they may need support with, in order to understand and move beyond unhelpful responses.

### **3.2 Motivation and poor attendance**

Although habitus and motivation for learning can be shaped prior to HE, thus affecting student attendance and engagement in HE, policy-defined HEI performance targets e.g. student retention and achievement, appear to be underpinned by two assumptions: 1. the motivation and performance of students is solely based on the efforts and quality of HE institutions; and 2. everyone entering HE really wants to be there to learn. Approximately half of all interviewees raised an issue with student motivation in one form or another:

we have an increasing cohort of students coming from South East London ... [who] come here on a Monday morning or ... afternoon ... and leave on Thursday, sometimes Friday if they can't help it. They are not students at ... [this university] and that is not the focus of their life ... They go to the seminars they think they have to turn up for, and then off they go to their social life ... everything back in London. And that doesn't work. Very often they'll come to us for a quick fix and I say "I can help you with the essay but it's not going to rescue you" (Asaad, 4/2/16)

Motivation was described as complex, and something that academic support teams had very little influence over, other than 'encouraging people to acquire the patterns of thinking [and behaviour] that will enable them to succeed academically on their own' (Anna, 21/1/16). Similarly, the team supporting Creative English students in Elvaston (post-1992 arts institution) described them as uninterested in any work outside of their specific knowledge-base and enjoyment. These Creative English students 'might write poetry or things like that ... [because] that's what they're into, and then someone comes along to talk to them about cultural theory and being critical and it doesn't mean anything to them' (Effie, 26/5/16). Art students at the same institution were also described as only being interested in 'practical' work and of the view that they 'have not come ... [to university] to write an essay' (Ethan, 26/5/16).

Rogers describes an ‘attribution-theory-based approach’ to understanding motivation, outlining what he describes as some ‘important’ assumptions:

behavioural variations [are] generally associated with motivational variables (persistence, effort expenditure, task enjoyment and sophistication in strategy use) are all linked to a person’s expectations for success and the value they place on that success. Second, and most importantly, these expectations and values are heavily influenced by the ways in which that person has explained previous and related instances of success and failure. These explanations are arrived at through the process of attributing an event to a particular cause. The characteristics of this cause determine the response to the success and failure (2002: 115).

According to this theory, students’ motivation for success depends on what Bourdieu would describe as previous dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984; 1987). According to the literature referred to by Rogers (2002), motivation to succeed depends on a complex mix of whether students are able to cope with the task, gain pleasure from it and are able to persevere when the task is difficult. This also involves the students’ relationship with success, which can be described in three ways: 1. Whether the student is programmed to succeed or fail, in other words the experience that they have become accustomed to; 2. what the student perceives as ‘success’ e.g. completing their degree or something else that is competing; 3. How the student has experienced success and failure in the past and what they perceived as the ‘cause’, in other words whether they perceived it to be as a result of their actions or the actions of others – the fine line between attitudes of dependency or independence. This goes some way to explain why political agendas to ‘educate’ those who national government feel may need it most, do not always work, because the individual may not necessarily be motivated to change – consciously or unconsciously.

### **3.3 Pressured into doing a degree**

Several interviewees blamed widening participation agendas (Robbins, 1963; Dearing, 1997; Blair, 2001; BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016) for the increased pressure for individuals to undertake degrees. Some

students were described as enrolling onto a degree because ‘everybody else ... [is] doing it’ (Asaad, 4/2/16), or because ‘maybe mum and dad encouraged it, or schools said “oh today is UCAS application day off you go and fill it out”’ (Asaad, 4/2/16). Several interviewees felt that the job market was also perpetuating pressure on individuals to undertake degrees:

higher education is perceived as compulsory by large sections of both employers and employees, even if it’s described as non-compulsory the perception is it is compulsory and so with that comes a higher level of ‘duty of care’ on the part of the providers because in the distant past when there weren’t ... [academic support] you’d have a very small section of the population going to read their subject, the idea was that they had chosen to do it and therefore it was more on them, now ... [students] haven’t really chosen to do it they kind of have to do it[,] even when you’re talking about Master’s degrees it’s pretty required for a lot of careers (Boris, 29/2/16)

This interviewee in particular described two changes that they considered to be driving this situation:

1. a change in education system and policies, for example the drive to get more students into HE, as well as
2. the employment market moving towards more ‘tertiary industries, service sector ... desk-based type work’ and ‘technology’ (Boris, 29/2/16). The latter was described as leading employers to ask for ‘more paper-based qualifications’ (Boris, 29/2/16) using ‘pre-existing’ measures - ‘degrees’, which ‘escalate’ into masters to differentiate ‘between applicants’ (Boris, 29/2/16). Wolf (2002) would argue that the need to undertake further study for individuals to differentiate themselves perpetuates HE as an industry, thus fitting with central government’s economic agenda.

While some students are described as entering HE with the desire to learn and develop knowledge (cultural capital), others were described as seeing a degree as just a means to compete for work - symbolic capital that could be traded for economic capital. The conflict in motivation between HE for knowledge (cultural capital) and HE for employment (economic capital) was described as conflicting within classrooms, not just dividing some of the students but also dividing some of the subject specialists and students:

I’ve worked at four universities ... and its happened everywhere ... - the conflicts between large amounts of students doing the degree programme for career purposes while the staff are

teaching as if they're teaching novice researchers, ... from what I've seen it causes staff frustration ... they would prefer the students to have a different motivation and when they realise that the students are motivated by reasons that are different from their own ... they enjoy the teaching less ... you can't blame students needing a degree to get a job (Boris, 29/2/16).

The 'need' for a degree was considered to be 'more prominent in the current economic climate' (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). Therefore, despite expectations of what higher education could be doing for individuals, interviewees repeatedly explained that they 'can't ignore' the fact that students increasingly need degrees 'to become more employable and to secure the position that they want in the job market' (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). This was described as becoming an important focus of student expectations now (Desiree, 2016).

One interviewee from Downton felt that preparing students 'too closely for ... graduate-level job[s] they can enter in six months, which is the [government] measuring time' (Desiree, 15/4/16), was 'incredibly short-sighted' (Desiree, 15/4/16). 'A year taking stock', particularly for 'creative students', was thought to be quite normal (Desiree, 15/4/16), and 'Wetherspoons' as a job while students 'consolidate their thoughts about their art and ... [their] career as an artist' was described as 'perfectly reasonable' (Desiree, 15/4/16). However because this kind of trajectory does not fit with governmental expectations, it was subsequently not the statistics that institutions need or desire (Anna, 21/1/16; Desiree, 15/4/16). Therefore, regardless of what may be the best choice for individuals, they were often described by interviewees as being, firstly, encouraged into HE, and then encouraged to take the most lucrative paths out of HE, despite their own desires. This scenario is, arguably, central government taking on the role of *in loco parentis*. Students are encouraged into higher education with the aim to develop as autonomous thinkers and workers, only to find they are then disempowered, having decisions about how they progress taken away from them. Areas of careers are effectively made unavailable to students as a result of politically motivated performance targets as institutions tailor the curriculum to more lucrative employment and data sets.

### **3.4 Summary**

It is difficult to influence students' motivations, particularly if a lack of motivation means that the students' do not attend and engage with their institution. Despite the difficulties in influencing motivations, all white papers, particularly the most recent (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016), do not consider the motivation of students in their plans to develop the nation, or in their modes and criteria in evaluating the quality of institutions. Government widening participation agendas assume that all people wish to do several years of study towards a degree, however this is not necessarily the case. Equally, the increasing focus on commerce undermines the value of a degree, it seems to encourage some students to focus solely on what is necessary to meet assessments rather than what may be useful to individual's development or to reach their potential (Hill et al, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Although deficits appear to exist within individuals, deficits exist only within a particular context. In other words, a deficit only arises when someone in a position of power defines and enforces an expectation that individuals or institutions are yet to meet; as Bourdieu indicates 'a gap [is] ... a relational property existing only in and through its relation with other properties' (1998: 6). UK HE policy has increasingly used education to define deficits and enforce remedial agendas in the name of the economy, despite, as Barkas (2011) points out, policies and agendas clearly not improving the economy (economic capital) or contributing to social harmony and the development of individuals and cultural capital. It is therefore questionable whether the source of deficit lies within individuals or within educational institutions – both the compulsory sector and HE - as a result of the policies and political powers governing them. Political and institutional power and deficits will be analysed later in the thesis (see chapter 9 Discussion).

The relentless focus on education to meet the needs of the economy is undoubtedly reducing the benefits of HE mentioned by Robbins (1963), but it is also affecting how education and our 'learning society' (BIS, 2011) view and value learning. Education is not a quick fix to deficits leading to social mobility (BIS, 2016); in order to overcome national 'deficits' there needs to be a significant change in how education is viewed, one which places social and cultural values, rather than economic ones, at its core (Gamache, 2002; Wingate, 2006; Barkas, 2011; Wingate, 2015). The next chapter will explore the development approach to academic support and the idea of developing and empowering individuals (emotion and intellect) to enable them to experience more fulfilling lives and contribute more meaningfully to society (Quinlan, 2011).

## Chapter 7: Development

### Introduction

I think ... [higher education] has a number of purposes; to get students to develop as people, as academics, as critical thinkers, as researchers, as professionals who can get on in their professions and get professional jobs underpinned by research and scholarship and skills; to move people from school into adulthood really, and equip them with the skills to handle life and to make a real contribution to society ... I think ... [the purpose of higher education] is to help people (Dylan, 15/4/16)

The term ‘development’ emerged from interviews with those in academic support roles and from the literature (critical perspectives and practices) discussed in chapter 3; the term ‘development’ has two meanings though. In terms of practice, ‘development’ is used to represent a departure from deficit models of support and instead signifies a proactive and anticipatory approach to meeting the needs of all students (Hill et al, 2010), usually embedded within the curriculum (Wingate, 2015). The term ‘development’ also represents a sense of purpose; specifically the aspirational perception of interviewees that their role is to support the holistic growth of individuals (Roberts and Stewart, 2008; Quinlan, 2011; Badley, 2016), as opposed to merely remedying gaps between abilities and expectations. Therefore, rather than supporting surface learning to aid students to ‘get’ degrees ‘efficiently’ (BIS, 2016), interviewee aspirations were to stimulate depth of development (Ainley and Weyers, 2011). Quinlan points out that in 2011 there was ‘relatively little discourse in the UK about the ways that higher education can support not only intellectual development, but the development of the whole student’ (2011: 5). In 2018 there still seems to be a lack of literature in this area.

This chapter is concerned with the latter definition of development, which Quinlan describes as ‘an integrative view of learning and development that emphasises the connections and relationships between thinking, feeling and action, rather than separating cognitive dimensions of education from affective or moral dimensions’ (2011: 2). Underpinned by social values, the development approach is to enable individuals to have more empowered and content lives (Gibbs, 2017), and make more



meaningful contributions to society (Barkas, 2011; Gibbs, 2017). This approach therefore values the role of assimilated knowledge in the empowerment of individuals (Pring, 1995) for the development of humanity (Young, 2008). This is in opposition to the kind of surface notion of knowledge considered key to competition (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016), commerce and power (Canaan and Shumar, 2008), all of which Ainley describes as ‘destructive ... of human sociality ... [and] the natural world on which humanity depends’ (2016: 6).

This chapter will therefore explore interviewee responses regarding the relationship between the holistic benefits of HE and the developmental role of academic support, exploring values and practices underpinning this approach. This chapter will be divided into five subtopics, indicating the five main themes arising from interviewees: 1. Rite of Passage; 2. Choice and Identity; 3. Challenging the Status Quo; 4. Opening Minds; 5. Holistic Development and Social Values.

## **1. Rite of Passage**

### **1.1 Independence**

Higher education was often described by interviewees as bridging the gap between school and adulthood. As Quinlan points out, ‘developmentally, young adulthood is a time of change, in which students are grappling with identity’ and moving from dependency (2015: 8). In its most rudimentary form, HE was described as offering an opportunity for young people to move ‘away from home’ for the first time (Chey, 22/4/16) and ‘live independently’ (Adie, 20/1/16). Moving away from home was described by interviewees as a really important step in breaking with familiar surroundings and the familial environment. This break was considered to be significant in developing ‘a life of ... [one’s] own’ (Adie, 20/1/16), ‘away from parents’ (Adie, 20/1/16); thus intimating a break with familial habitus and move more towards autonomy and potential beyond familial trajectories (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984).

With a lack of grants and with a rise in tuition fees, however, it was recognised by interviewees that moving away from home was not an option open to all young students now. Thomas states that:

many new [widening participation] students study at their local higher education institution, and thus they do not live in HE accommodation, but rather have to commute to participate. This excludes them from many social and communal aspects of the HE experience. This is reinforced by a high dependence on 'part-time' employment for financial survival (2005: 99)

Not being immersed in a community and in study could be one reason for disengagement, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, HE was described by interviewees as metaphorically 'move[ing] people from school into adulthood[,] ... equip[ping] them with the skills to handle life and to make a real contribution to society' (Dylan, 15/4/16), enabling students to 'have a positive impact' and make a 'difference' in the world (Anton, 7/1/16). The notion of moving people from school to adulthood implies that school does not necessarily contribute to the development of adults, and therefore does not necessarily prepare people adequately for life. Thomas et al indicate that students underestimate 'the difference between independent learning in HE and school/college' (2015: 17) and therefore benefit from some guidance in making the transition, as highlighted in the previous chapter ('Remedial').

Several interviewees mentioned a big part of their role as 'promote[ing] independent learning' in HE (Ethan, 26/5/16), and enabling students to become 'managers of their own learning[,] ... recognise when something ... [is not] working and ... fix it themselves' (Eileen, 26/5/16). Therefore, the desired cultural capital that teams were developing in students was not necessarily focused entirely on subject knowledge, but on self-knowledge and subsequently emotional resilience - a 'positive adaption to threat or adversity' (Cotton et al, 2017: 65). Self-knowledge and emotional resilience, was associated with better decision making, academic achievement, and general contentment (Carlson, 2013). Arguably, resilience is closely related to 'self-efficacy' which 'reduces stress by allowing students to view 'threat' as a 'challenge', thus giving students control over the situation' (Turner et al, 2017: 806). Indeed, from my own experience, the students that struggle the most with their studies are not always

the least able, but often the ones who experience education and learning as a problem unique to them, rather than learning being a challenge that everyone faces to varying degrees.

## **1.2 Summary**

HE was considered to be the transitional bridge for individuals, from school and childhood, into adulthood. Part of this development was thought to be aiding individuals to cultivate independence away from parents, however with the ever-increasing cost of study it was recognised that many students remain living with parents dependently while studying in HE. Self-knowledge was considered to be important to independence, not just for academic achievement, as discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial', but for self-management, emotional resilience and considered decision making, all qualities that better equip individuals to have more fulfilling lives. The next section of this chapter will now consider choice, not just choice to enter HE study but also choice of subject, and the role of choice in shaping or reflecting individuality.

## **2. Choice and Identity**

### **2.1 Moving beyond social trajectories**

Although student 'choice' was mentioned by recent policy - Success as a Knowledge Economy (BIS, 2016) - it was largely as a means to drive up competition between HEIs in order to achieve politically-motivated notions of 'quality'. Interviewees, however, considered the choice to study and choice of what to study as key to the development and empowerment of individuals; both choice and empowerment were defined as the very essence of democracy. Couldry states 'I write not as an expert on the idea or history of the university, but instead as a person whose life chances were transformed by the experience of going to university. At stake is not just a particular set of institutions, but a whole generation's sense of their future' (2011: 37).

To study in HE was considered to be ‘a right’ for anyone who wished to attend, rather than being for a ‘privileged’ few with the economic means to access it. Beth Redmond - representative from the The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts - was quoted as saying ‘Education is a public good, it benefits everyone in society, and, therefore, I believe it should be paid for by those who are most able to. The state of your parent’s bank account should not hinder your access to education’ (Muffit, 2014). In other words those who are most able to pay for HE should, while those without the financial means should be allowed access regardless. Indeed, this suggestion, which is not unlike previous grant arrangements back in the 1980s and 1990s, also offers a means to potentially equalise some of the economic capital inequalities in the UK, which, may impact on the social mobility of economically deprived groups.

One interviewee described their institution (Downton) as offering students from lower economic areas, with lower entrance tariffs, an experience of HE that could potentially enhance their enjoyment of life. Downton particularly, was described as being very ‘widening participation’ (Dylan, 15/4/16) taking on ‘more first generation students ... and more BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) students’ (Desiree, 15/4/16) than their research intensive and high ranking neighbours. Burke states that ‘diversity has become increasingly connected to the diversification of higher education and the development of different kinds of institutions and forms of provision’ (2012: 32), thereby reinforcing and reconstructing ‘inequalities’ (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003). Webb et al support this idea with research data, indicating that Russell Group institutions had lower percentages ‘of students whose parents were unemployed or in lower-level jobs’ (2017: 12) - between 2004 and 2015 – than any other institutions across the sector, and the ‘proportion’ of students with these characteristics, were ‘declining’ in ‘several’ of these Russell Group institutions.

However, while statistics and literature highlight hierarchal divides and ‘inequalities’ in access between institutions, they do not necessarily capture the efforts and impact that some teachers and teaching - within and outside of the elite institutions - have on individuals. Most interviewees described the positive impact of having the choice to study in HE, indeed it was their own experience that shaped their largely altruistic attitudes towards raising the aspirations of others:

within my own educational/professional experience I’ve worked with people with profound learning difficulties, ... mums and dads who aren’t able to read bedtime stories to their kids – with very low levels of literacy, and I think that’s given me a kind of non-elitist attitude to education in that I think that this extraordinary thing that I love should be available for everybody, ... I get quite upset and determined to change things when I see that barriers are in place which are getting in between those different areas of polarities (Eileen, 26/5/16).

Several interviewees felt that the change in funding for universities and the rise in ‘student fees’ was potentially creating more barriers to these kinds of opportunities for those on lower incomes. It was therefore described as important to ensure that those who enter HE, regardless of institution, receive the ‘help’ needed to ‘develop their potential’ beyond previous trajectories (Eileen, 26/5/16); and also important to ensure that the support on offer is not ‘stigmatised or stigmatising’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). Academic support services were described as playing an ‘enabling’ role (Eileen, 26/5/16), aiding individuals’ to make the most of their ‘choices’ and ‘rise’ to the ‘challenge ... as far as possible in life that any of us can’ (Anton, 7/1/16).

## **2.2 Breaking free of the national curriculum**

Compulsory education was described as ‘very structured’ ‘constrained’ and ‘locked down’, where individuals are ‘taught to the exam’ (Antreas, 16/12/15). As mentioned in the last chapter, the compulsory sector offers little space and freedom for individuals to explore their thoughts, interests and potential, beyond the rigid curriculum driven by examinations. University education was thought to be ‘the first opportunity that individuals get to break free’ (Antreas, 16/12/15) of the constraints of school and develop their own pathway. However, after fourteen years of school it can then be difficult for universities, in three years - or two years if ‘accelerated degrees’ are enforced (Coughlan, 2017),

to bring about a change in ones' 'modus operandi' (Bourdieu, 1977: 79) and their relationship with education.

Interviewees described subject choice as important in shaping a students' growing sense of identity 'people might say "what is the point of fine art ... or dancing?"', but you can see when it's the right subject for someone, they are able to do something with it, make something of it ... [make] a contribution to the broader community ... in a way that is fulfilling' (Effie, 26/5/16). The choice of study, particularly within the arts, was described as a 'lifestyle choice' (Eileen, 26/5/16), a decision 'to be a particular kind of person who lives in a particular way, because ... [they have] a particular kind of consciousness raised attitude towards the world' (Eileen, 26/5/16). Indeed, my life and the lives of my friends from art school are shaped by their individual interests in the arts, it seems to have been a lifestyle choice that permeates every aspect of our values and existence. Choice of subject was described by interviewees as much more than just a means to money, but about assuming a position with which to experience and engage with the world.

However, most interviewees recognised that students were now largely studying in HE in order to get work, although - as discussed in chapter 2 (Policy) and chapter 6 ('Remedial') - it is arguable to what extent this is driven by individual choice or the current political paradigm of fees and competition for jobs. Most interviewees did not believe that HE study should be just about getting a job, for they themselves experienced the many benefits of not having that 'pressure' when they went to university. Instead, regardless of their individual economic circumstances as students, interviewees generally recalled having the freedom to explore a subject that they were interested in without concerns for clear-cut and lucrative trajectories. Indeed, I too had that choice and studied the arts despite coming from what would be considered a 'widening participation' and economically-deprived background. In the

present climate of £9,000 a year fees I doubt I would have been able to attend university, even if stayed at home. Therefore, my own economic situation would have precluded me from a higher education, and the empowerment that I have subsequently experienced, not to mention my own contribution to knowledge.

Interviewees considered it important that all students be afforded the same kind of choices, ensuring that they not only have the choice to study but can choose a subject that they consider to be ‘useful’ ‘important’ ‘interesting’ and ‘relevant’ to them (Effie, 26/5/16), something which gives the individual ‘some measure of satisfaction’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Similarly, Noddings (2003) sees education as a source of enjoyment with happiness as its ultimate goal, however Gibbs (2017) critiques this notion, concluding that the aim of education is contentment, achieved through learning to ‘be’ - as in identity, rather than to ‘have’ – commodity.

### **2.3 Employment agendas and the arts**

Couldry highlights the irony in government ‘talks’ of HE ‘access’ for students ‘while simultaneously ensuring the narrowing, and eventual undermining, of what there is for students to ‘access’ ... [as the] government’s commitment to fund the infrastructure that made the idea of the university in England’ is withdrawn (2011: 37). On a smaller scale, several interviewees talked about the reduction in choice of subjects at some institutions because the subjects did not ‘fit with [government] employment specifications’ (Asaad, 4/2/16). The arts and humanities subjects were described as particularly suffering from the conflict between policy-driven measures of employment (commodity) and the psychological benefits of studying the subject (identity and contentment). As one interviewee pointed out: ‘it’s hard to say that if someone becomes an artist and doesn’t earn as much money as they might,

is ... necessarily a loss for the world or for that person[.] Basically, I don't think so, if that person is able to have, what they perceive is, a worthwhile life' (Desiree, 15/4/16).

The tussle between the arts and immediate lucrative employment is an obvious conflict between cultural and economic capital, and between those who see the development of cultural capital as the primary aim of HE and those in government who see the primary aim of education in economic terms:

preparing students too closely for a ... a graduate level job they can enter in six months, which is the measuring time, seems incredibly short-sighted, particularly with our design and other creative industries students in fact, the year after they complete is a year for taking stock – Wetherspoons is a perfectly reasonable thing to do for an artist while they are working, consolidating their thoughts about their art and preparing for a career' (Desiree, 15/4/16)

According to Faulkner, 'Manifestos, policy statements and speeches have little or nothing to say about ... 'the humanities'. These, it seems, are luxuries we can ill afford ... How does it improve our skills set, raise our productivity and increase our GDP?' (2011: 27). Economic measures of success are therefore potentially driving institutions towards removing individual choice in favour of enforced homogeneity and more lucrative statistics for league tables. Collini states that rather than universities having 'some sense of human purposes beyond that of accumulating wealth ... it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the greater part of public discourse ... at present reduces to the following dispiriting proposition: universities need to justify getting more money and the way to do this is by showing that they help to make more money' (2012: X).

## **2.4 Liberal arts and power**

Under the current political paradigm – funding cuts for non-STEM subjects and the expectation that degrees will lead to lucrative employment - arts and humanities may be reduced or removed from institutions who lack the funding and status to be able to attract the most elite students. The 'hypocrisy' of this, as one interviewee pointed out, is that:



most of the Cabinet ... studied humanities as undergraduates - Boris Johnson notably – Classics, these are areas that seemed to have prepared them for leadership. It did not dis-prepare them I guess is the contrary version[.] ... If you say there is a connection between what someone studies at undergraduate and through on further [study], and their ability to govern, then these routes, these humanities studies are being cut off for students who are less privileged ... [unless] your mother can give you £300,000[.] ... [Are] the kind of students we have at this university, for example, ... going to be cut off from governing and roles in government? (Desiree, 15/4/16).

Therefore, learning for learning's sake may return to being just for the privileged few. This situation mirrors the ancient divide between vocational education - for the workforce, and liberal education – for those shaping society (Carr, 2009; Mingqin et al, 2015). Burke states that although the 'development of new forms of higher education for new student constituencies ... might be a positive, valuable and creative way to redress the under-representation of certain social groups' (2012: 32) this political situation also 'contributes to the privileging of certain institutions, courses, academics and students' (2012: 32). This privileging, coupled with employment agendas, aids the perpetuation of power and economic capital to those who can 'afford' the time to develop intellect. At the same time however, it potentially drives poorer students towards more vocational forms of study - instructional and more rigid curriculum - making it harder for them to challenge and permeate leadership (this will be discussed more, later in the chapter). Atherton concludes that for social mobility to increase it 'requires a reform of the whole economic and social system ... The one-dimensional presentation of social mobility favoured by the majority of politicians and academics, doesn't do justice to what examining social mobility can tell us, nor what changing it could achieve' (2017: 141).

## **2.5 Summary**

Like the previous chapter, compulsory education was again highlighted as problematic, this time it was described as limiting the development of people as 'individuals'. HE was considered to be the first opportunity to break free of national curriculum, and to offer individuals choice of study, choice which was increasingly linked to shaping as well as reflecting identity. However, with the current employment agendas, the humanities and the arts risk being squeezed out of poorer HEIs in favour of

more lucrative trajectories and more favourable statistics; therefore, making the hierarchal divide between institutions and social groups much more visible. This situation is in danger of recreating old divides between liberal arts and thinkers – who shape society, and vocational education and subordinates – who follow. Despite the inequalities between HE experiences however, academic support services were described as enabling individuals to make the best of their choices. The next section of this chapter discusses how HE and the role of academic support can offer individuals more of a chance to challenge the status quo in relation to both internal (habitus) and external (social field and rules governing specific circumstances).

### **3 Challenging the Status Quo**

#### **3.1 School and self-limiting beliefs**

Although compulsory education is effectively free in this country, Bourdieu (1998) would argue that it no more breaks with social boundaries than a paid-for education because of the way in which curriculum and quality are delivered and controlled. There was a general sense, as discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial', that school education did not help to raise all young peoples' aspirations, on the contrary it was often described as contributing to, or compounding, low self-esteem 'I went into factories straight out of school and I didn't want to do that ... but I didn't have any qualifications ... [and] many choices' (Anton, 7/1/16), 'we all want more, ... I wanted more' (Anton, 7/1/16). Several interviewees described the negative impact of school on their own educational capabilities and beliefs, as well as the impact on the students they see 'the education system damages young children and damages them ... with concepts of failure and inadequacy and inferiority and fear[,] ... they carry all those injuries' (Anton, 7/1/16).

This educational experience limits the potential of individuals as opposed to harnessing it, reinforcing inner structures, which subsequently impact on the choices that individuals make, projecting them in directions that further restrict their opportunities for growth:

I always felt that I had never been tested or put in an environment where I would show what I was capable of ... I went to what I guess you would call ... a “bog standard secondary school” ... you were virtually written off, you would go into a manual job or something like that at the end of it and ... that would be the rest of your life (Adie, 20/1/16)

This interviewee described entering HE as a mature undergraduate, and eventually progressing to a PhD, thus being able to break with the job role expected from school. HE was described by another interviewee as a ‘form of exorcism where you can deal with those daemons [acquired in school] and get rid of them[,] it kind of frees you as an individual, it’s a bit like an academic counselling service’ (Anton, 7/1/16). This interviewee recalled feeling academically inferior until he started on his path to HE; HE helped him to challenge his own perceptions and alter the position he assumed in social spheres. Self-esteem and the role it plays in learning and critical thinking are, arguably, primary forms of cultural capital, transferrable to, and beneficial in, any social field.

### **3.2 Raising aspirations**

Several interviewees talked about entering HE as mature students, thus coinciding with drives to widen participation. However, some interviewees wished that the opportunity to attend HE had come much sooner for them, as their self-esteem and aspirations would have been raised sooner. The manager at Chartwell, who described himself as dyslexic and having dyscalculia, felt that everyone should be given the opportunity to enter HE straight from school:

I suppose I fall into the WP category ... [HE study] was never even suggested to anybody [that I knew] ... it was never even flagged to anybody, I remember my mum saying that she’d be really proud if I became a secretary – that was her ambition because that was something spectacular for them, but myself for my sister and various cousins and family members and friends have all gone onto higher education as mature students part-time (Carl, 22/4/16)

This interviewee described HE as giving them the opportunity to identify and ‘move towards’ their own goal, rather than following a more traditional and familial trajectory into the job market. Although

this person did not have what they described as a really positive experience of HE initially - studying part-time in the evenings - they still considered their HE experience to have had many far reaching benefits. They felt that ‘everyone should have the opportunity’ (Carl, 22/4/16) to go to university, ‘and be supported’ in making the best of the HE experience (Carl, 22/4/16).

The prior educational experiences of interviewees gave many of them a strong sense of social justice. They considered it their duty to aid others like them to fully access and engage with their HE experiences. Most interviewees, as discussed in the last chapter, talked about their role in boosting individuals’ confidence and aiding them to make the most of their HE studies ‘my job here is to buoy people up and give them the confidence that they deserve as individual human beings to go on and make the most of their life (Anton, 7/1/16). Being supported in HE was considered to be important by all interviewees, for attendance alone did not always allow people to make the best of their experience, particularly if their inner construct disadvantaged them ‘a lot of the time ... the need [for students] is just around ... raising expectations’ (Carl, 22/4/16). ‘Raising’ student ‘expectations’ was the idea of challenging students’ limiting ideas and beliefs (habitus trajectory) that may hold them back from accessing and making the most of the learning experience and environment. Opening students up to the idea of challenge and change could potentially alter their relationship with learning and education and what they might perceive as external educational power or authority (Bourdieu, 1998).

Several teams talked about Peer Mentoring or Peer Assisted Support as a ‘brilliant way’ of raising aspirations (Carl, 22/4/16). Although this form of support was primarily for the benefit of newcomers to HE, the benefit for existing students who train as peers was described as equally empowering. Peer assisted support is based on the premise that a peer from a higher level (year) can help a new student to acclimatise to university and subject practices. Peers who have been through a similar experience to new students were described as being more able to understand and convey the different stages of

learning. Using a more senior peer is therefore a way of effectively getting new students, who may be stuck by their own habitus and capital, to see past their current positions and perceptions. The notion of developing a shared habitus and sense of shared capital can aid people to move beyond their own habitual limitations.

### **3.3 Shared habitus and the student experience**

Amongst the interviewees there were a high number of first generation graduates, mature graduates, diaspora graduates, and graduates who came from economically deprived areas. Those who may have experienced a somewhat marginalised position within education or HE, seemed to be compelled to aid others who, similar to them, may benefit from some support. This often enabled academic support teams to empathise with students in a similar way to peers. All interviewees described an affinity with one or several groups of under-represented students, having a shared understanding of what the different groups of students may be experiencing. This enabled interviewees to see the potential in individuals, who may not be able to see it in themselves. Prior personal experience and knowledge, and the cultural capital gained from this, was described by interviewees as informing their approaches to academic support, thus adopting the role of mentor and guide in helping students move beyond self-limiting perceptions.

### **3.4 Enabling individuals to challenge policy**

Challenging the status quo was not just about inner structures and raising aspirations of individuals however, but also about empowering and equipping them to question and challenge social practices, through and beyond their studies. The ‘privilege of critique ... freedom of speech ... [and] freedom of expression’ (Brynne, 20/1/16) were all considered to be important aspects of HE, therefore HE and academic support promote: ‘discussion, research, criticality’ (Beatrice, 29/2/16). The team at Blenheim (pre-WWII social sciences institution) talked particularly about their students being encouraged to

question fundamental topics such as ‘what is education or testing and assessment?’ (Beatrice, 29/2/16) rather than just accepting conflicting ‘political views [such as] “teachers must do this” “this is the best form [of education]” “you can get students in school at two, and then that will improve standards” “test them every day” (Beatrice, 29/2/16). Because of the nature of its subjects and its status, this social sciences institution particularly offered a platform for students potentially to challenge the status quo of HE policy and social practices more directly - as a researcher as well as an educator.

It was therefore, important that this academic support team at Blenheim enabled students to develop the abilities and the methods to be able to challenge ideas effectively, ensuring that their communication carried the authority of the field. The ‘capacity to present knowledge and understanding in a form legitimated by ... a field’ (Watson, 2014: 107) is what is termed as ‘linguistic capital’. Linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital, it is symbolic of knowledge and can reflect and change our view of the world (Bourdieu et al, 1994). ‘Linguistic habitus’ is the language ascertained through family and education that reflects the relationship between inner and external structures. A good command of standardised written English language is, arguably, an example of linguistic capital transferrable to all symbolic fields in the UK, indeed Bourdieu and Wacquant claim that ‘every linguistic exchange contains the potentiality of an act of power’ (1992: 145).

Several interviewees talked about ‘almost everyone’ needing help to move ‘up to a new level of their writing’ (Desiree, 15/4/16). As discussed in the previous chapter, writing was considered to be a useful tool in not just communication but also for developing thinking and knowledge - ‘thinking by writing’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16), in other words using writing to process, clarify and develop thinking and knowledge. Similarly, discipline-specific modes of English language unique to fields, as well as what is coined as ‘academic’ language, are also forms of linguistic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994).

### **3.5 Linguistic habitus and capital**

Like general standards of written English language, the linguistic capital unique to a field can be divisive if one does not have, or cannot access, it (Mawson, 2010; Bourdieu et al, 1994); ‘linguistic competence is not a simply technical ability, but a statutory ability. This means that not all linguistic utterances are equally acceptable and not all locutors equal’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 146). To remove linguistic barriers, therefore, is not simply about removing language, but about attempting to remove the knowledge, social discourse and understanding it represents – in social spheres, inside as well as outside of education. Therefore, to empower and enable individuals, it seems prudent to make ‘visible’ and induct students into the linguistic capital and knowledge of a field (Wingate, 2015), so that they have shared power in which to challenge social practices – conforming in order to challenge from within a field. Rowland talks about ‘learning to comply or learning to contest’ (2006: 17), and the ‘tension’ between the two, however, from my experience I believe it is possible to learn to comply in order to acquire the knowledge and tools in which to contest and challenge more effectively, to ensure views are received and considered. In other words obtaining the capital of the field in order to challenge the powers and capital of the field. As discussed in the previous chapter, interviewees felt that ‘everyone’ (Brynne, 20/1/16) could benefit from induction and tuition in modes of writing. Some interviewees and their students saw writing as a ‘discipline in itself’ rather than ‘a skill’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16), therefore some students ‘simply want[ed] to know more of their possibilities as writers’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). Those students could seek individual guidance, as well as sign up for particular writing modules or courses run by academic support at Downton and Blenheim institutions particularly.

### **3.6 Summary**

School was described as commonly reinforcing or even developing self-limiting beliefs about one’s abilities and life trajectory. At least half of the interviewees identified with poor experiences of

compulsory education, these experiences shaped their strong sense of social justice and their desire to mentor others in challenging their own inner structures (Bourdieu, 1977). HE was described by most interviewees as a means to redress the balance, a chance to be supported, to heal wounds from school and grow beyond prior habitus. HE was also considered to be a place where students can be equipped with the necessary linguistic capital, not only of their subject field but of general transferrable standards, in order to be able to challenge the status quo - learning to comply in order to evoke change. Studying in the social sciences - education particularly - was described as a vehicle in which to aid individuals to challenge and change educational policy and power from within, thus readdressing social imbalances. The next section of this chapter will explore the role of thinking and knowledge in the empowerment of individuals and the development of more satisfying lives.

## **4. Opening Minds**

### **4.1 Thinking, empowerment and satisfaction**

It is not possible to talk about the development of individuals without discussing the role of thinking, for thinking is considered by interviewees as fundamental to individual development, as discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial'. Indeed Bourdieu indicated that an individual's perceptions or inner structures - 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations' (1977: 78) - coupled with the social field (outer structures), determines the practices one assumes, which can either challenge or perpetuate an individual's views and thought process. Most interviewees associated a student's capacity for higher thinking with a 'thirst for knowledge' and a more fruitful and satisfying life. As one interviewee expressed 'I think if the students are able to be as passionate about the world of ideas as I think I am then that's what motivates me as an educator' (Eileen, 26/5/16).

Every interviewee talked about the importance, and power, of enhancing students thinking, with the very purpose of HE often described as 'to make us think' (Beatrice, 29/2/16) and 'to spark ideas'



(Beatrice, 29/2/16) HE 'should take ... [individuals] out of their comfort zone, open them up to new ideas of seeing the world, seeing themselves, seeing the subject that they thought they knew about, being challenged and learning new ways of analysing, criticising, viewing and discussing things' (Asaad, 4/2/16). This interviewee, like others, believed that the expansion of knowledge through the exposure to a range of 'new' ideas and perspectives helps students to become more critically aware, as well as more self-aware. One interviewee talked about students being 'uncomfortable' or 'stressed' with having too many ideas, however she explained that the discomfort usually comes with change as students move away from established ideas and grapple with new ones (Beatrice, 29/2/16).

Although Bourdieu argues that an individual's 'discourse continuously feeds off itself like a train bringing along its own rails' (1977: 79), he goes some way to counter this with the idea that prolonged and profound external stimulus can potentially alter an individual's trajectory, if inner structures are predisposed. The important phrases here are 'prolonged' and 'profound' for it is not possible to 'quick fix' ones habitus with mere skills training and employment knowledge, particularly if needing to transcend socio-economic barriers and limiting prior educational experiences. Indeed, both education and educational counselling (Wankowski, 1991b; 1991c) work on the idea that individual trajectories can be interrupted, but only as a result of prolonged and profound 'interactions' (Byrom, 2016: 2). Awareness of one's own perceptions and positions, and the ability to question rather than passively accept, was often described by interviewees as important to students' holistic development - beyond mere subject study and employability agendas. As one interviewee explained:

I still believe idealistically that the purpose of higher education is really to improve the person and I do believe, as someone who has been through university education, comes out at the end of it with a different perspective on life with a bit more understanding of the complexity of situations, for example there is no one clear answer to questions, so just be more critical ... to anything out there. (Dimitriou, 15/4/16)

Getting students to understand that life does not always involve clearly defined answers, but instead often consists of a complex mix of perceptions and approaches, is, arguably describing life 'skills'.

Indeed several interviewees talked about enabling people ‘to think critically, solve problems ... [and] deal with [life’s] challenges’ (Asaad, 4/2/16).

## 4.2 Thinking and democracy

HE was described as the one opportunity where people are openly and extensively encouraged to ‘explore what they actually think about lots of different subjects’ (Chey, 22/4/16) as one interviewee demonstrated:

I’m very conscious of trying to promote thought amongst students, critical thought and critical analysis, I think it’s a great privilege to have three years of your life where you are encouraged to think, it will never happen again, often nobody wants you to think ... people are trying to sell you computers or aftershave or whatever, they don’t want you to think they just want you to buy the product, the government don’t want you to think really they just want you to do what you’re told and get on with your work ... [T]here’s not much in life that encourages you, us, as individuals to think creatively or critically, particularly critically (Anton, 7/1/16)

A large number of participants talked about the importance of questioning, rather than ‘accept[ing] things at their face value’ (Arron, 21/1/16) particularly in relation to fields of power. Critical thinking, or ‘higher level thinking’ (Adie, 20/1/16), was described as enabling individuals to ‘ascertain the extent’ of ‘fact’ in ‘claims’ made by ‘politicians’ (Adie, 20/1/16), therefore enabling individuals to make more informed decisions - criticality equates to democracy. Arguably, criticality, and the ability to weigh up situations and claims, is a form of cultural capital that holds the power to be transferrable to different social fields, in a similar way to particular forms of linguistic and economic capital. Indeed criticality enables individuals to consider, adapt and manoeuvre within fields, and between fields, and - like linguistic capital or combined with linguistic capital – challenge the power and capital of fields.

Although HE government commissioned reports refer to ‘transferrable’ skills (see chapter 2 Policy), these seem to be less about the empowerment of individuals to challenge the status quo, instead more about conforming to politically-driven expectations and employability agendas. Rowland highlights the danger in this:

undue emphasis upon the development of skills to meet the economic needs of society may undermine the critical purposes of academic work. In the tension between compliance and contestation, compliance appears to have the upper hand. If the enquiring university is to provide a critical service to society, it must find ways to engage critically with the society it serves, and thereby serve the society it critiques (2006: 45)

Many interviewees questioned whether the ‘churning out workers to ... government specifications (Asaad, 4/2/16), as opposed to fully developing individuality and thought, were potentially reinforcing social divides; divides between those in power and those that comply to the needs of the employment market. In contrast, however, criticality and developing the ability to ‘critique’, was considered by interviewees as key to questioning and ‘contesting’ social practices, and therefore offering an opportunity for individuals who would ordinarily become subordinates to potentially influence, or take control, of power.

### **4.3 Thinking and leadership**

Although a few interviewees felt that studying ‘advanced’ levels of most subjects could develop criticality as much as the ‘humanities’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16); generally vocational education was deemed to be more instrumental in filling existing employment positions rather than questioning societal practices. In contrast, liberal education was associated much more with developing higher thinking, innovation and ‘leadership’ qualities (Asaad, 4/2/16). Several interviewees felt that enhancing individuals’ aptitude for critical thought increased their chances of taking on leadership roles, thus drawing a link between the humanities and leadership qualities, as highlighted earlier in the chapter.

For many interviewees students’ subjects and assignment tasks offered the vehicle to stimulate thought, however a few talked about developing thinking aside to subject study and assignments. One interviewee from Arniston talked about running a course ‘six times a year’ (Anton, 7/1/16) which

encouraged people to explore and verbalise their responses to various stimuli, such as art or music for example:

I've ... managed to build things that I think are interesting into the course, and people respond to it very well because it goes a bit beyond the academic agenda and they don't necessarily have to ... learn stuff, they don't have to memorise it they just have to think about it and engage with it and when they walk out of the room they can forget it (Anton, 7/1/16)

Although these workshops were described as not involving 'formal academic engagement', the experience was thought to be 'very intellectually engaging' (Anton, 7/1/16). They felt that it was not necessary to use subject specific examples to develop independent thinking, because these qualities are transferrable to any field - life and subject study - aiding one's ability to consider, question and assimilate knowledge. Student feedback from these sessions was described as very positive.

This view challenges the belief discussed in chapter 3 (Literature Review) that academic support should be contextualised for teaching to be viewed as relevant and for learning to occur (Wingate, 2007; Barkas, 2011; Wingate 2015). Indeed non-contextualised tutoring may be viewed by students as extra-curricular and thus unnecessary or irrelevant to them, as indicated by Hill et al (2010); this is also supported by a few interviewees who felt that criticality at times may be discipline-bound, thus requiring context. However, the latter are arguments for contextualising academic skills to enable students to meet course requirements, whereas the example of 'opening minds' mentioned earlier, is arguably more about developing individuals' capacity for thinking, outside the constraints of subject-related notions of right or wrong. Therefore, non-contextualised teaching may offer individuals a chance to explore, informally, their own thinking and sense of voice, where prior learning (formal and informal) may not have encouraged it. This philosophical underpinning to practice adheres to the early work of Wankowski (1991b; 1991c) and Peelo (1994) – discussed in chapter 3 - where academic support is non-contextualised and individual-centred, paying close attention to the relationship between emotion, thinking and learning - which Bourdieu would describe as habitus, perceptions and

practices. Indeed a couple of interviewees indicated that informal learning and teaching often led to more profound changes in individuals than some of the formal and more structured teaching.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Bourdieu (1977) and Byrom (2016) concur that self-limiting trajectories can be ‘interrupted’ by sustained and transformative interactions and relationships. Indeed, interviewees described a link between developing the ability of individuals to think critically and their quality of life – highlighting a link between knowledge and empowerment, and empowerment and satisfaction. The ability to critique and assimilate knowledge was considered to be important to developing social awareness, making informed decisions, and constructively challenging social injustices. Criticality and higher thinking was also thought to increase the chances of individuals assuming leadership roles. Knowing one’s mind and exploring one’s own thinking was described by several interviewees as important to developing higher thinking, this led to some interviewees adopting practices and developing workshops that blended both emotion and thinking. A good number of these ‘holistic’ sessions were intentionally outside of subject teaching in order to get away from restrictive notions of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, instead allowing students to explore themselves as individuals. The next section of this chapter will explore the relationship between the holistic development of individuals and the development of social values in more detail.

### **5. Holistic Development and Social Values**

#### **5.1 The habitus - emotion and learning**

As identified in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter, all interviewees felt that developing the confidence of individuals’ was an important part of student learning and learner independence. Interviewees mostly talked about building confidence through inductions into academic practices and by developing a sense of belonging, as well as by sharing their own experience and knowledge of HE

study and learning. However, some interviewees talked about supporting all facets of students much more overtly. The manager of the Arniston team (1960s broad subject institution) felt that academic support needed to be more ‘whole person’. However, although he was clear that they would not stop students discussing areas unrelated to their ‘academic’ remit, this interviewee felt obliged to ‘signpost’ students to other ‘areas’ of support such as emotional counselling:

my previous job was much more holistic in the sense of you had emotional, academic and the personal, we looked after the whole person, that would be my ideal ... here we look after the academic which makes it different from counselling, ... there’s counselling, there’s student support and well-being[,] ... much more delineated[.] ... [M]y personal preference would be a more holistic approach ... you can’t divide only academic or ... only personal, we are a whole (Arron, 21/1/16)

Therefore the thinking here seemed to reinforce earlier views that academic support needs to be a blend of emotional, ‘social’ and ‘personal’ (Arron, 21/1/16), rather than separated into different HE roles and compartmentalised. Indeed, while the early work of Wankowski (1991b) alludes to a more holistic approach to working with individuals, in the 1960s – the period he was reflecting on - cohorts were smaller and universities more selective. However, with the increase in student numbers and the widening of student demographics, the increase in complexity of need (see chapter 3 Literature Review and chapter 6 ‘Remedial’) institutions possibly felt the need to move to more delineated specialists for ‘support’.

The DfE (1993) report on student support, discussed in chapter 2 Policy, highlighted the split between institutions, with only a small number taking the ‘personal tutor’ approach - similar to that of the Oxbridge model - with the majority separating wellbeing services from academic development. Couple this with the blurred lines between education and commerce - education as a commodity (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’, chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion) - and we potentially create a situation where learning is viewed as external to an individual, therefore unrelated to and unaffected by emotions (inner structures), and unlikely to bring about fundamental change.

## **5.2 Helping individuals meet their own ideas of success**

However, despite the role of academic support being largely focused on students' academic work, all interviewees held personal and professional values regarding the 'advocacy for students' more holistically (Arron, 21/1/16). This advocacy went beyond the idea of students as 'packaged products with a set of specifications' (Quinlan, 2011: 7) or bundles of 'attributes[,] to be given to the market' (Brynne, 20/1/16). Instead interviewees were concerned with students' growth as individuals and citizens. As one manager indicated 'a lot of people I work with think about the student as an individual character ... it's all about building somebody who is ethical, has integrity, has the skills they need to be successful' (Carl, 22/4/16). The notion of 'success' that this interviewee referred to was not to do with meeting institutional measures or employment expectations, instead was more about individual perceptions of success and supporting students in reaching what they saw as their goals.

## **5.3 Social integration, values and tolerance**

Ultimately, as the manager of Arniston team described, academic support practitioners seem to be the students' 'champions' (Arron, 21/1/16) 'help[ing] them develop, learn, fulfil their potential and succeed' (Arron, 21/1/16). However, for some of his team members that meant coming into conflict with institutional practices and expectations:

we feel that the international students are welcomed into university with a lot of fanfare and dinners and then the international office turns around and gets the next lot, and any international student who has not adapted and settled in from that one welcome event is basically left to, I don't know, shrivel up ... So we have three events [for them] throughout the year which are more social than academic (Asaad, 4/2/16)

These 'more social' events were offered at times of the year when the team felt that first year international students may need emotional support, for example the Christmas period. This period was described as particularly important because international students in halls were often spending their first Christmas away from their families in a different country on their own. Also, according to the team, these students will have experienced their first full term of studying in a university in a different

country, and therefore in need of sharing and comparing their experiences, although they do not necessarily know how to or may lack the confidence in initiating contact.

This team also offered social lunches for students of different nationalities ‘Chinese people don’t speak to English people and French people don’t speak to Italian people, but they get this chance to really linkup and share experiences of the university over lunch’ (Anton, 7/1/16). This initiative had to be defended, for administrators at Arniston were not keen on funding lunches for students, ‘I had to argue the case ... [that] actually this academically is really very useful ... it helps ... [the students] deal with a lot’ (Anton, 7/1/16). Thomas states that ‘the benefits of ... greater staff-student and peer interaction can be understood in relation to the social and emotional dimension of learning. This engagement was described as influencing students’ sense of belonging’ (Thomas, 2005: 104). Indeed, regardless of the practices and views of their institution, Anton and other team members at Arniston considered facilitating the socialisation of students as really important, enabling individuals to transcend not only boundaries of their subject specialisms but also their own habitual and cultural boundaries, in order to create more inclusive and mutually supportive communities.

The university as a multi-cultural institution was considered by several interviewees to be really important in developing a more tolerant and inclusive society:

perhaps when ... [students] were at school it was more of a cohesive homogeneous group, when they come to university they are going to meet a broader range of people and that in itself is extremely valuable for us as a society ... I think it is critical that we keep that search for knowledge but also search for tolerance for acceptance for communication for openness (Arron, 21/1/16)

This broader social networking was described as ‘opening minds’ (Arron, 21/1/16; Chey, 22/4/16) and ‘hearts’ (Arron, 21/1/16) making graduates more accepting and able to think beyond their current situations and communities, thus transcending limiting familial and cultural habitus. The process of socialisation was considered to be critical to the evolution of society, for ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’



was considered key to developing an ‘inclusive’ world (Arron, 21/1/16; Anton, 7/1/16), and, therefore, ultimately good for ‘humanity’ (Beatrice, 29/2/16).

The team at Arniston perceived their role of academic support as much wider than merely academic skills. Instead they saw their role as developing the whole person, getting students to see the value in developing social networks beyond immediate social groups and notions of shared habitus. In this case the notion of cultural capital seems to be more about social inclusion and being adept at developing mutually supportive relationships. Furedi talks about higher education as playing ‘an important role in the socialisation of an ever-increasing proportion of the younger generation. The aim of ‘universalizing post secondary education’ is to a significant extent influenced by the objective of assisting the process of socialisation’ (2017: 5).

#### **5.4 Emotional well-being and teaching**

The team at Arniston who supported social integration also, not surprisingly, undertook initiatives that integrated emotional wellbeing within their teaching. Therefore, rather than allowing emotional isolation or a lack of self-resilience to surface in individual sessions, the team assumed a proactive in loco parentis role by starting English classes with short meditations:

It’s really interesting to see people come along ... [to] what they expected was ... some formal English tuition ... [I] start with the meditation and ... maybe people can ... dump their ... psychological baggage[,] ... then we’ll have a nice open playing field for the day[.] ... [Y]ou could feel the ... tension dropping out of the room (Anton, 7/1/16)

Starting an English class with a meditation was not only described as establishing a more open and sharing learning environment, but also about giving students the tools for emotional resilience in, and outside of, academia. Having a broader remit to that of the writing centre model seemed to provide this team, and other ‘broad skills’ teams, with the flexibility to take more overt approaches to whole person development. Although talking about retaining students rather than holistic development per

se, Cotton et al state that institutions need to provide ‘appropriate support which acts as a ‘protective factor’ in developing student resilience[,] [as this] can help all students to access the transformational learning opportunities which HE offers’ (2017: 77). It was considered important that HE move ‘beyond simply reproducing inequalities in society’ (Cotton et al, 2017: 77) and in order to do this ‘attention must be given to structural factors which can enable students to develop increased resilience’ (Cotton et al, 2017: 77).

### **5.5 The power of 1:1s**

Although very few teams described being involved in large social events or very overt activities to support emotional well-being like the examples of the Arniston team, many spoke about how they considered the holistic development of students in their approach to their work. Despite some perceptions, as discussed in chapter 3 Literature Review, that tutorials outside of subject staff is somewhat ‘un’ inclusive or bolt-on, all interviewees described the benefits they had witnessed first-hand of tutorials offered by their largely centralised roles. Indeed all interviewees described the one-to-one approach as very popular with students, as discussed in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter, with nearly all teams having to limit their offer because of staff capacity. Tutorials seemed to offer the opportunity for more intimate conversations and understanding regarding the situation of individuals, as well as a shared sense of habitus ‘I think they ... appreciate sometimes when you say “yes I do know what it’s like to have two young children and be studying, and rushing home and then only being able to start study again at 9 o’clock when the kids are in bed”’ (Antreas, 16/12/15). Most participants described sharing their experiences with their students, as a means to help students see past current perceptions and situations and develop more of an understanding of themselves.

Confidentiality was considered to be important by all teams, despite not all academics at all institutions being entirely happy with this practice. Tutorials were described as a ‘safe haven’ (Arron, 21/1/16), an opportunity to build trust and understanding on a more individual basis, providing students a space to discuss their work and their concerns outside of their immediate subject teaching and assessment. Tutorials were described by some interviewees as having more of an impact on the development of students than group sessions. This was because individual meetings offered students much more freedom to express themselves in a less exposing environment, giving tutors much more of a sense of where the students are in their learning, therefore enabling them to personalise tuition and guidance, in transcending problematic *modus operandi*.

## **5.6 Summary**

Relationships were considered to be imperative to learning, but also important to social integration and the development of a more tolerant society. While most interviewees consciously approached their role in a socially inclusive manner, the staff from Arniston assumed the role in loco parentis in providing activities to integrate socially different students of different nationalities transcending both social and cultural inhibitions and boundaries. As discussed in the last chapter (‘Remedial’) emotional resilience and a sense of belonging are interrelated with an individuals’ ability to make the best of their HE learning experience – therefore emotions and relationships are inextricably linked to learning (see chapter 9 Discussion). Despite this, as the manager (Arron) at Arniston pointed out, emotional well-being services tend to be separate from academic support, alluding to the fragmented way in which individuals are currently viewed and treated within the UK education system. This fragmentation is exacerbated by the current political paradigm where HE is seen as a quick-fix for employment, reducing individuals to homogenous and surface learners (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’, chapter 8 Business and chapter 9 Discussion). As Brynne (21/1/16) and Quinlan (2011) concur, individuals are not an endless supply of market-designed sets of ‘attributes’, but the future of this country in the holistic

sense, therefore most interviewees saw it as their role to aid individuals in defining and meeting their own sense of 'success', as well as the good of humanity, aside from policy-driven demands. This is where personalised contact was considered not only important to staff but very desirable to students, for students seemed to really value the confidentiality and tailored guidance one-to-one support offered. The demand and sustainability of tutorials, however, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter (Business).

## **Conclusion**

While the notion of economic capital may have remained the same, the notion of cultural capital has, arguably, become representative of many different attributes and values. In the case of this thesis, and this chapter in particular, cultural capital is symbolic of four different sets of values: 1. knowledge of the world, 2. self-knowledge, 3. community and 4. humanitarian. The HE experience, and academic support combined, was described as fostering and developing students' as 'enquiring citizens' (Desiree, 15/4/16) with a 'thirst for knowledge' (Arron, 21/1/16), rather than merely supporting students to conform to employment agendas. The university was described as an important 'incubator' (Anna, 21/1/16), shaping ideas, people and values. 'Networking' and 'casual conversations between people with a passion for a particular subject, completely different subjects' (Anna, 21/1/16) and completely different people, were considered crucial in the 'exchange of learning' (Anna, 21/1/16) in the broadest sense. Through 'choice', support for choice and the HE experience, students were described as holding the potential to shape society for the better. Therefore, it was considered to be important for democracy, equality and social justice, that education for education's sake in pursuit of 'higher level thinking skills' (Adie, 20/1/16), be open to all students, not just those with the economic capital to access it.

Although the linguistic habitus of social groups and linguistic capital of particular fields may be at odds with each other, most interviewees felt that it was important to transparently induct all students into forms of communication (and knowledge) in the field. This was considered to be empowering individuals to challenge conventions in a way that their contribution may be heard and valued. Students progressing through HE were described as the potential ‘professionals’, ‘academics’, (Dylan, 15/4/16) ‘scientists’ ‘researchers’, and ‘philosophers of the future’ (Chey, 22/4/16), therefore it was important to ensure that students’ approach to their work and their interaction with the world is underpinned by the values to progress ‘culture ... [and] civilisation’ (Brynne, 20/1/16) rather than destroy it.

The shared values underpinning the role of academic support, seemed to indicate some form of shared habitus and capital of those entering the profession, as well as indicating their priorities for HE. While it may not be possible for agents within fields to cease pursuits for positions of power, and thus rendering Bourdieu’s field analysis as a ‘theory’ of its time, interviewees did feel that HE policies needed to promote more social and humanitarian values. Academic support services therefore seem to be somewhat caught between agents and values: 1. their own humanitarian and social values; 2. economically-driven agendas and institutional targets; and 3. students with mixed educational backgrounds and expectations. The next chapter will discuss the business approach to academic support services and the role they play in the current business model of education.

## Chapter 8: Business Approach

### Introduction

the culture is changing in the wake of the 9K fee hike[,] ... five years ago I would encourage students to come early ... [then] go away and work on the corrections and submit the work[.] ... [N]ow students are coming the day before the deadline ... and [effectively] saying “fix it for me – I’ve paid for this” ... [T]his mind-set ... [of] “consuming education” ... “buying it”, ... not “engaging with it”[,] ... it’s very difficult for the students to fail now (Eileen, 26/5/16)

This chapter will explore the perceptions of interviewees that they are expected or expecting to enhance the business of their institution, serving two, often opposing, purposes: 1. customer service – tasked with meeting student expectations and enhancing their experience; 2. Quality enhancement – enhancing the quality of teaching, employability of graduates, and research. The business approach to academic support emerged with the marketisation of higher education (Schofield et al, 2013), where students are positioned as consumers through funding-linked ‘choice’, supported complaints procedures, and publicised feedback mechanisms – in the name of quality (BIS, 2016). Institutions, and subsequently academic support, are expected to demonstrate ‘value’ and ‘impact’ of their ‘services’, as one interviewee indicated:

if somebody or a group in a managerial position or in a position of making funding decisions was talking about ... [effectiveness of academic support] I would give them what they wanted, whatever that is, so that could be things like rates of improved grades or attendance rates over time or feedback over time, it’s always that kind of thing (Boris, 29/2/16)

Despite expectations that interviewees demonstrate value and impact in some way, most saw the attempt to ‘measure’ effectiveness of academic support as ‘contentious’ and ‘hugely difficult’. Indeed, for every definition and measure of effectiveness emerging from an interview, a counter argument would emerge either from another team member or another team disputing its validity. Five key themes arose from the interviews, these themes will be used to subdivide this chapter: 1. Student Expectations; 2. Funding and Efficiency; 3. Footfall as Measure of Success; 4. Grades Versus Progress as Measure of Success; 5. Satisfaction as Measure of Success.

## **1. Student Expectations**

### **1.1 Fees and individual ‘tuition’ versus ‘collusion’**

Individual tutorials, as discussed in previous chapters, were described as very popular, as one manager highlighted ‘we mostly get satisfied students ... because it is mainly one-to-one [support on offer], what student wouldn’t like that?’ (Antreas, 16/12/15). Another team member talked about some students regarding these tutorials as a ‘secret weapon’ to gain advantage over their peers, who they see as their ‘competitors’ (Anton, 7/1/16). Therefore, a desire for knowledge and development, is replaced by competitive stratagems – use of extra teaching and educational ‘classifications’ - in order to distinguish themselves and gain prime position within a field (Bourdieu, 1998). Although, talking pre-2011 fee increases, Watson states that ‘what [ever] happens to students during their time at university clearly has an impact that shapes their lives. We used to take pride in the fact that students were treated as individuals, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century mass system of education, this can no longer be the case’ (2008: 11). In a paradigm where education is a business, and institutions compete with each other for numbers (and funding) rather than individuals, it is unsurprising that students may behave in the same way.

Most teams had a limit on tutorials, as discussed in previous chapters, to ensure their offer was fair to all students, rather than just for a few individuals to gain competitive edge. Not all teams managed tutorials in this way: ‘We have some students ... who come back for every single essay, there’s one student I saw the other day because my colleague has refused to see her, she has been 60 times[,] ... every time she comes with an essay it’s similar things we talk about, ... she is just using us as a crutch’ (Asaad, 4/2/16). This student wished to maintain grades of 60% or above, regardless of whether she needed continuous help to do it, thus highlighting conflicting notions of ‘quality’ – quality of student experience versus quality of learning. All teams seemed to have a policy in place that only permitted them to review small portions of student work, in order to avoid co-authorship, however this was open to abuse allowing individuals to achieve ‘less legitimate’ ways of obtaining their degree classifications:

students ... will come and see me, then they will go and see someone else with another part [of their work], ... then they will go to see someone else in the library with another part, and then they will come back [to me] ... I think that causes resentment ... [M]y colleagues say "when this person gets employed ... and they can't write an email in the way that they are supposed to, how fair is that?" (Anton, 7/1/16)

The combination of limitless tutorials and support from a range of unconnected services potentially provides individuals with the means to gain a degree without necessarily developing the knowledge and skills that the degree represents; therefore bringing the validity of the degree qualification, and grades, into question. At least one interviewee in nearly every team, felt the need to point out that their purpose was not to do the work for students or 'give students the answers' (Beatrice, 29/2/16), despite even some of the most diligent students expecting explicit 'instructions' and 'answers' (Adie, 20/1/16).

In the case of the student accessing 60+ tutorials, the team as a whole did not seem able or willing to limit this student's demands, or develop a strategy with which to aid her independence. In this case staff seemed to prioritise the student experience and student satisfaction above maintaining degree standards. However, all of this raises the question whether grades and student satisfaction are prioritised over learning and the development of autonomy. Indeed some interviewees saw the rise in student fees as an indication that they needed to do 'all' they can to ensure that students get a degree 'as an outcome of their study' (Antreas, 16/12/15) 'people are paying such a lot of money, I just think it is part of the deal' (Antreas, 16/12/15). As another interviewee from Arniston highlighted:

I think there's various levels of collusion going on[,] ... there's a lot of emotional pressure from the students to do the work for them, and if that is resisted they will then create waves which will ripple through the institution ... it's about the student experience isn't it? ... what that means in practice is another step in the process of dumbing down because you want to enhance the student experience you don't want to upset the students, and that means you do the work for them, and if you don't they get very upset (Anna, 21/1/16)

At a government run Westminster HE Forum (2018) on plagiarism and grade inflations, the focus tended to be on the action that institutions needed to take to remedy unethical practices rather than questioning how current HE policy is devaluing university education and degree experiences. According to interviewees most student dissatisfaction with academic support was largely associated



with not enough individual tuition, Watson states that ‘the introduction of tuition fees’ has led to students viewing themselves more as ‘consumers’ leading to a rise in ‘student expectations’ (Watson, 2008: 7). However, Schofield et al argue that education is ‘co-creative’ therefore ‘students cannot rightly be conceptualised as customers since the failure in their qualification cannot necessarily be seen as a failure of the product or service’ (2013: 194), but their own failing also. The effectiveness of ‘education’ was described as being dependent on the ‘intellect and motivations that the student brings to the experience’ (Schofield et al, 2013: 194), therefore not all resting with the effectiveness of their educators.

## **1.2 The quick fix service**

Interviewees described a growing perception of academic support as being seen as a quick fix service for students’ work or learning needs. Despite all academic support teams being clear that they are not proof reading services, significant numbers of students expected to have their work reviewed and corrected for them. Proof reading and correcting students work was considered by interviewees as a step too close to co-authorship and a step away from developing learner autonomy, as one interviewee from Chartwell explained: ‘proof reading doesn’t help students to move forward with developing their own writing or assessing their own needs’ (Chey, 22/4/16). Interviewees talked about teaching students how to proof read and correct their own work, as this supported intellectual growth and empowerment, however not all students wanted to learn how to do it for themselves as this took more time than they were willing or able to spend (Blumenfeld, 2015; QAA, 2016; Lancaster, 2016).

Alongside the expectation that staff can proofread and correct students work, interviewees from several teams also mentioned the expectation that they can, and will, quick fix language issues, despite language being representative of a student’s understanding, knowledge and criticality (Bourdieu et al, 1994; Mawson, 2010; Watson, 2014) - key assessment criteria. As one tutor pointed out ‘what am I to

do' about '13 years of inadequate schooling' in just a '45 minute appointment [?]' just before a submission deadline (Asaad, 4/2/16). The team at Blenheim made a point of changing the title of their service in order 'to get past the idea' that they can provide a proof reading and correction service (Brynne, 20/1/16).

### **1.3 Employment conflict – obtaining a degree versus desire to learn**

The desire for quick fixes, whether it be proofreading or making work passable the day before a deadline is, arguably, a by-product of the current 'need' for a degree rather than the desire to learn about a subject. One interviewee described undergraduates as being sold the idea 'that their ticket to lots of money is a degree' (Anna, 21/1/16), this was considered to be making students more goal focused, entering HE 'to get a piece of paper that will get them the job they want' (Boris, 29/2/16) looking for the quickest route through their studies. Indeed, the previous Minister of State and advocate for the 'fast track' degree, encouraged institutions to condense three year degrees into two:

by curtailing holidays and providing more intensive teaching. Accelerated courses appeal especially to students who may not otherwise choose to pursue a degree. They include mature students who want to retrain, from non-traditional or disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who just want to get into the workplace faster (Johnson, 2017)

It is unclear how two year courses aimed at 'mature students' will avoid being populated by all students looking for a quicker and cheaper qualification, regardless of whether they are equipped to manage 'intense' teaching and learning and an intense work schedule (see chapter 6 'Remedial'). It is also questionable whether 'intensive' teaching intensifies learning; particularly if the students entering two year degrees from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds - referred to by Johnson – may not be students who are naturally disposed to study. Turner et al state that 'Prior learning and experience is a major factor in retention, with students concerns over mismatched expectations or a poor sense of preparedness underlying many instances of withdrawal' (2017: 807). Therefore, the cheaper and quicker two year degrees, with less time to prepare students for study, may lead to higher attrition and fails.

One interviewee highlighted that current staff and students within the same courses are already torn between ‘conflicting purposes’, which are played out ‘quite dramatically within the classrooms’ (Boris, 29/2/16). While some students were described as wanting to know what they need to do in order to be ‘more employable’, others were described as focused on developing knowledge and intellect (Boris, 29/2/16). Simplistic and quick fix approaches to learning, however, like Wingate’s (2006; 2015) complaint of ‘study skills’ teaching, is unlikely to transform the habitus and cultural capital of individuals (Bourdieu, 1998) from a status of what might be perceived as un-employable to employable. Farenga and Quinlan highlight employers’ desires for more than just technical competence, but enhanced interpersonal skills as well as ‘ethical’ and ‘sociocultural awareness’ (2016: 770).

#### **1.4 Summary**

As previously discussed in the last two chapters, students seemed to generally favour tutorials over group sessions because of the individual nature of the support available. However, there appeared to be conflicts between unrealistic student expectations and the expectations of teams, institutions and HE policy. Most academic support teams have policies in place to enforce ethical working and parity, such as limits on tutorial allocation and limits on the amount of work they can review for an individual. However, at some institutions, students were described as attempting to use academic support to gain competitive advantage over peers and as a means to gain or maintain grades without really developing learner independence. With the rise in fees, academic support teams describe having to balance consumer expectations (and satisfaction) with learner needs for development, however the two are not always compatible.

Quick fixes and the expectation that ‘condensed’ teaching (Johnson, 2017) will lead to ‘condensed’ learning seemed to be a growing trend, sending out unrealistic messages to students about what it

means to learn. Superficial notions of learning, as discussed in chapter 6 ‘Remedial’, shape how learning and knowledge is valued, affecting learner motivations and expectations. Differences in student motivations can affect how they engage with learning and their perception and potential use of academic support. Degrees seem to be sites of conflict, conflicts between those who view degrees as a means to knowledge and individual development, and those who see them as a seal of approval for employment, which can be fast-tracked if need be. The next section of this chapter will discuss the role of academic support services at a time where funding is limited but efficiency and quality are expected.

## **2. Funding and Efficiency**

### **2.1 At capacity**

Despite expectations that HEIs, and academic support services, offer more in the wake of higher fees, most teams talked about the impossibility of meeting all of the needs of a diverse body of students. Several staff members described having dual roles, one in particular served as a fulltime tutor but also as the immediate team manager:

I have made the case frequently that I cannot pay attention to all the [managerial] things that are happening and deal with them[.] I can see stuff emerging ... and people I need to talk to ... I actually haven't got the capacity to do all of this, ... I have felt that the fact that we've been shifted around and that we haven't got ... a manager who really understands what we do, very very difficult, ... there's been such a lot of change and there are so many forces at play manoeuvring around all the services – it's mind-boggling (Effie, 26/5/16)

The teaching demand for this team was at capacity and yet this interviewee's time was split between teaching and managing, making it difficult to effect any strategic change on behalf of the team. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of reporting structure and management with an understanding of teaching and learning, as the team sat within a company outside of the institution. Quinlan, in her article *Leadership of teaching for learning in higher education: what is needed?* argues that 'creating a learning culture depends ... on [an] academic community working together to create a student-centred ethos. To do so, sound leadership is required' (2014: 33). Therefore, the notion of academic

support is not merely a small team of people, but an infrastructure in which a small team of people may lead on.

However, a considerable number of interviewees described their teams as ‘too small ... compared to the student numbers’ who need support (Boris, 29/2/16). As one interview explained: ‘we’re now at capacity ... lecturers are asking us to do embedded sessions and we just can’t meet the need ... it’s not sustainable (Antreas, 16/12/15). It was considered impossible to ‘meet all of the demands’ for ‘embedded courses’ (Boris, 29/2/16) and standalone workshops on low levels of staffing:

the proportion of class time that we can offer is really negligible, ... we are not reaching most of the students even though we could help most of the students ... we are only reaching a small proportion ... the ones that are able to access our classes[,] ... [our classes] always get full and there are always waiting lists (Boris, 29/2/16)

Although most teams were convinced that they could make a difference to the development and achievement of most students, and subsequently improve the effectiveness of course study and institutional statistics, teams were unable to offer students or courses the parity of service or parity of experience on current resources. One tutor felt that they were impacting on very small numbers ‘we can take a handful of students and run weekly sessions ... probably only take less than 20 out of 10,000 students’ (Adie, 20/1/16). Most teams prioritised group sessions over tutorials as a more ‘efficient’ (Eileen, 26/5/16) use of their time, because tutors could address a ‘hundred students simultaneously’ (Eileen, 26/5/16) as opposed to one; however this then raises questions about how the diversity of needs are then met on mass. In the 1990s when HE funding was still available and scrutiny of institutions less intense, Simpson (1996) highlighted the difficulties teachers faced in maintaining ‘quality’ while accountability, student numbers and diversity increased, and resources decreased. Now, in the current market-driven business model of education, expectations of institutions (academics and academic support) are much higher while resources much lower.

## 2.2 Struggles to bring about strategic change

Working at capacity was a common theme across teams, many talked about making ‘the case’ (Boris, 29/2/16) for more staff and attempting to demonstrate ‘unmet demands’ (Boris, 29/2/16). The role of academic support was referred to at times as ‘just a drop in the ocean’ (Beatrice, 29/2/16), indeed Barkas (2011) argues that both governmental and institutional ambitions for, what she describes as, ‘skills centres’, was quite unrealistic. The main concerns of some teams were not just about managing expectations in the present but about how they will meet expectations in the future, as one interviewee explained ‘the demand on this kind of service will increase in the coming years especially with widening provision agendas and the needs of the students coming through ... a lot of them really need this kind of support ... what we need is ... more advisors rather than less’ (Anton, 7/1/16).

Despite demand and staffing levels sitting outside of the control of teams, there was still the internal expectations that academic support be accountable for HE inductions, as one manager explained: ‘I report to the teaching and quality committee annually ... they are the ones who would say ... “people are saying that they can’t get their students onto ... [your] courses” and I would say “well it’s because I haven’t got enough staff, we’ve got a bigger demand now” (Brynne, 20/1/16). Simpson (1996) talks about the need for institution-wide considerations and initiatives, where all staff and institutional procedures unite in a joined-up approach to supporting and monitoring the student journey. However, with universities having to function as large efficient and accountable businesses (BIS, 2016), not only are some institutions choosing to outsource elements of student services or technical support to save money - therefore relinquishing some control, but equally there is little space and time to reflect while keeping the ‘business’ of education going.

Some teams and managers assumed positions within their institutions which enabled them more power and autonomy to influence institutional approaches to inclusivity and teaching and learning, however

others were left to respond more reactively on the periphery. Although, arguably, one way to manage high demand for academic support would be to co-develop materials and teaching with courses, so that course teams can better support learning, this was a practice which less than half of the teams were able to engage in – reasons for this will be discussed in chapter 9 Discussion. One interviewee at Arniston described this co-teaching as only an aspirational approach for their team, because they felt that their manager would prioritise ‘providing a service’ (Antreas, 16/12/15) over decentralising support. This was because of the way in which the effectiveness of their role is defined, measured and subsequently valued within the institution. Therefore, to devolve academic support to course teams may also devolve their power and position within the institution (Bourdieu, 1977).

In contrast, the manager of another team felt that a withdrawal of their services altogether would be a beneficial strategy to developing the institution, as this may reveal the ‘gaps’ and ‘cracks’ in institutional protocol, practices and procedures that were not only deemed problematic for the team but also problematic for the students. However, this manager felt that the ‘managers’ above them were keen to ‘measure’ and demonstrate ‘performance’ (Effie, 26/5/16), therefore were not likely to subscribe to any changes that ran counter to demonstrating value and impact of their services. At a time when it is imperative for institutions to safe-guard reputations and economic capital to survive in the HE field, it seems prudent for managers to behave similarly in order to safeguard the reputations and economic capital of their departments within the field of their institutions (Bourdieu, 1977).

### **2.3 Space**

Staffing levels were not the only resource issue however, space was described as a premium and an uncertainty, with some services having to fight for their physical location and space in their institutions. One manager described the struggle for space going on in their institution particularly:

there is a suggestion that [the building we are in] will either be knocked down or [have a] change of use, so we're not sure for the future, but space is very very tight, we are lucky to have as much space as we have, [but] we don't know whether we'll hang onto it. We've got a bigger problem at the other campus in that we've only got a single room for one person, ... we haven't got the staff to keep that room occupied all the time[,] ... because we're not keeping it occupied we are under pressure to give it up or share it ... [I don't know] what that means in terms of the service that we offer [there] ... All the services are jostling for position on both campuses (Effie, 26/5/16)

Departments, and teams within departments, were effectively competing with each other for space, the campus being a physical site (field) of conflict and power struggles. Concerns were raised by this team that new courses and new subject areas may take up most of the central areas on campus, with student facing services being forced to share spaces around the outside of campuses, physically located away from the courses and course teams. This potential move to further separate academic support from the courses, albeit physically, arguably demonstrates a lack of understanding and valuing of the role it plays (Corbett, 1996).

## **2.4 Summary**

Nearly all teams were working at capacity and therefore unable to reach all people that they felt would benefit from their teaching. Student diversity was described as very high in some institutions, and rising in others, thus putting pressure on one-to-one support, as well as making it difficult to tailor large group sessions to the needs of all. Some teams were afforded more power in their institutions and therefore able to take more strategic steps to affect long term and sustainable change - 'whole' institution approach. Others, however, were left to take more reactive and quick fix steps, having to weigh up capacity and sustainability with delivery, therefore not always offering what they felt was necessary in the way that they felt that would be most beneficial long term. The positions and power of academic support teams in relation to academic and administrative powers will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter (chapter 9 Discussion).



### 3. Footfall as Measure of Success

#### 3.1 Quantity and popularity

Several interviewees talked about ‘footfall’ (Brynne, 20/1/16) as a measure of effectiveness. In other words success being equated with quantity of students that the team engage with, or quantity of sessions delivered. The rationale given by one manager for ‘footfall’ as a measure of success was that if teams were ‘not efficient and effective’ (Arron, 21/1/16) then students would not access their services. This, therefore was considered to be ‘the clearest indication’ a team ‘must be doing the right thing’ (Arron, 21/1/16) - equating attendance with relevance. Equally students ‘returning’ to a service was considered to be indicative of its ‘popularity’, either popularity of an individual tutor or of the service as a ‘resource’ more generally (Brynne, 20/1/16). This was echoed by an interviewee from Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group institution) who talked about the importance of ensuring that figures or ‘footfall’ were kept high:

we report to the governance board once a term – in terms of numbers and feedback, we don’t have any particular target ... [but] if our attendance suddenly dropped I guess we will be expected to suggest reasons for that and then put things in place to try and boost it back up ... [Governance] are convinced there is a need and I think that if our figures dropped ... we would need to remarket, ... we had a big marketing drive when we first started and that was about three years ago so in a way a lot of those students that were targeted and told about [us] ... have passed through our system (Chey, 22/4/16)

Footfall was therefore considered to be a measure of success at the highest level within this institution, and therefore a drop in numbers would indicate a problem with the service or with publicising the service, rather than there being a reduction in need. Despite most teams being largely up to capacity, and having to find ways in which to manage resources to meet demands, many interviewees talked about the continual need to brand and market their services in order to maintain visibility and levels of engagement; as one interviewee described ‘we’ve been quite successful in getting the brand quite well known ... across the campus, but ... if we want to change it we have to undo all of that’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Branding and marketing was an assumed part of the role of academic support, usually designed and delivered at team level. However, despite all teams marketing their services in order to ensure continual

engagement from students and course teams, there were conflicting perceptions of footfall as a measure of success or effectiveness. While some interviewees saw footfall as a sign of effectiveness others felt that it represented dependency and ineffective support.

### **3.2 Quantity as mixed indicator of success**

Tutorial statistics were defined by some interviewees as problematic and ‘quite difficult to present in a way that people will understand’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). For instance, overlapping with discussions in previous chapters, one member of staff from Elvaston felt that students ‘repeatedly’ returning for one-to-ones was a sign of ‘dependency’ as opposed to ‘success’ or popularity, an indication that academic support has not been effective in some way (Eileen, 26/5/16) - independence being the optimum aim. Therefore the view would be that fewer tutorials could equate with successful intervention. Indeed an interviewee from Downton considered a lack of repeat tutorials as potentially an indication that students had received what they needed from the service and were therefore ‘all right now’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). However, this interviewee also highlighted that sometimes when a student does not re-book it could equally indicate that a student feels the team ‘can’t help them at all’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16); the reasons for not being able to help a student, as discussed in chapter 4 Theory and chapter 6 ‘Remedial’, could equally be as complex.

The same issues with data and meaning are presented when course interventions are added to the equation. For instance, the manager for the team supporting Elvaston and Fairfax pointed out that if the team runs a ‘useful’ on-course group session it often leads to more one-to-one tutorial bookings from the course (Effie, 26/5/16). This was because when guidance was seen as relevant, there was a tendency for students to want more; in this case high tutorial bookings could be an indication of ‘successful’ classes (Effie, 26/5/16). However, if the team identified a particular issue with a course brief - through excessive amounts of tutorials requests from the same course - and helped the course

team to 'mitigate' it, this often led to a reduction in tutorial bookings from the cohort. This reduction in tutorials would also signify 'success' or 'a good result' (Effie, 26/5/16), as there would be a clear reason for the reduction. The problem that interviewees saw with the latter, however, was how a team would quantify this form of effectiveness to ensure that it is counted within end of year reviews of the service. This, therefore, hints at the 'need' to demonstrate effectiveness through numbers, at both department and institutional level.

The notion of 'reach' (Eileen, 26/5/16) was also a 'quantity' related definition of effectiveness. 'Reach' was the extent to which a team had had contact with different courses and students across the institution, as opposed to seeing the same students and courses multiple times. This, therefore, seems to value limited contact with many, rather than consistent (and potentially incremental) contact with a few. However, like quantity of contact with the same students, 'reach' was also not always necessarily a sign of 'success', because some academics were described as 'intrinsically more self-sufficient' (Eileen, 26/5/16), knowing exactly how to meet the needs of their own students' (Eileen, 26/5/16) and therefore contact may be an unnecessary waste of a limited resource.

### **3.3 Metrics, teaching and funding**

One interviewee talked about their institution being interested in not just the quantity of contact but also demographics of students seen by the team such as 'ethnicity and class ... and all the protected characteristics' (Antreas, 16/12/15). However, this was considered by a colleague to be a 'largely' 'tick box exercise' (Anna, 21/1/16) to prove that the institution was responding to what they described as an 'ubiquitous demand' of supporting students from widening participation backgrounds. This interviewee considered these statistics to be just about demonstrating contact with students who had historically been connected with 'a lot of the [HE] funding' (Anna, 21/1/16). However, if this is the case, as the manager of Downton pointed out, there is no guarantee that students with particular social

characteristics require or wish to access academic support, particularly if there is a correlation between students from widening participation backgrounds and the experience of ‘imposter syndrome’ mentioned in chapter 6 ‘Remedial’. Equally, there is no guarantee that academic support contact with widening participation students will indeed lead to the student developments expected of policy (Dylan, 15/4/16).

Generally interviewees considered there to be too much of a ‘fixation’ with ‘metrics’ (Anna, 21/1/16) at institutional level ‘everything has to be measurable and life isn’t like that’ (Anna, 21/1/16). A few interviewees at Arniston felt that ‘Metrics culture’ was ‘colonising’ every part of their institution (Anna, 21/1/16) with very little ‘analysis’ of what the data actually signifies, ‘attempts to use metrics to measure quality’ were described as unconvincing (Anna, 21/1/16). Several interviewees felt quite strongly that numbers were not a good indicator of effective teaching. One interviewee from Elvaston and Fairfax talked about their team recording numbers of workshops and tutorials each year ‘last year I think the amount of tutorials leapt up by something ridiculous like 40% it was crazy’ (Ethan, 26/5/16) however high numbers was not thought to signify that the team had been ‘effective’ instead they felt it just meant that the team had been very ‘busy’ (Ethan, 26/5/16). Similarly they recorded statistics on how many ‘video tutorials’ had been viewed on their website, but again this was not considered to be an indication that they were ‘useful or any good’ (Ethan, 26/5/16) just that they had been viewed. The team manager talked about having to fight ‘against’ the use of key performance indicators ‘several times’, as a means to measure their services, for they did not want their measure of success to be through what they described as meaningless numbers (Effie, 26/5/16).

Arguably, the massification of education and accountability culture has seen institutions driven towards scientific measures to evaluate effectiveness and impact. Scott (2011) highlights the issue with the propagation of ‘metrics’, stating that they:

inevitably get translated into "winners" and "losers" ... [therefore] the enemies of diversity because they translate legitimate differences – in student mix, research priorities and the rest – into illegitimate hierarchies. My guess is that rankings – and the measurements that have fed them – have done far more to destroy diversity than, for example, the decision two decades ago to make polytechnics universities.

Therefore, as Bourdieu (1998) describes, educational measures effectively measure innate social structures and hierarchical positions that people, or in this case, institutions, hold within the field. The idea of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ is indeed not valuing differences in institutional purpose, and yet institutions are expected to celebrate and support differences and diversity in their students. HE, therefore, seems to be a site of conflicting values, with conflicts between how institutions are considered and how institutions are expected to consider their consumers. I would argue that the institutions are treated - their competitive positions - impacts on their consumers; therefore generic measures that have been devised to drive up quality across all institutions, are in danger of reflecting and maintaining inequalities in institutions and students.

### **3.4 Summary**

Gauging value and quality through ‘contact’ was considered simplistic and lacking understanding of teaching and learning. While students’ choice to seek tutorials with academic support may indicate that the service is relevant and useful, it does not necessarily mean that learning takes place and that the support on offer is effective in invoking development and independence. Where tutorials were unlimited, some students were described as using tutorials as a ‘crutch’, therefore in these cases the service is dependency-inducing and ineffective. Interestingly, institutions on the whole seemed to favour high numbers of students accessing one-to-one support, seeing a drop in use as a problem rather than as a result of a solution – high numbers therefore seemed to be equated with both value and impact.

Generally interviewees valued qualitative methods of measuring impact over ‘quantitative’, because, as one interviewee explained, ‘numbers’ were too easily manipulated into proving ‘whatever you want them to tell you’ (Anna, 21/1/16). Indeed, in some institutions metrics culture and the ability to demonstrate worth seemed to get in the way of more strategic and whole institution approaches to academic support, rather than being instigated and delivered by a few. However, this, arguably, is driven by the current political paradigm where education-linked metrics are more likely to attract economic capital.

#### **4. Grades Versus Progress as Measure of Success**

##### **4.1 Grades**

Student grades was probably one of the most contended measures of success amongst interviewees, and yet, as one manager described, ‘everybody’ wants to ‘gauge’ their effectiveness on the ‘academic success’ of students (Carl, 22/4/16). This seems to be because grade achievements have been up-held as the ultimate measure of educational success for pupils, teachers and institutions across the compulsory and HE sectors, for decades. While some interviewees saw improvement in individual student grades or a raise in cohort grades as a measure of success, ‘qualitative measures around people’s commentaries’ (Brynne, 20/1/16), such as feedback at course boards, was considered more important by others. Several interviewees stated that they did not subscribe to the ‘accountability discourse’ (Boris, 29/2/16) in other words they did not necessarily use ‘pass rates or statistics’ (Boris, 29/2/16) as a measure of their own effectiveness. This was because student pass rates and grades were considered to be too ‘dependent on a lot of other factors’ (Boris, 29/2/16).

Other interviewees explained what was meant by the ‘other factors’: ‘[although] I do ask what students get on an essay when I have worked with them ... you can’t necessarily say that was all down to me

or half down to me you just don't know' (Antreas, 16/12/15). In other words it is not possible to take sole credit for rises in student grades without knowing what else may have impacted on a students' learning 'we played our part, but [so did] maths support, and health and well-being, and chaplaincy, halls of residence support, ... the library, the personal tutors and the module teachers in the disciplines' (Dylan, 15/4/16).

#### **4.2 Impossibility of cause and effect**

Several interviewees expressed the impossibility of measuring the 'cause and effect' (Carl, 22/4/16) of their teaching 'we don't have any diagnostic tests' measuring before and after (Antreas, 16/12/15). Therefore, there was 'no way' of proving that 'student X ... got a first' (Carl, 22/4/16) because of the academic support sessions, particularly of self-selecting students, who could be the more 'hard-working and conscientious' and more likely to obtain high grades (Chey, 22/4/16). Without knowing where students were before intervention it was considered difficult to assess extent of impact. Most teams had very little time, tools and resources to carry out this kind of before and after diagnostic assessment with each student.

Despite this, the 'central secretariat', as one interviewee described it at Arniston, undertook a one-off piece of 'cause and effect' research in order to compare how the 'performance' of self-selecting students 'correlated' with those who had not accessed academic support. Based on this research the team at Arniston 'were able to generate a narrative that suggested that students using ... [their] services were improving their performance' (Anna, 21/1/16). However, the interviewee describing this piece of research was not convinced by its validity 'of course the wonderful thing about ... [this] is you have no idea how ... [the other students] would have performed with [us,] ... so it's a useless comparison (Anna, 21/1/16). Statistical data was considered to be incomplete and too malleable to be able to

measure and demonstrate effectiveness of teaching without some qualitative research ‘it’s the old analogy “there are lies, damn lies, and statistics, in that order”’ (Anna, 21/1/16).

Scott supports this by stating that statistics encourage ‘corruption’ and ‘game-playing’ (2011); he also adds that there is ‘something deeply incongruous about universities that are designed to ask questions, to engage in critical inquiry and (however clichéd) push back the frontiers of knowledge reducing everything to uncomplicated digits’ (2011). Scott points out that metric culture is not necessarily in the ‘best interests of individual students [either, who at times may be] weighed down by caring responsibilities or going through "bad patches" in their lives’ (2011). And yet, these students will be graded on how they perform at a particular time in their learning, and this grade will be held as representative of their abilities – despite the fluid nature of abilities. Similarly, institutions who are graded on the achievements of their students, are equally being judged on their abilities, based on a snapshot of their students’ learning (grades) at a given time.

### **4.3 Grades versus learning**

Not only were student grades not considered to be a reliable measure of effective or ineffective teaching, but they were also not always considered to be a good indicator of learning either. As the manager of the post-1992 broad subject writing centre explained:

for those students who come into the university who are doing really well, they are then entering into ... [new] genres that they are learning and writing about ... not only new forms of writing but greater complexity of writing, having to make arguments and really bring evidence to strengthen your argument, ... so their performance as writers might drop for a while even though they are actually learning and practising these writing strategies ... So, it’s really difficult to measure that (Dylan, 15/4/16)

Although writing was the example being used here, this view could arguably be applied to any aspect of learning. A drop in grades, according to this interviewee, did not necessarily indicate a lack of learning or progress, and more importantly did not necessarily indicate ineffective teaching either. ‘Improvements’ in a student’s work were described as not always ‘chronologically bound[,] ... just



because they show or don't show ... immediately doesn't mean that they won't show ... two weeks later or three months later[,] ... I think there's a big obsession with immediate clock-time' (Boris, 29/2/16). In other words learning does not necessarily occur immediately after teaching or even in time for assessments, learning also depends on learner priorities and what else is going on in a student's life at the time (Scott, 2011). The notion of measuring learning and teaching through assessment grades, however, is making the assumption that everyone is the same, and therefore learning is a homogenous act that is outwardly trackable and measurable in the same way and at the same time (Wolf, 2002).

One interviewee described attempts to measure learning and teacher effectiveness as 'one of the problems with education' (Anton, 7/1/16):

People are running around with a kind of intellectual slide rule everywhere trying to measure effectiveness, but in fairness they have to do this to get the money, they have to show that A and B equals C and C is better than A and B so therefore "give us some funding", so they [institutions and departments] are kind of pushed into this trap. There are people with fulltime jobs kind of worrying about that and trying to get those kind of data produced (Anton, 7/1/16).

As discussed in chapter 4 Theory, Bourdieu argues that examining and grading students, particularly within compulsory education, is not necessarily a true measure of effective teaching or learning but merely an act of classifying familial habitus and capital already established before entering school (Bourdieu, 1998). Therefore, as discussed in chapter 6 'Remedial', assessing the effectiveness of universities through student achievement could merely be classifying and reaffirming the types of students (prior educational experiences - habitus and capital) who enter different subject areas and different institutions.

Shevlin et al state that measuring teacher 'effectiveness in facilitating good academic work' (2000: 398) – i.e. grades - is controversial, because of the importance that the 'British Government' places on 'examination results' for teacher 'incentives' (2000: 398). However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, even if academic support teams really believe that grades were a good indication of their

teaching, most of them lack the resources to consistently ascertain grades or ‘see what percentage of those [students] ... continued with their studies’ (Dylan, 15/4/16).

#### **4.4 Learner independence**

Rather than grades, most interviewees talked about assessing the progress of students through qualitative methods and on more of an individual basis. Some talked about gauging a positive change in a student’s emotional state, particularly a growth in ‘confidence’ (Antreas, 16/12/15; Chey, 22/4/16) and possibly a change in decision if a student had been considering dropping out of their studies. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of achieving learner independence, therefore effectiveness of academic support was thought to be:

the degree to which you have helped someone to move on towards that goal of independent learning, so the true measure of success would be that people don’t need you, but that’s really hopeless and idealistic I think ... How you measure that is by the only way ... you measure it by the extent to which someone becomes less dependent on the service (Anna, 21/1/16)

Helping students to achieve independence would presumably mean a reduction in need for academic support and a possible reduction in ‘footfall’ statistics for the service. This conflicts with the notion of ‘footfall’ as a sign of effectiveness, and particularly conflicts with the point that was made about attendance needing to remain high for a service to demonstrate relevance. Development is complex and has multiple facets and layers, it is not simply a case of a student crossing the line from being dependent to independent, and not simply about superficial ‘skills’ (Wingate, 2006; 2015). In reality sometimes it can take the full three years of incremental tuition – one-to-ones, embedded and incremental workshops to enable some individuals to be where they need to be in terms of course expectations and employability.

Interviewees generally saw learner independence as an important indicator of progression, rather than student grades, because a reduction in need for support was considered to signify more of a fundamental change in a student (habitus and capital), it was also much easier to identify a difference

in an individual student before intervention and after. Witnessing something just ‘click’ for a student, and seeing them assimilate and apply feedback and general principles as part of their own decision-making process (Chey, 22/4/16) were all considered to be evidence of growth. However, measuring and communicating these qualitative changes in individuals, in a way that institutions may want or need to demonstrate effectiveness, was described as very ‘hard’ (Chey, 22/4/16). Therefore statistical measures were often chosen for ease of use, rather than more accurate measures of developmental changes in individuals.

#### **4.5 Academic progress**

One interviewee adopted, what they described as, an ‘individualistic view’ seeing effectiveness ‘in terms of ... what it means for that student who has shown up’ and whether that student feels as though they have made ‘some progress ... from what ... [academic support] are providing’ (Boris, 29/2/16). ‘Effectiveness’ for this person therefore seemed to be dependent on the extent with which their sessions met the needs and individual goals of students. However, for other interviewees effectiveness was defined as helping students to achieve a ‘realistic goal’ (Anna, 21/1/16). In other words, a realistic goal may involve taking into consideration: the gap between students’ abilities and their expectations; the gap between student expectations and that of the team, department and institution; and the gap between what the team are able to achieve (knowledge and experience) and the team’s resources (availability).

One of the ‘writing tutors’ for Downton (the post-1992 broad subject institution) defined success as ‘guide[ing] the student towards achieving an improvement’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16) in their writing, and then quantifying success as ‘an improvement in student’s writing in at least one aspect’ (Dimitriou, 15/4/16). Similarly one of the ‘writing lecturers’ for this team saw effectiveness as ‘moving someone from the level they are currently at in their academic writing to a higher level’ (Desiree, 15/4/16):

through your advice have you moved this paper up a band?, has the student mastered a technique that will allow her to move her next paper up a band without coming to the centre? – I mean that would be a goal but that’s something we can’t measure, we have no access to that kind of measure, we can’t even know a change in marks. So measures of effectiveness are very elusive (Desiree, 15/4/16)

Despite the elusive nature of measuring impact of academic support this interviewee talked about writing a paper where they considered a possible ‘scheme’ to enable them to ‘measure change’ in student’s work. This scheme enabled them to compare and measure the difference between ‘a draft of a student paper before’ advice, and the draft that was ‘submitted’ (Desiree, 15/4/16). Although this process was considered to be ‘useful’ it was also described as ‘complicated’ (Desiree, 15/4/16), therefore not very easy to apply to all students’ work, particularly with limited staffing. In contrast, the manager of this centre felt that ‘writing development’ was ‘longitudinal’ (Dylan, 15/4/16), and developed over time, therefore it would be an inaccurate measure of effectiveness to assess impact of academic support soon after intervention, but equally hard to assess the true extent of impact at a later date either. Shevlin et al state that although we may favour assessing the ‘value’ of a teacher ‘by their ability to effect personal change and development in their students’ (2000: 398), change is a long term outcome and therefore ‘problematic’ to ‘quantify’ in the way that central government may wish institutions to.

#### **4.6 Summary**

Pass rates and academic achievement, like footfall, were a contested means of assessing impact. For they tend to simplify learning in terms of cause and effect, and also assume that learning is time-bound and homogenous. On the whole, interviewees felt that there were too many factors influencing pass rates and grades for them to take credit for all students’ academic achievement. However, institutions seemed to really value, or arguably, need improved grades and pass rates to demonstrate their effectiveness. As previously discussed, most interviewees favoured qualitative measures in assessing the impact of their services, in this case it involved witnessing, first-hand, observable changes in a

student's understanding and learning. An observable development in a student, like the discussions in the last chapter (chapter 7 Development), was considered to be much broader than just academic achievement, instead improvements in confidence, cognition and independence were all considered to be far more fundamental to the general success of the student.

## **5. Satisfaction as Measure of Success**

### **5.1 Relevance**

As mentioned earlier, demand for or 'popularity' of a service was considered to be an indicator that what teams were offering was 'relevant' to students and staff. Relevance is, arguably, more associated with achieving levels of satisfaction, than it is with statistics around 'footfall' and 'reach' however. One team used a couple of questions directly after tutorials to ascertain whether the tutorial 'helped' the student and whether the tutor answered 'all' of the student's questions. However, one of the tutors did not consider this to be 'a measure of effectiveness' instead they thought it was a method of ascertaining the students 'perception of the tutorial' (Dimitriou, 15/4/16).

The manager of the Downton team considered stakeholder perceptions of both staff (academics and centre staff) and students, and of both users and non-users of the service, to be important, therefore equating positive perceptions somewhat with effectiveness. They instigated a one-off piece of research with both the users of their centre as well as the non-users, hiring an independent facilitator to 'gather' the views of 'different stakeholders' (staff and students) (Dylan, 15/4/16). This gathering involved collating perceptions of the centre, perceptions of their work, 'experiences' of the centre, and 'what ... [stakeholders] would like to see from [the team]' (Dylan, 15/4/16). Although the responses to the research had not been assessed at the time of these interviews, it was clear that this manager saw a link

between perceptions, experiences, expectations and ensuring what was on offer was relevant to a wide range of people.

Relevance of academic support was not just about ensuring that delivery was appropriate to the students and their courses, however, it was also considered to be about ensuring that delivery was ‘timely’ (Eileen, 26/5/16) in other words delivered when it is most needed. However, ensuring that the needs of stakeholders (staff and students) are met in timely sessions, was described as very difficult. Resource levels, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, hindered the abilities of teams to ensure that all delivery was timely and therefore relevant. Several interviewees talked about the difficulty of having to develop and adapt teaching material and session plans to all the different programmes of study, at the same time as attempting to meet all of the needs of diverse students. However, while some authors, such as Barkas (2011) and Wingate (2015), may use this as an argument for decentralising academic support, I would argue that institutions need to be considered on their own merits. Indeed, working across courses can offer opportunities for insights, knowledge dissemination and the sharing of good practice.

## **5.2 Positive feedback**

Nearly all interviewees talked about the personal and professional importance of achieving ‘satisfaction’ and receiving ‘positive responses’ and gratitude from academics as well as students. Several interviewees talked about the emotional impact of experiencing positive feedback or gratitude from students and staff, as one interviewee recalled:

we were high after that day’s teaching we were really buzzing on what happened in the classroom because we hadn’t done it before, didn’t know if it was going to work and we came away and it was just like a massive rush of adrenaline, we went for a coffee ... to come down and we took these evaluation forms with us and read them out and we just got higher because they’d said such lovely things and such positive things on these forms (Anton, 7/1/16)

Most interviewees described the personal and professional satisfaction of making a difference to others and having their efforts acknowledged and appreciated ‘we are reliant on student feedback to give us a sense ... that we are doing okay’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). Interaction, connection and response was considered to be important humanistic aspects of both teaching and learning, as discussed in chapter 7 Development. This stands in stark contrast to the more scientific notion of gathering ‘objective’ data to prove that something ‘effective’ has occurred. On the topic of emotions and teaching, Quinlan states that: ‘teaching is, first and foremost, a human interaction. As humans, we are thinking and feeling creatures. We bring ourselves, including our feelings, into the classroom’ (2016: 104). She goes on to explain that just as ‘students remember and value the emotional aspects of effective teaching’ (Quinlan, 2016: 104), the most distressing experiences for teachers are when their dedication and efforts are unappreciated by their students (Quinlan, 2016).

### **5.3 Formal versus informal mechanisms of feedback**

All interviewees seemed to be torn between formal and informal mechanisms of gathering feedback. Arron, the manager at Arniston considered themselves to be a believer in formal measures of effectiveness ‘for any of our programmes, one-to-ones, academic peer mentoring, we have surveys[:] ... students are sent a survey where they express their views, their opinions. We’ve had focus groups and unsolicited feedback which comes to us’ (Arron, 21/1/16). What this interviewee describes are, arguably, mechanisms of obtaining feedback, thus equating formal measures of effectiveness with ‘feedback’.

Similarly another interviewee talked about ascertaining ‘satisfaction ratings’ through ‘qualitative comments’ (Carl, 22/4/16) after teaching sessions. One of their colleagues talked about asking questions such as: ‘how happy were you with the content/delivery?’ ‘Do you feel more confident as a result of this workshop?’ ‘What would you change?’ ‘What did you find most useful?’ (Chey, 22/4/16).

Therefore mainly attempting to obtain a critical evaluation of the teaching, equating progression and success with ‘confidence’, albeit the student’s own perception of their progress and confidence. One interviewee felt that ‘student satisfaction’ rather than a ‘perceived improvement’ (Boris, 29/2/16) was a measure they would use to assess their teaching activities. They talked about looking at student attendance of their support programmes, and whether they attended until the very last session; they also talked about considering whether their student feedback is ‘unsolicited’ and ‘positive’ and whether they are getting ‘more people’ engaging with support activities – online or face-to-face (Boris, 29/2/16). Therefore unsolicited feedback was considered to be important, and engagement was considered to be an unspoken form of positive feedback, despite engagement being described in previous chapters as connected to student motivations and priorities – the interrelationship between inner and outer structures (Bourdieu, 1998).

However, whilst administrative powers favoured formal methods of feedback, interviewees on the whole tended to favour more informal modes through their contact with individuals and groups, valuing the anecdotal, voluntary signs of gratitude more than the formally gathered views:

We get loads of anecdotal thank yous and feedback and stuff, which I kind of value more in a way – students coming back and saying “thank you so much I got a first for my last essay” or just feeling better and feeling more “confident” as a result of coming to see us, we get a lot of that and a lot of students emailing us and saying how useful they found it; I know it’s not a very scientific measure but I think it’s a sign that we are effective and that we’re doing well (Chey, 22/4/16)

Voluntary forms of feedback seemed to be imbued with a sense of being more of a genuine exchange ‘it’s all about the student and those interactions’ (Carl, 22/4/16), which do not ‘necessarily fall into reporting mechanisms that people traditionally like to use’ (Carl, 22/4/16), such as the National Student Survey.



## **5.4 Summary**

Informal and voluntary feedback and gratitude were important to individuals on a personal level for it represented a genuine exchange between tutor and student. Interviewees seemed to use feedback informally to gauge appreciation and assess what works in their exchanges with students. They also interpreted behaviours as a form of feedback in order to adjust practice. In contrast, however, formal modes of obtaining feedback in order to rate student satisfaction seemed to be purely about demonstrating the worth of a role. This involved obtaining students' perceptions of their learning experience at a time when they were still in the middle of it. Student power and rates of satisfaction will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis in chapter 9 Discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Conflicts arise between government expectations, student expectations, expectations of academic support teams and institutions. Performativity agendas, consumer feedback mechanisms, and unrealistic expectations that learning can be fast tracked (Johnson, 2017) drive unrealistic expectations of what it means to learn. This places more pressure on under-resourced academic support teams who are dealing with conflicts between: school, FE and HE; learners and consumers; educational transformation and quick fixes; educational institutions and educational 'businesses' – conflicts in purpose and measures. The co-creative nature of education means that how students perform is not just dependent on the establishment and staff (Schofield et al, 2013), prior educational experiences and dispositions of students and how they respond to or engage with teaching is also important to consider (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984). However, current government-driven measures of success seem to contradict this view, laying sole responsibility with institutions. Statistics are open to manipulation and can indicate what a person, institution or government want them to indicate. The use of statistics in education tends to simplify learning in terms of cause and effect. The current use of statistics tend to

assume that learning is homogenous and constant. Unlike statistics, informal and voluntary feedback and gratitude were important to interviewees on a personal level because they represented a genuine exchange, and were therefore representative of more individualistic and nuanced exchanges between teacher and learner, in contrast to objective and decontextualised sets of data.

The following chapter (chapter 9 Discussion) will define and discuss the varying powers at play in higher education and how they contribute to the '*remedial*', development and business approaches to academic support.

## Chapter 9: Discussion – Power and Capital

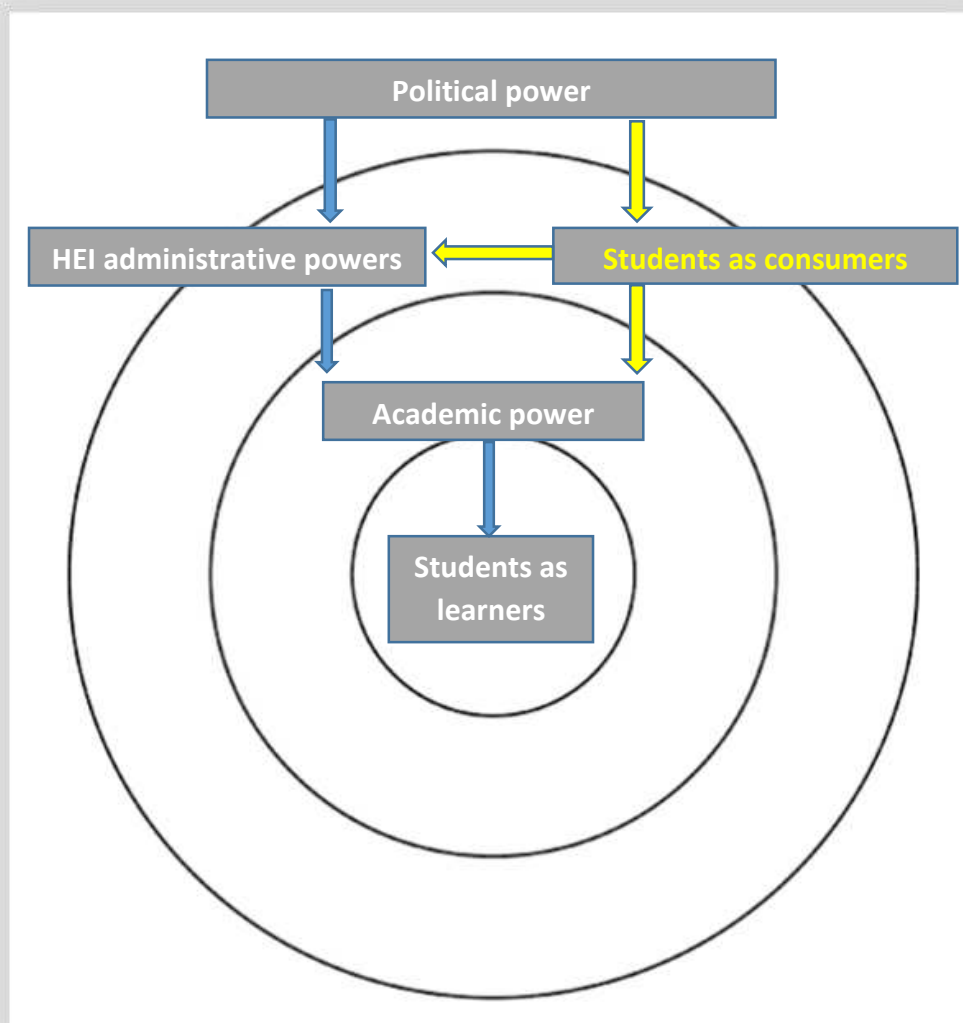
### Introduction

Education is a political, cultural and social action. It is bound up in the interplay between state and civil society shaping who we are, what we do, how we think and speak; and, what we receive from and give to society. The business of education is the creation and recreation of culture, society and personal identity ... Education is seen as both a force for social change and as a vehicle for reproducing existing social hierarchies (McLean, 2006: 1)

In the previous chapters I presented and analysed approaches to academic support - '*remedial*', development and business - each of which highlighted tensions between politically-driven expectations of HE and conflicts between HEI responses to policy - people interpret policy in different ways and do not necessarily share the same goals as policy-makers. This chapter will focus on power, exploring interviewee perceptions that changes in HE funding, and an emphasis on economic capital, are driving power struggles between HE administration, academics and learners. Bourdieu (1986, 1989) describes social fields as sites of conflict, a fight for the dominant capital in a field and ultimately power. The position that different agents adopt in a field depends on the types, volumes and relative weight of their capital in relation to that of the field (Bourdieu, 1998). Beholders with the majority and quality of capital hold ultimate power, maintaining their positions through the defining and perpetuating of what is considered to be the currency of power in that particular field.

The UK government – the political field of power, has dictated the currency of the UK HE field - economic capital, steering HEIs towards devising financially lucrative courses to compete for students and fees. The whole process of recruiting and educating students in the current HE field is underpinned by economic values. Even from within individual institutions economic capital is tending to take precedence over cultural and social capital. HE administrative powers have power over staff wages and therefore the work of academics, however, although academic powers, through cultural capital, hold power over students as learners, students as fee-paying consumers are imbued with power to critique academic and administrative powers. Therefore, students as consumers have power over the

abilities of staff and HEIs to accrue economic capital and their abilities to subsequently secure power and status in the field. This somewhat problematic cycle reinforces political control and politically motivated economic goals. The following diagram illustrates this chain of power, where students are cast in two conflicting roles and positions:



Academic support services are positioned within this unstable cycle of power and cognitive dissonance, with money as the dominant form of capital and control. As discussed in the previous three data analysis chapters – ‘Remedial’, Development and Business - at the centre of this power-play there is undoubtedly conflicts in values: humanitarian versus economic; public good versus individual or private gain; and holistic development versus vocational skills; all of which converge in HE. This

convergence shapes what is delivered, how it is delivered, who it is delivered to and how learning and teaching are defined, assessed and managed; all of which shape the contributions that graduates make to society.

Academic support services hold varying degrees of power within their institutions in relation to administrative, academic and consumer powers, which affect the approaches they adopt to their role. This chapter will explore the interrelationship of these varying powers and how power is shaping the purpose of HEIs and the role of academic support, mediated through the experiences of interviewees and literature. This chapter will be divided into four sections: 1. Academic power, administrative power and institutional deficits; 2. Satisfaction metrics, consumer power and learner deficits; 3. The power of academic support services and addressing deficits; 4. Holistic education and social progression versus performativity and societal deficits.

## **1. Academic power, administrative power and institutional deficits**

### **1.1 Two forms of power**

It is important to analyse the interplay between academic and administrative powers, as this helps to understand the contexts that shape the role and practices of academic support. Academic power consists of the disciplines (subjects and subject specialists) and their varying levels of autonomy (cultural, economic and symbolic capital) within their institution. According to Bourdieu ‘academic power and intellectual prestige are at once weapons and stakes in the academic war of all against all’ (Wacquant, 1990: 680), with a hierarchy of different subjects and specialists commanding different weights of intellectual power (Bourdieu, 1988). However, academic power is ultimately answerable to administrative power; administrative power consists of strategic and senior management in HEIs, the institutional decision-makers in charge of responding to HE policy. Policy-makers are the tip of the

HE power pyramid who shape the expectations of the HE field and define the dominant forms of capital, as established previously.

Atherton, referring to the work of Deem et al (2007), describes this hierarchical power structure as the ‘new managerialism’ a shifting ‘balance ... between “strategic control” and “operational control”’ (2017: 95). He goes onto describe the impact of this in HE:

new managerialism has ... challenge[d] the very ideas and practices on which HE is based. The organisational reality of everyday university life seems to suggest that for many, if not most, academics there has been a fundamental loss of control – over work organisation and professional culture – as universities have been transformed from ‘communities of scholars’ into workplaces’. Activities designed to promote social mobility via widened access have been associated with this shift (2017: 95)

I have witnessed first-hand this shift in status and power from academics as autonomous scholars and experts, to more subordinate workers with increasing pressures, with variances occurring between different leadership powers. Indeed, according to interviewee responses, the power of staff members – academics and academic support – varies between institutions and between Vice Chancellors.

## **1.2 Working in a culture of fear**

One interviewee described the academics at Elvaston as working in a ‘culture of fear’ (Effie, 26/5/16); academics were having to ‘toe the line’, ‘obey instructions’ and ‘keep their heads down’ (Effie, 26/5/16). This culture was described as driven ‘from the top’, in other words coming from administrative powers in response to ‘strategic’ (government) ‘control’ (Atherton, 2017). However, this internal culture of passively following orders did not match with the external image that is presented through marketing and webpages to potential students. On the contrary, the external image was defined by interviewees as ‘creative, cutting-edge, questioning, innovative, [and] radical’ (Effie, 26/5/16) a culture that encouraged students to ‘ask big questions ... not take anything for granted and ... break rules in order to establish new and better ones’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Therefore the institution was thought to be suffering a ‘crisis’ in ‘identity’ (Effie, 26/5/16), for what is sold to students is not the

reality that academics are working and teaching in. According to Collini (2012) in the present political climate many institutions are struggling with a crisis in identity as they attempt to meet conflicting purposes and priorities. However, the issue described at this particular institution highlights an inequality in power, with students being enabled to challenge and question, while teaching staff remain subservient. This, therefore, creates an inequality between teachers and learners, with learners holding more power over those who are entrusted to guide their development. With the additional layer of consumer power – presented in the 2016 BIS report: Success as a Knowledge Economy - academics are caught between consumer and administrative powers. Student (or consumer) power will be discussed more in section two of this chapter.

### **1.3 Conflict in Purpose**

How administrative powers choose to respond to HE policy depends on their: individual habitus - interpretation of, and response to, challenges; and their institutional habitus - capital and power of the institution (subjects, symbolic status and students they attract). As already established in previous chapters, not all institutions are created equal (Bourdieu, 1977) “the public of private interests’ justifies the increasing privatisation of higher education and the increasing disparity of institutions across the higher education sector’ (Nixon, 2011: 63). Variations in power between institutions leads to variations in power-conflicts within institutions. The struggle between administrative and academic powers often shows itself through what is advertised to students for recruitment purposes and what academics are seen to be delivering, as one interviewee from Blenheim highlighted:

recruitment materials and websites[,] ... say things like ... “this will prepare you for a 21<sup>st</sup> century career in marketing”[,] and then ... [the students] are ... assessed on a 20,000 word piece of original research written in an academic style[.]... [Students] are being recruited on the basis that they need ... [an MA] for their career and then they’re being assessed in a method ... which is trying to train them as obvious researchers (Boris, 29/2/16)

This example is representative of the conflicting expectations being juggled by institutions. Atherton describes HE as ‘pulled in different directions. It is attempting to balance retaining its ability to develop

critical, reflective thinking and thinkers but also to provide the kind of tangible skills that enable its students to not just survive but to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (2017: 97). However, the expectations of institutions are not just limited to developing students, for HEIs are also expected to concentrate on business, such as developing entrepreneurial strategies to bridge funding gaps (BIS, 2011), as well as contributing to knowledge, meeting research output expectations (Research Excellence Framework - REF) and developing future researchers. These demands create a struggle between economic capital at the level of administrative powers, and cultural capital at the level of academic powers. Atherton goes on to say that while 'attempts to keep faith with a classical vision of the university without recognising the changes that HE itself is undergoing look doomed to failure, ... rushing to become an 'education business' and rejecting the history of HE and the intellectual and social capital that comes with it also looks to be risk-laden' (2017: 97).

Academics seem to be caught in the middle of expectations: meeting the REF; the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); at the same time as satisfying students' expectations, regardless of what is sold to students (consumers) through recruitment strategies. Fenton describes these 'detrimental' problems for 'teaching staff' as a 'recipe for demoralisation, demotivation and stagnation' (2011: 105) as they try to cram 'teaching into every available hour to maximise space utilisation and student turnover' (2011: 105). However, Fenton considers the reality of this 'efficiency' in teaching (BIS, 2016) is that it 'removes the chance of research, writing or even reading' (2011: 105). Therefore, despite expectations driven by the REF, Fenton believes that 'research-led teaching will increasingly become a luxury for all but the few elite institutions' (2011: 105) with the majority of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). This presents a step back to elitism, driven by money, rather than a step forward to social equality.



#### **1.4 Conflicting expectations converging in the curriculum**

Interviewees regularly highlighted conflicts between different government-imposed measures - employability versus research excellence, and research excellence versus teaching excellence, thus paralleling the vocational (employment skills - economic capital) and liberal (research and knowledge – cultural capital) debate. Chey from Chartwell highlighted the liberal-vocation conflict in course content for nursing students:

a lot of marks [are awarded] for analysis and being critical but then the [assignment] questions aren't always set up to provide that much scope for it ... The other thing is trying to manage a lot of learning outcomes with a small word count and then a[n] [essay] question ... that doesn't always ... completely match the learning outcomes (22/4/16)

Nursing was thought to require so many different qualities and knowledge, all of which had been translated into numerous 'essays' - 'reflective', 'scientific', 'factual', 'sociological', 'psychological' (Chey, 22/4/16) - all with a similar 'marking scheme' (Chey, 22/4/16) and low word counts. This interviewee considered 'government requirements' as partly to blame for so much being 'crammed' into each assignment, too many performance targets and expectations lead to an overloaded curriculum - a complaint of Robbins in the 1960s. However, this scenario also highlights the conflicts arising from using competency models of assessment (Wolf, 2002) associated with vocational training, with more liberal modes of assessment to gauge cognitive development.

The limited word count of nursing assignments was described as a strategy deployed by academic staff in order to manage 'ridiculous amounts of marking' (Chey, 22/4/16). Nursing cohorts were very large and nursing students tended to enter HE with lower writing abilities, therefore, these cohorts were quite resource-heavy. Widening participation and large diverse cohorts (social equality), coupled with insufficient teaching and support hours (economic efficiency) impacts on the ability of institutions to achieve performance targets, particularly if they are numerous and conflicting. Therefore, rather than shaping knowledge and society, as institutions once had, they are tending to adopt more reactive

strategies to manage external demands efficiently (BIS, 2016), thus perpetuating the status quo. What is clear from this situation is the impact that conflicting political agendas, in the name of ‘quality’, have on the actual quality of teaching and learning, and graduates. Barnett, describes ‘talk’ of ‘quality’ in HE as ‘not fully honest’ (1992: 28) because those:

who use the language of ‘quality’ do not always make explicit the conception of higher education from which their approach to quality springs. ... Consequently, proposals for quality assurance and quality improvement tend to become the party lines of the different groups. ... Higher education is a complex public good in modern society, giving rise to different definitions of its purposes (1992: 28)

However, despite the complexity of the world in which HE reflects, the many purposes and ‘conceptions’ of a higher education seem to be reduced down to meeting definitions of ‘quality’ (Barnett, 2004). Barnett makes an important point when he states that ‘our models of quality assurance should ... fit our concepts of higher education’ (1992: 21) rather than our ‘conceptions’ fitting ‘models of ‘quality assurance’; otherwise we end up with what Barnett describes as ‘performance indicators’ tail wagging the quality dog’ (1992: 21).

### **1.5 REF and league tables**

The manager for the Downton team (the post-1992 broad subject institution) described witnessing a shift in priority in their institution between 2004 and 2016, as it achieved university status. Previously this ex-polytechnic was described as being ahead of its time in terms of ‘teaching’ and ‘support’, ‘very well known for supporting all sorts of students – students with disabilities, ... very much a widening participation institution’ (Dylan, 15/4/16). However, in response to obtaining university status and the REF, administrative powers had been ‘investing’ in researchers and ‘climbing up the league tables’ (Dylan, 15/4/16). This manager felt that the university ‘profile’ had really ‘changed’, hinting at the problematic nature of measures such as the REF combined with league tables, for both encourage people and institutions to compete for their own survival, rather than focus on what they think they should be doing. In this particular case, achieving university status presented a dilemma between

continuing with quality teaching and student support - or meeting expected research outcomes of the REF. Walton describes the Research Assessment Exercise as ‘absurd and sinister’ a move from ‘peer review to ‘metrics’ [which] enhanced and extended the privileged status of calculations of quality and impact ... based on league tables of academic journals’ (2011: 22) – league tables being used to compile league tables. The REF encourages institutions and staff to do whatever is necessary in order to achieve expected research output, through fear of what will happen if they do not. This pressure is in danger of compromising teaching standards, as the necessary time and energy used to manage demanding teaching timetables is placed on meeting research expectations. Indeed, the emergence of the TEF appears to be as a counter-balance to the REF.

The manager of the team supporting Elvaston (the post-1992 arts institution) also talked about the conflict between research and teaching, as administrative powers hired more entrepreneurs and researchers than teachers in a bid to gain a stronger research profile. However, high numbers of part-time associate lecturers - experts in their fields – were not only described as lacking teaching experience, but they were also hired on part-time contracts. The manager of the team felt that ‘nothing’ was getting ‘refined and embedded’ in the curriculum ‘it’s just “oh, that didn’t work let’s do something different” so a whole new thing gets chucked out there’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Instructions to students were also described as ambiguous; students would be instructed to write an essay but what the tutors were expecting to mark was ‘a report or a reflective piece’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Interviewees felt that these issues and inconsistencies in teaching were ultimately being driven by the vice chancellor’s desire to become top of the league table in their field, which meant improving their REF output.

Indeed, Morgan (2015) in the *Time Higher Education*, talked about how the combination of the REF, *Students at the Heart of the System* and promises of ‘quality teaching’, have affected the status of teaching in HE:

This month, [the University of] Surrey – whose vice-chancellor is Sir Christopher Snowden, the president of Universities UK – announced plans to cut the number of academics in its politics department from 14 to six. On most measures currently used to judge teaching (although such measures are problematic for many) the politics department scores highly. It was ranked fourth in the UK in the 2014 National Student Survey, with an overall student satisfaction score of 97 per cent. In the same year, it was announced that the department's graduates had scored an employment rate of 100 per cent in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey.

So despite being ranked highly in all areas of 'quality' the vice chancellor of the University of Surrey planned to cut its politics teaching staff to less than half. The reason for this drastic drop in the number of teachers was due to the department's poor performance in the 2014 REF (Morgan, 2015). Therefore, the vice chancellor of the University of Surrey in 2015 seemed to prioritised the REF and researchers over teaching and teachers.

A pattern arose from interviews indicating the concerns that the actions of administrative powers were being 'driven by statistics' and 'data'. The Vice Chancellor of Fairfax (the post-WWII Russell Group institution), was also described as ambitious and focused on figures. Their strategy was to recruit 'high tariff best students' (Effie, 26/5/16), as well as researchers, in an attempt to be 'top of the Russell group' (Effie, 26/5/16) in research and student success. Recruiting high tariff students is, arguably, an effective way of achieving 'efficiency' (BIS, 2016), for an institution is more likely to achieve high-class degree awards on less teaching, thus freeing-up staff to meet REF expectations. Williams (2016) highlights the pressure that academics are continuously under to meet research targets, with 'many' feeling 'pushed' into behaving in ways that could be considered 'unethical' and dishonest. However, the part-time researchers for Fairfax (post-WWII Russell Group institution) were described as being used to fill in gaps in teaching (Ethan, 26/5/16), therefore placing researchers into a similar situation as teachers, with both under pressure to meet both research and teaching output – REF and TEF – with different, and potentially conflicting, criteria.

## **1.6 Graduate destinations and league tables**

Many interviewees described their administrative powers as concerned about their league table positions, however different administrative powers had different priorities and approaches to improving or securing the status of their institution. Chartwell (pre-WWII Russell Group institution) - known for being 'research intensive' - was described by one interviewee as revising its education strategy 'towards skills and transferrable skills' and 'employability' in response to 'graduate-level jobs' metrics (Chey, 22/4/16). However, as discussed in chapter 6 ('Remedial') the employability of pupils graduating from school has been brought into question by employers, and as discussed in chapter 7 (Development) employability is arguably more about a person's values, habitus and transferrable qualities rather than role-specific skills. The combination of these, present real issues for HEIs to overcome in order to meet employability metrics, particularly when combined with efficiency-drives and high student to staff ratio, and a time-span of just two or three years. However, as Chey at Chartwell highlighted, there is potentially a 'gap between' what the administrative powers, academics, and 'support services' 'see' as their priorities at her institution (Chey, 22/4/16), indicating a conflict in sense of purpose between administrative and academics, as well as indicating a third position of power - 'support services'. The power and priorities of academic support will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

## **1.7 TEF and league tables**

As previously discussed, Scott (2015) talks about institutions and staff resorting to 'gaming' metrics in order to meet, and survive, the multiple expectations thrust upon them. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) provides yet another set of criteria for institutions, and individuals, to meet, and potentially another set of metrics in which to 'game'. One institution that had been employing researchers instead of teachers in order to raise their REF profile, was described as considering employing teachers in light of the TEF. However this move to employ teachers was described by

interviewees as having little to do with raising teaching standards (and cultural capital), as the government would like to think, but instead a means to get better ‘scores’ in an attempt ‘to promote themselves’ (Ethan, 26/5/16).

Scott (2015) considers ‘all’ metric-driven assessments of quality to be problematic:

NSS scores are now ruthlessly “gamed”, because of their impact on league tables. Short-term employment rates are not the same as longer-term employability in today’s fractured and volatile labour markets. And of course, the proportion of “good” degrees is determined by universities themselves ... None of these metrics, or any others that might be incorporated ... actually measures teaching excellence.

Scott (2015) highlights concerns about any ‘quality’ assessment based on data, particularly set by those outside of the expertise in question. The TEF - and the measuring of teaching quality - was considered to be ‘worse’ than the REF, this was because teaching excellence was to be judged on ‘metrics based on metrics’ (NSS and employability statistics). Indeed TEF results like NSS and REF results, potentially shape the positions that HEI’s hold in the league tables, and league table positions potentially impact on the ability of institutions to recruit and accrue funding – not unlike the Ofsted system and secondary education. HEIs who struggle to achieve excellence as a result of limited financial resources and limited lucrative employment destinations may find themselves unable to break free of their position. In contrast, the already economically affluent HEIs may find their historical positions reinforced as they are able to ‘afford better facilities, more favourable staff-student ratios and attract even more students able to ease their way into employment’ (Scott, 2015). This goes back to what Bourdieu (1977) describes as the elite reproducing or reinforcing their positions of power.

## **1.8 Summary**

There are three main levels of power converging in HEIs:

1. policy – concerned with the societal or economic role of HE – who define and control performance

2. administration - concerned with the business strategy of an HEI – deciding on how performance indicators are met
3. academic – concerned with service delivery - tasked broadly with meeting performance indicators

This, therefore leads to conflicts and deficits, for decision-making at the level of administration - in order to sustain business, does not always fit with practices at the level of course teams, as course teams attempt to deliver on the various and conflicting expectations. According to interviewees, the autonomy of academic power across institutions seemed to vary. These variations are dependent on the way in which subjects are perceived by political powers, the historical origin and status of HEIs, the perceived role and status of subject specialists, and the vision and ambitions of administrative powers.

However, the most important point that emerged from the interviews is the role that HE policy and conflicting priorities seem to play in driving, or perpetuating the notion of academic or institutional deficits. Like students, the needs of institutions and academic staff varied, depending on how they were positioned in relation to policy-driven expectations. Some academic staff were described by interviewees as requiring guidance around meeting REF expectations while others required guidance in curriculum and teaching development. The role of academic support in relation to institutional deficits will be discussed later in the chapter. The following section of this chapter will introduce yet another form of power – consumer power - and another layer of deficits – learner deficits – as a result of conflicting political agendas across the whole of UK education.

## **2. Satisfaction metrics, consumer power and learner deficits**

### **2.1 Performativity and rates of satisfaction**

According to Scott (2011) institutional ‘performance’ is primarily based on ‘subject mix’, second to this is ‘student mix – in terms of class, gender and ethnicity’, however institutions are expected to

compete with each other, as though they are on a level field, through generic measures and metrics. Ball states that ‘professionalism’ has been replaced by ‘three interrelated policy technologies; the market, managerialism and performativity ... [Each] offer a politically attractive alternative to the state-centred, public welfare tradition of education provision’ (2003: 215-216). However, this aligning with ‘private sector’ methods is driving the ‘commodification’ of education, ‘controlled’ by the state through performance indicators and ‘comparisons’ (Ball, 2003). Ball goes on to add:

the issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial ... as it determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid ... [I]n the UK, these struggles are highly individualized as teachers, as ethical subjects, find their values challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity (2003: 216)

In HE particularly, student completion rates, grades and student satisfaction are all measures of ‘performativity’, defined by policy-makers with control over the ‘field of judgement’. Although each measure holds the potential to undermine the power and professional values of teachers, using rates of student satisfaction - associated with consumers and service industries (private sector) – as a means to assessing teacher effectiveness, seemed to be the most contentious. In the words of Ball (2003), rates of satisfaction ‘displaces’ teacher power - ‘creativity’ and ‘professionalism’ - and instead turns it into consumer power.

## **2.2 Subjectivity of rates of satisfaction**

Although most interviewees placed some importance on obtaining student feedback on an individual basis (see chapter 8 Business), the formalising of student satisfaction through statistics, as an indication of effective education, was raised as a concern by all interviewees. Shevlin et al argue that ‘student ratings’ do not ‘wholly reflect actual teaching effectiveness’ (2000: 397); indeed this was echoed by interviewees who felt that measures like the National Students Survey (NSS) were subjective ‘measures of student satisfaction’ rather than teacher ‘effectiveness’ (Desiree, 15/4/16), which potentially play a role in driving down quality rather enhancing teaching and learning.



According to the empirical research undertaken by Shevlin et al (2000), students' perceptions of teaching are biased towards whether their teacher is charismatic or not. Therefore, student 'satisfaction' is dependent on how students relate to their teachers, in other words how their perceptions (habitus and capital) and positions fit with the position and perceptions of their teachers. If student satisfaction is based on how students relate to those teaching them, it is necessary to have time to forge relationships, this can prove difficult on mass, particularly with roles such as academic support, where their work with courses may be inconsistent.

The underlying criteria leading to positive feedback of academic support was described as 'complex' (Eileen, 26/5/16) and could therefore only be a 'rough or crude' indication that tutors may be having some kind of 'positive' effect on students on a case-by-case basis (Eileen, 26/5/16). Similarly, student dissatisfaction, did not necessarily mean that a teacher had been ineffective as the manager of the team for Elvaston and Fairfax explained "Some people say "you've helped me so much" and others might go out and say "well actually that wasn't an awful lot of help", but that's not because we haven't done our job, it might just be that we told them they have got a lot more to do than they thought, but we can't make that better for them' (Effie, 26/5/16). According to several interviewees, particularly those at Atherton (1960s broad subject institution) - the underlying student expectation of academic support seemed largely to do with alleviating some or all of a student's work load or anxieties in some way. This, therefore, reinforces Furedi's (2017) notion that are more dependent students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than previously, a trait which, arguably, falls short of government and employer expectations. Student satisfaction and dissatisfaction with academic support services seemed reliant on whether the individual's expectations were met, which, as discussed in chapter 8 (Business), did not always necessarily equate with learning. Student expectations of academic support did not always coincide with the aim of academic support, policy expectations or employer expectations.

An overemphasis on students' satisfaction with their teachers and their HE experience was raised as a concern in chapter 2 (Policy), chapter 6 ('Remedial') and chapter 8 (Business). The consumer service model for measuring teaching and learning undermines the power of academics and academic support staff to challenge learner habitus and bring about change. Instead, these measures potentially encourage staff to focus their time and attention on practices that safe guard favourable ratings and pass rates. This model of assessing education creates a three-way power struggle between administrative power, staff and students - as learner and consumers, and conflicts between different forms of capital and power:

1. HEI administration – responsible for business management and decision making, to accrue economic capital
2. academics and academic support staff – frontline service providers supporting the development of cultural capital
3. students – holding the conflicting positions of both learner being guided in the development of cultural capital, and consumer imbued with economic power to critique and shape HEIs, teaching and cultural capital

Several interviewees described administrative powers across the sector as being overly concerned with performativity and comparative targets. Echoing the words of Barnett (1992), the manager from Blenheim stated that 'when the tail starts to wag the dog, when universities are gaming systems to creep up the league tables[,] ... if the effort becomes driven by that[,] ... the university loses its way in terms of its mission' (Beatrice, 29/2/16). The main concern raised by this manager was that the importance placed upon the NSS in league tables could steer some institutions towards putting their energy into improving scores and safeguarding economic capital, at the sake of developing individuals and cultural capital. Indeed, as discussed previously, other interviewees raised similar concerns, some about the practices of their own vice-chancellors. All interviewees implicitly distinguished between

the effectiveness of institutions in their ‘mission’ to educate and contribute to knowledge development, and the somewhat dubious role of the NSS.

### **2.3 Rates of satisfaction and consumer power**

There is no doubt that giving students the means to rate their experience of education, and publishing it as a means to drive competition, imbues students with degrees of power over service providers – academics and academic support staff. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ‘most distressing’ experiences of teachers are when they are criticised for their efforts (Quinlan 2016: 104) because of their ‘emotional’ commitment to ‘teaching’; however I would also argue, as discussed in chapter 2 Policy, that in the current volatile climate there are also underlying fears about keeping one’s job. This is particularly prevalent if an institution is dependent on recruiting and retaining all applicants regardless of their abilities and motivations, for its economic survival.

At a time when institutions are charged with challenging the limits of student habitus and socio-economic status, in order to raise aspirations and lay the foundations for social mobility, academics seem to be at their most disempowered, at the mercy of statistics and comparisons. In *The impact of student satisfaction surveys on staff in HE and FE institutions* The University and College Union (UCU) (2010) highlighted that ‘as well as students, staff should also have a role in measuring the quality of an institution and that dignity and respect for all should be inherent in the process’. Although it is debatable whether more forms of institutional feedback will enhance quality or contribute to an equality of power, this statement from UCU does seem to highlight concerns that not all staff are awarded the same ‘dignity and respect’ as students in voicing satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, the main issue is not necessarily that student feedback is collated and published, but more that it is de-contextualised and distilled into percentages to signify satisfied or unsatisfied, and used to grade and empower or disempower institutions and teachers.

## 2.4 Statistics and homogenisation of education

Boyle (2001) raises concerns about the prolific use of statistics to measure any part of the natural world regardless of whether it is for ‘excellent humanitarian reasons’:

They measure, measure, measure, knowing that what they measure is alive and will not keep still, and suspecting that maybe - however much they count - they will not capture the essence of the question they are asking. Things have to keep static if you're going to count them ... But real life isn't still. We need answers, but we also know that what is most important to our lives simply can't be pinned down like a still-life ... all of those numbers are making us misunderstand things. And every time a new set of statistics comes out, I can't help feeling some of the richness and mystery of life gets extinguished.

Although ‘accountability’ was considered to be important to interviewees, it was more to do with ensuring that they were doing the best they could in affecting learning, the aim being to assess and develop strategies that work with different individuals and groups. As discussed in chapter 5 (methodology), Elliot (2009) suggests that teaching and learning cannot be distilled into a definitive set of rules and practices, for what works is ‘context-dependent’ because circumstances surrounding learners (habitus and capital) and learning (both habitus and capital of tutors coupled with field) are fluid. Therefore, individually tailored qualitative measures are more appropriate in assessing what is happening between teacher and student (specific relationship), on an individual basis in context, and more importantly ‘within an atmosphere of professional trust’ (Brynne, 20/1/16). On the contrary, several interviewees highlighted the de-professionalisation that government control of ‘output’ (BIS, 2016) is having on all levels of education (see chapter 6 ‘Remedial’ and chapter 8 Business).

Performativity mechanisms were described as homogenising or leading to the ‘macdonaldisation’ (Anna, 21/1/16), of education. As one interviewee indicated, ‘[different] universities are good at different things I don’t think they all have to be the same (Beatrice, 29/2/16), instead this person felt that each should play to its strengths. In chapter 6 (‘Remedial’), performativity targets in secondary education were described as affecting the preparedness (academic and emotional) and the integrity of students in HE, which then impacted on the quality of HE learning ‘I think what really scares many of

us is the thought of going down the OFSTED route of intense government surveillance of our [HE] education’ (Brynne, 20/1/16). However, it could be argued, that between the REF, TEF, NSS, and easier student complaints procedures, universities are part the way there.

## **2.5 Summary**

Although feedback was generally important to interviewees on a case-by-case basis, through qualitative measures and professional judgement, student satisfaction was considered to be subjective. Formalised rates of satisfaction through context-less statistics, are arguably devoid of meaning. Satisfaction did not always equate with whether students were learning, or experiencing good and bad teaching, instead, at times, seemed to be based on how students felt about or perceived their own position and power in their own learning experience. Although how students feel is not always within the control of teachers or institutions, satisfaction polls imply that teachers (academics and academic support) have control over re-shaping student perceptions and motivations. The publishing of student satisfaction, arguably disempowers both academics and academic support, laying the responsibility of ‘value for money’ and the development of individuals (perceptions and behaviour), solely with staff.

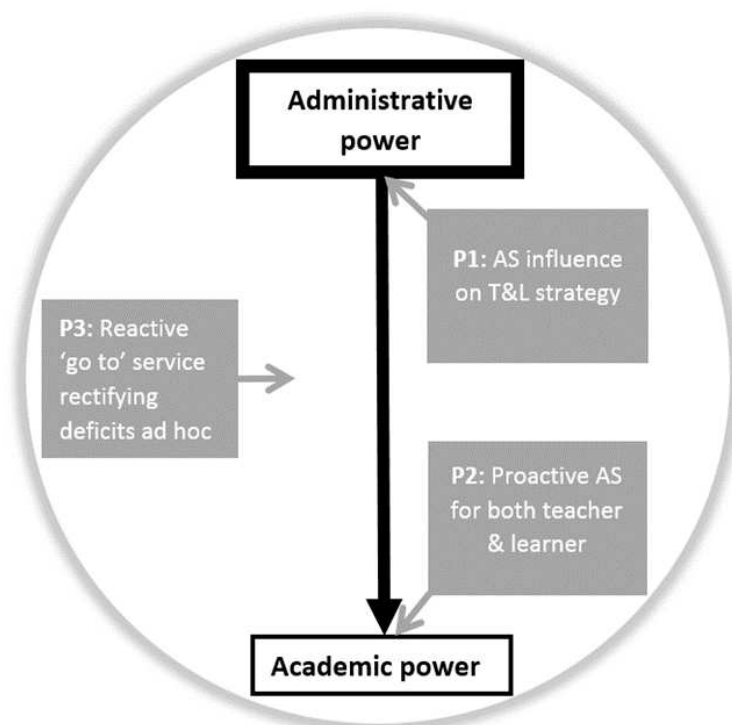
However, consumer-power is not the same as learner empowerment, and can run counter to it, perpetuating learner deficits. It is also arguable whether consumer-power is merely policy-makers using students – as complicit agents - to enforce political control and power. Indeed deficits as a result of performativity agendas in secondary education, as discussed in chapter 6 ‘Remedial’, often meant that students needed to be taught how to think, read and write, manage their time, emotions and work, motivate themselves, and understand integrity, all in HE. The following section of this chapter will focus on the power and position of academic support, and how the position of the role in relation to academic and administrative powers impact on perceptions and practices.

### 3. The power of academic support services and addressing deficits

#### 3.1 Varying positions of power

Academic support teams appeared to assume a mediating role between conflicts in priorities between policy, academic and administrative ‘power-struggles’ (Anna, 21/1/16. The practices and power of teams however, depended largely on their positions in relation to academic and administrative powers.

The following diagram indicates the three main positions of power, and potential practices, of academic support (AS) teams within an HE institution (field):



Analysis of interviewee responses revealed that the closer academic support services were positioned to administrative power (see **P1** on the diagram), the more likely they would have some form of influence on teaching and learning (T&L) strategy. Whereas the closer academic support services were positioned to academic power (see **P2** on the diagram) the more proactive they could be in supporting both teacher and learner at course level, as one interviewee highlighted:

the staff might come to us and say ... “we’ve got a large number of students that are on the verge of failing could you please do us some special sessions” ... [This] is partly helping the

staff[,] ... they don't want to have ... statistics of their students failing, it is also helping the students ... [O]n the back of that we [also] do ... writing development sessions with staff so they can then see what we do, and some of them have ... started to integrate their own relevant classes ... without needing us anymore (Boris, 29/2/16)

In this case academic support services were positioned close to course teams within an academic department, imbued with an equality of power and capital. The academic support tutors seemed to have knowledge (cultural capital) desired by the courses, as academics were described as 'not always ... conscious of the writing ... and discourse patterns' of students (Beatrice, 29/2/16). The team was also positioned reasonably close to administrative powers line-managed by the faculty head who played some part in institutional strategy.

In contrast, the further away academic support services are positioned to academic power, particularly if also positioned at a distance from administrative power (see **P3** on the diagram), the more they would assume the role of a 'go to' service rectifying issues or 'deficits', ad hoc and reactively, with students.

As one interviewee described:

institutionally we don't sit in any of the academic departments. There is an interesting tussle going on about names as always, behind that there's the politics of status ... So we are not attached to any ... academic faculties and we are not allowed to call ourselves lecturers ... Because we are at arms-length from the academic departments it means that all the time our positions are being negotiated ... [leading to] a patchy engagement across the ... university; ... it's a partnership[,] we can only go in and do things with individual classes at the invitation of the lecturers and some of them are happier than others to invite us (Anna, 21/1/16)

Despite academic support being positioned in the same department as staff-facing teams, the remits of the different teams were separate, academic support had no involvement in curriculum development or staff development. Therefore 'not all schools ... [were] really interested in engaging' (Anton, 7/1/16) with academic support, and tended to perceive the role as 'a bit too much spoon-feeding and mollycoddling ... [of] students' (Anton, 7/1/16). This perception and lack of engagement with academic support is, to some extent, a result of institutional positioning – positioned at a distance to academic and administrative powers - thus affecting how they perceive and behave in their role. A lack of connection with academic or administrative powers, seemed to position academic support

closer to students, therefore this team tended to prioritise student satisfaction of their services over academic and administrative priorities. Positions, perceptions and behaviours thus reinforce positions, perceptions and behaviours (Bourdieu, 1977). Indeed, any engagement with course teams occurred as a result of individual tutors breaking free of their collective positioning, and instead establishing relationships with individual academics.

### **3.2 Bridging mandates and relationship gaps**

The team supporting Elvaston (the post-1992 arts institution) and the one campus of Fairfax (the post-WWII Russell Group institution) also had to work at developing relationships with academic teams. The role of academic support had been removed from university structures entirely and instead were now managed alongside non-teaching roles by a separate company and CEO ‘It’s a real tricky one because we are not affiliated ... to any university, nobody knows what ... [the management company] is in educational circles’ (Ethan, 26/5/16). This teams’ engagement across the two institutions was subsequently ad hoc (Ethan, 26/5/16), either because schools did not want to ‘engage’ with them or because the team lacked ‘capacity’ (Effie, 26/5/16) to deliver across all courses single-handed. This team had to rely on what they described as “‘corridor conversations’ rather than ... being institutionally enshrined in ... documentation ... that ‘this should happen’” (Eileen, 26/5/16). As the manager explained: ‘we talk to individual lecturers but we don’t have an official presence or status in the system’ (Effie, 26/5/16). Their post-1992 institution – Elvaston -was described as very ‘practice-based’ with about 20% of staff ‘on a dyslexic spectrum’ (Eileen, 26/5/16) who often lacked confidence in ‘their own writing’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). Therefore some academics were ‘very grateful’ of support, and very happy for the team to undertake any of the work that academics did not ‘particularly want to’ (Eileen, 26/5/16).



Relying on individual relationships rather than a mandate was at times problematic, this academic support team was often asked to bridge gaps in staffing levels, filling in for academics so they could get on with other aspects of their own duties such as research. The problem this then posed was whether the academic support team should agree to deliver a session knowing that the timing may render the content ineffective - and affect their own satisfaction ratings. However, refusal to deliver a session may break the relationship they have with the course team - thus reducing their statistics regarding 'reach' and course 'engagement'. Indeed chapter 8 (Business) highlighted the difficulties experienced by teams in cautiously managing different expectations, at the same time as achieving their own and institutional 'measures' of success. Ad hoc relationships with course teams seemed to exacerbate this situation.

Changes in administrative powers or course teams also present an issue of re-establishing one's own position of power in order to continue to work proactively and strategically. These changes in leadership or staff prove particularly problematic if individuals have arrived from an institution where the perception of academic support is purely remedial, student-focused and behind the scenes. While academic support benefits from a lack of defining parameters, as it enables the role to evolve (as discussed in chapter 3 Literature Review), the downside is that the perception of academic support can differ depending on the prior experiences of administrative and academic powers; differences in perceptions can affect how practitioners are able to approach their role.

### **3.3 Summary**

Academic support services seem to be positioned on a spectrum between administrative and academic powers, and a tussle between economic survival and the pursuit of knowledge and learning. While a member of staff might be high up in the academic support hierarchy, or within the professional field of academic support, they may be low down within the institutional hierarchy, thus impacting on what

they can achieve in their role. Some interviewees within their teams held positions that enabled them to overcome academic or institutional deficits directly with the relevant powers. However, others had to spend a lot of time building, and rebuilding relationships with academic or administrative powers, or resigning themselves to negotiating issues with or through students in order to fulfil their remit. The final section of this chapter discusses the perceived role that higher education (and education in general) can play in redefining and progressing knowledge for the good of humanity, beyond politically motivated competition, self-interest and consumerism. This next section of the chapter will discuss interviewees perception of HE as a means to develop and empower individuals for a more socially aware, inclusive, and harmonious society. What will also be discussed is how performativity in education undermines social inclusion and social mobility, thus perpetuating the very deficits that performance agendas are designed to address.

#### **4. Holistic education and social progression versus performativity and societal deficits**

##### **4.1 Supporting self-cultivation**

Interviewees, in one form or another, either talked about, demonstrated or supported the development of social and humanitarian values through their teaching and support activities, or through their approach to the role. Several interviewees talked about the importance of ‘creating citizens that make a useful’ (Chey, 22/4/16) or ‘real’ ‘contribution’ (Dylan, 15/4/16) to society. One interviewee described the role of HE and academic support as developing ‘attitudes’ ‘underpinned by compassion, imagination, generosity, inventiveness, flexibility and all of the skills that would enable ... [someone] to be a good citizen and ... a team player’ (Eileen, 26/5/16). This is echoed by Quinlan (2011), who highlights the need to develop ‘good character’, the ‘right behaviour’ as a means to living what she describes as a ‘good life’.

Collectively, interviewees talked about developing virtues of ‘integrity’, ‘inclusivity’, ‘respect’, ‘generosity’, ‘tolerance’ and a sense of shared ‘social responsibility’, which Mascolo (2017) refers to as ‘self-cultivation’. These attributes are, arguably, a form of cultural capital, transferrable across, and beneficial to, all social fields. However, as discussed in chapter 4 (Theory), chapter 6 (‘Remedial’), and chapter 7 (Development), self-cultivation cannot ‘merely’ be achieved by merely providing individuals with the ‘capacity’ for choice (Mascolo, 2017), or fast-tracking education:

self-determination does not spring spontaneously from within the self. It is a slow and gradual process through which students construct knowledge, skills and values that have their origins between the student and agents of culture ... It is a relational process in that occurs as teachers provide the academic and socio-moral scaffolding that awakens, orients and supports a student’s active efforts toward self-formation (2017: 31-32)

This describes the importance of the two way relationship between student and teacher in developing individuals, highlighting the responsibility of both the learner as ‘active’ and motivated participant in ‘self-formation’, as well as the teacher as facilitator and support. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter and in chapter 6 (‘Remedial’), the performativity paradigm in which UK education is governed, places the responsibility for motivating ‘active efforts’ in ‘self-formation’ solely with teachers. However, this paradigm and associated practices runs counter to philosophies and values underpinning the notion of self-cultivation and self-formation.

To develop or reinforce the virtues mentioned earlier, it is necessary to shape or reshape the habitus of individuals, involving a total immersion within ‘changed life conditions’ (Illeris, 2014: 61), for developing ‘thinking’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘understandings have no quick-fix option’ (Fenton, 2011: 105). It is therefore necessary to rethink approaches to, and leadership of, education based on humanistic values (Quinlan, 2011; Mascolo, 2017). Ideally ‘humanistic academies’ (Mascolo, 2017) will prepare students for ‘life’ more broadly, with ‘vocation’ merely as a part of ‘life’ preparation (Quinlan, 2011; Mascolo, 2017). To enable individuals to have ‘good’ lives, Mascolo talks about the need to consider and develop ‘curriculum and pedagogy that go beyond the disinterested dissemination

of discipline-based information' (2017: 32). He encourages institutions and disciplines to 'galvanize academic life around a common purpose: the pursuit of knowledge for the good of humanity', and ask fundamental questions about the nature of 'good' in relation to 'human actions', and about the 'bodies of knowledge and skills ... students need to live a good life in an ever-changing global world' (2017: 32).

#### **4.2 'Employability skills' and 'commodification of knowledge'**

Quinlan states that 'the terminology of 'character' or 'morals' has rarely been invoked in higher education ... Instead ... moral and social aims of higher education have been overshadowed by emphases on instrumental and economic goals, including employability skills and preparation for the workplace' (2011: 5). However to believe that 'workplace' focused education will transform the 'employability' and 'social mobility' of individuals (BIS, 2016) is simplistic, for it denies the existence of habitus and the role that social-conditioning plays in shaping behaviours. On the contrary, this simplistic paradigm of cause and effect assumes that individuals are constructed of surface-level pockets of unrelated knowledge, which can be shaped individually to change behaviour, without addressing core values and perceptions.

Citing the work of Lyotard, Ball talks about how economically-driven education has led to a 'commodification of knowledge', thus altering relationships between 'the learner, learning and knowledge' (2003: 226). These changes mean that knowledge is seen as exterior to individuals with 'knowledge and knowledge relations, including ... relationships between learners, ... [being] de-socialized' (Ball, 2003: 226). This 'externalization and de-socialization' was described as one of the issues that teachers are both 'struggling with[,] and against' (2003: 226). Indeed, education for life is not just a quick fix at HE, instead it requires a rethinking of the whole UK education system for, as

discussed in previous chapters, it is questionable whether the national curriculum, examinations and close scrutiny of teachers is really helping to develop and empower the majority of individuals.

### **4.3 The need for social reform**

Competition, commerce and political-drives for economic capital are the antithesis of education and self-cultivation for ‘a good life’, instead they are more likely to shape ‘sectional’ (Collini, 2012: X) and self-absorbed (Illeris, 2014) individuals concerned with ‘private benefits’ (Collini, 2012: X). This poses a social ‘crisis of meaning and purpose’ (Mascolo, 2017: 30). Walton states that ‘British universities have become vehicles for the further development of corporate capitalism, whose real and present threat to diversity of all kinds extends to universities as well as tropical rain forests, as it prizes measurable growth, a quick fix and the bottom line’ (2011: 24). As Barkas (2011) and several of the interviewees point out, the current political paradigm driving education is not improving societal conditions, we only need to look at the ‘destruction that is going on around the world’ (Anton, 7/1/16) to know that human beings need ‘to evolve as a species’ (Anton, 7/1/16). HE was viewed by many interviewees as a means to reform societal issues and values:

when the miners went on strike and I went on my first demonstration ... and the police attacked that demonstration, ... I thought “when this gets in the papers on Monday the whole world is going to change because people treated like this is outrageous”, but of course nothing was ever mentioned, life carried on ... I [then] became interested in empowering myself and other people ..., that’s what I see as the role of higher education (Anton, 7/1/16)

Empowering individuals to challenge social injustices - dictatorial, immoral or discriminatory – seemed to be the cultural capital that this interviewee considered valuable to the progression of humanity. However, for someone to challenge social injustices they would firstly need to have a sense of social and humanitarian values, not only to recognise inequalities or discriminations, but also to feel any concern for anyone or anything outside of their immediate social sphere.

#### **4.4 Performativity versus relationships and tolerance**

Echoing the opinions of interviewees, Quinlan (2011) highlights the importance of ‘virtues’ such as ‘sincerity’, ‘honesty’, ‘empathy’, ‘care of others’, ‘reliability’, ‘integrity’, ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘tolerance’, all of which pertain to the ability to develop and sustain positive relationships. However, although ‘the best rationale for promoting holistic student development may be quite simply that it is a right and good thing to do’ (Quinlan, 2011: 4), Quinlan points out that ‘such an argument is difficult to sustain on its own against a rising tide of external demands on the sector (2011: 4). Indeed Ball states that performativity ‘has no room for caring’ (2003: 224) or the building of relationships. Therefore ‘judgements’ on performance replace meaningful and authentic ‘interactions and relations’ (Ball, 2003: 224) between both teachers and students, as well as between colleagues. Indeed ‘pressures’ on colleagues through ‘appraisals, annual reviews and data bases’, is described as eradicating the valuing of individuals as people, and instead replacing it with values equated solely by output and productivity (Ball, 2003).

Despite these pressures, however, academic support managers and tutors talked about building relationships and socialising students. The manager of one team talked about employing staff based on their ability to relate and form ‘a cohesive’ ‘open’ and ‘tolerant’ ‘part of the team’ (Arron, 21/1/16). ‘Tolerance’, which was mentioned several times by interviewees and authors alike, was considered important to social cohesion, enabling different individuals to find ways in which to live and work together. This arguably, was an integral quality needed to deliver academic support itself, as one manager highlighted:

we’re very different people but at the same time we have to work as a team, so the cohesion, the thinking, the rationale, the aim, the ethos of the team needs to be agreed[.] ... [W]e all are of one mind not in the sense that we have no individuality but we all strive for the same aims, for the same goals, [and] for the same purpose, which is helping students (Arron, 21/1/16)

Working together with respect for each other's differences in views and approaches was considered to be very important to this person 'there are variations [in approach] of course and we have discussions about these ... I think the important thing is that we have that openness and tolerance and ability to discuss the issues' (Arron, 21/1/16). While there was a general understanding that differences in staff experiences and perceptions (*habitus* and *capital*) affect how they respond to student behaviours (*habitus* and *capital*), this person felt that tolerance of each other's differences, and an 'openness' to talk over approaches, underpinned by an innate desire to make a difference, was imperative.

Illeris, referring to the work of Wenger, highlights the 'social qualities' in shaping identity and behaviour, stating that identity is both the:

social and societal relations of the individual, who one experiences to be in relation to others, and how one wants to be experienced by others. This part of the identity is developed by learning and is of great importance with regard to transformative learning, but it has not received so much focus as the part of the identity that concerns the individual's relationship to her or himself – although the two parts are, of course, elements of the same whole (2014: 59)

Indeed Quinlan highlights the need for those working in and leading education, 'to focus on their own inner lives – their senses of self – so that they are modelling lives of purpose, meaning and integrity' (2011: 3). She states that those leading education:

need to be willing to ... put themselves as people (not just a role) ... [into the work] ... promoting communities and dialogue, ... [focusing] on the content of that dialogue (learning) and its purpose (holistic student development) ... Our students, as people in transition making their way in the world, deserve to be treated as whole people. The world that they will make needs us to do so (Quinlan, 2011: 19)

However 'the current finance-driven 'constraint[s]' and 'marketisation pressures' pose a challenge to any 'major changes' (Quinlan, 2011: 4) in HE. Therefore I would argue that for the moral and social sustainability for this 'contested and conflicted sector' (Quinlan, 2011: 4) and for the good of mankind, that inner reflection and adoption of social values needs to be extended to political leadership not just those directly involved in delivering education.

## **4.5 Summary**

Social values and the development of character was seen as contributing more to ‘employability’ than job related skills. Supporting self-cultivation and the development of individuals who are able to be ‘good’ citizens and lead fulfilling lives were therefore considered more transferrable across fields than vocational education. However, for institutions to achieve this, it would need for political powers to free them from performativity agendas and the commodification of knowledge, allowing them space to consider and ‘galvanize academic life around a common purpose: the pursuit of knowledge for the good of humanity’. Therefore rather than meeting short-term employment agendas, institutions need to play a role in shaping the habitus and capital of individuals, recognising the role of knowledge in shaping the internal and external worlds of individuals; equipping individuals with what they need to learn and think, therefore enabling society as a whole to be more self-sustaining. This form of holistic education is based on shared responsibility for learning, and relationships between learners and teachers, rather than on performance indicators. Only then would social mobility be either achievable or unnecessary. Although this all seems like blue-sky thinking, to some extent interviewees are (as discussed in chapter 7 Development) attempting to achieve these longer-term and more far-reaching goals.

## **Conclusion**

HE is a site of power struggles, with academic support positioned on a spectrum between academic, administrative and consumer powers, driven in different directions by HE policy and performativity agendas. It is between these power-struggles that cracks and gaps appear – deficits - which academic support teams attempt to address. However, how these deficits are addressed depends on the position and power of teams. Interviewees generally seemed to be championing a more holistic notion of education over the more functional and economically-driven targets, however economic-linked performativity, tends to over-ride the desire to offer holistic education, and instead perpetuates more



economic-linked performativity. The current political rhetoric of ‘commodification’ and ‘performativity’, are effectively replacing relationships and the valuing of people, with products and judgements.

Employability is, arguably, about the characteristics of the person, rather than simply role-related knowledge and practices bolted on to an individual. However, the externalisation of knowledge means that individuals are not always valuing the interactive and transformative nature of education, the role it plays in making for a more productive and fulfilling life, and the contribution it plays to social harmony. Instead power and competition encourage people to selfishly compete for power in order to secure their own position; therefore institutional deficits, student deficits and social deficits are arguably driven by government power and political deficits. In the 1990s Pring raised concerns about the UK education system, stating that there was a ‘wide-spread and deeply rooted’ feeling that:

the educational system ... [was] not succeeding. This ... [was] reflected in the belief that schools and colleges ... [were] not preparing young people adequately for the world of work; that they have failed to instil the social values necessary for a well-ordered society; that students are ill prepared psychologically as well as economically for an unpredictable future and the standards are too low (1999: 5)

I would argue that the last seven years of policy have done little to rectify this and instead have exacerbated the situation with an emphasis on economic capital. Education is indeed ‘a political, cultural and social action’, an interaction between ‘state and civil society’, with the ability to shape ‘what we receive from and give to society’ (McLean, 2006: 1). Therefore decisions about what we receive and give to society should fall on a broader set of shoulders, rather than just political powers, for the UK education system could be a means for ‘social change’ for the better – economic and cultural - rather than merely reproducing dis-harmony, social inequalities and ‘[pre]existing social hierarchies’ (McLean, 2006: 1).

## **Chapter 10: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to reiterate the purpose of, and my approach to, this thesis enquiry, as well as summarising the results, emphasising my contribution to knowledge and answering my research questions. This conclusion will be divided into three sections, in section one I will reiterate the aim, rationale and questions driving this research, as well as summarising the approach that I took in exploring the research questions and analysing data. In section two I will summarise and synthesise data analysis results, reiterating and discussing the relationship between the three approaches to academic support - '*remedial*', development and business – and then answering the research questions. In section three I will conclude this thesis with a critical appraisal of my research and how it has impacted on my practice.

### **1. Aim, questions, approach and analysis**

#### **1.1 Visibility of academic support**

Evidence suggests (see chapter 3 Literature Review) that the role of academic support has existed at some UK universities, in varying forms, since at least the 1960s, as a means to addressing student retention and achievement in higher education. Despite this however, the role has lacked prominence in literature, only really emerging in the 1990s. Subsequently, research on the role is limited, and tends to focus largely on debating and evaluating notions of best practice, such as: academic literacies versus broad skills, embedded versus bolt-on, and centralised versus devolved. According to Bourdieu, however, practices are not necessarily acts of free will but are shaped by an interplay between 'context' – rules and capital of a field, and 'perceptions' – habitus and capital of agents within a field (Bourdieu, 1998). It is therefore important when evaluating approaches to academic support, to consider them in the context of HE policy. How institutions are positioned and respond to HE policy, affects the

subsequent role, power and approaches of academic support services. Institutions do not hold equal power and therefore neither do academics or academic support, despite HE policy and performance agendas tending to treat them as such.

## **1.2 Research aim and questions**

The aim of this thesis was to explore a gap in literature regarding the role of academic support in contemporary UK HE, using Bourdieu's theoretical framework to help evaluate power relations and capital. The following research questions were the main concerns of the enquiry:

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive the purpose of their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

My professional assumption, based on fifteen years of working in HE academic support services, is that HE policy impact on the perceptions and practices of academic support. This complex web of relationships led me to Bourdieu and his field analysis approach, for it offered a method to analyse and understand the interplay between perceptions (habitus and capital) and contexts (field) that shape practices. The role of academic support arose from conflict between HE policy - skills agendas and widened and increased participation in UK HE - and the perceptions and practices of English HEIs. Origin, subject mix and student demographics affect the power position of HEIs in relation to politically-defined performance indicators, which have subsequently shaped the need for, and work of, academic support teams. However, this thesis was not based on a positivist enquiry (Newby, 2014), therefore the aim was not to prove a hypothesis but instead to critically evaluate what has been happening (Ercikan and Roth, 2006).

## **1.3 Approach to research and data analysis**

In order to go some way to answering these research questions I undertook a thematic analysis (Morgan, 2011) of the following:

- Six key UK HE policies and reports between 1963 and 2016, in order to establish changing political perceptions regarding the purpose of HE, and how these changing perceptions have shaped the expectations of UK HEIs
- Critical and practice-focused literature on the role of academic support between 1960s and the present. There were several objectives for this: 1. to establish the origins and role of academic support services in English HEIs, as they emerged in literature; 2. to ascertain how English HEIs responded historically to UK HE policy, through academic support; 3. to analyse and synthesise critical perspectives of researchers, as they emerged, regarding the relationship between HE policy and the perceived purpose of academic support
- Observations and interviews carried out with five academic support teams consisting of the manager and a sample of two to three staff, apart from in the case of Arniston where all five members of staff were interviewed - for reasons explained in chapter 5: Methodology. Interviews were carried out with academic support managers and staff in order to establish and compare current perceptions of HE purpose from within English HEIs, in order to ascertain how the combination of HEI type and response to HE policy, coupled with interviewee perception, shape the role and practices of academic support teams

In order to capture a broad picture of what was happening in the English HE sector without forsaking qualitative rich data (Ercikan and Roth, 2006) for quantity of responses and superficial or numerical data, interviewees were chosen from very different universities. Differences in institutions included: historical origin, scale, subject mix, geographic location, and status within the field such as research intensive and non-Russell Group institutions. Themes arising from the interviews were analysed through the work of Bourdieu in order to understand how the interplay between perceptions and positions - historical and internal (*habitus*) as well as current and external (*field*) – shape behaviors and practices (Bourdieu, 1998).

## **2. Data results summarised and synthesised**

### **2.1 Three approaches to academic support – ‘remedial’, development and business**

The data analysis results revealed academic support services to be mediating a complex mix of conflicting powers - political, administrative, academic and consumer – and conflicts between economic priorities and social or cultural values. These conflicts are embodied in three opposing, but coexisting, approaches to academic support: 1. ‘*remedial*’, 2. development and 3. business. Remedial and business are politically driven, underpinned by competition, commerce and knowledge as a commodity. These typify the devaluing of people and professionalism (Ball, 2003) and the replacing of relationships between teachers, learners, and knowledge, with politically-defined performativity agendas, subjective judgements and de-contextualised and meaningless data sets. In contrast, development arises from the humanistic and social values of academic support practitioners, and the belief that education has a more fundamental part to play in empowering individuals, for social and cultural progression.

### **2.2 Development - the need for holistic and mutually responsible education**

Development is underpinned by liberal values of higher thinking, self-knowledge, autonomy and a more holistic development of individuals. Higher education was often described by interviewees as bridging the gap between school and adulthood, therefore academic support sometimes involves supporting students who were ‘grappling with identity’ (Quinlan, 2015: 8) and issues arising from a move away from more dependency-inducing education. The theme that seemed to arise from the interviews was that holistic education - emotional intelligence, emotional resilience and intellect - should not be underestimated, as it can determine individuals’ abilities to cope with life and employment (Cotton et al, 2017). Emotional resilience can impact on all areas of student learning, enabling them to accept challenges to inner perceptions and inner structures, or lead them to disengage with anything challenging or different and reject change. Holistic development was associated with

‘self-efficacy’ and reduced stress (Turner et al, 2017), better decision making, academic achievement, and general contentment (Carlson, 2013).

Arguably, the notion of ‘employability’ is more about the holistic development of an individual than merely skills training, the qualities that both employers and current policies (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016) describe as desirable seem largely related to individuals’ characteristics and intelligence (emotional, social and critical) - ability to learn, to use initiative, to work with others, to be responsible and accept responsibility. Therefore, education for employability arguably involves bringing about a change in an individual’s disposition and perceptions (*habitus*). However, unlike political-agendas, which tend to consider knowledge acquisition as information to be objectively and quickly consumed and regurgitated where appropriate; knowledge acquisition in the evolution of the *habitus*, is more about engaging individuals in transformative experiences, helping them to move beyond unhelpful preconceived ideas and practices (inner structures).

Similarly, literature and interviewees deemed ‘reliability’, ‘creativity’, ‘integrity’, ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘tolerance’ as key to individuals’ abilities to develop and sustain positive relationships, leading to more fulfilled lives and more meaningful contributions to society. However, the development of individuals, whether it be for the public good or economic good, is not a quick fix, it is a ‘gradual process’ of ‘self-formation’ through which students are supported to ‘construct knowledge, skills and values’ (Mascolo, 2017: 31). Holistic development is therefore based on shared responsibility for learning, and relationships between learners and teachers, rather than on performance indicators. By holding institutions and teachers solely responsible for learners and their development, policy-makers are effectively disempowering learners and encouraging or maintaining dependency. It is the subtle aspects of performativity, such as these, that undermine education as a means to develop self-regulating and employable citizens, able or willing to make meaningful contributions to society.

### **2.3 ‘Remedial’ – performativity and deficits**

The ‘*remedial*’ approach to academic support commonly involves overcoming deficits in students, staff and institutions in order to achieve policy-defined, and enforced, performance targets. Performativity in the compulsory education sector (national curriculum and expected examination pass rates) was highlighted by at least 25% of interviewees (and several authors and researchers) as driving fundamental learner deficits. Performativity agendas were largely blamed for driving teachers and learners to meet assessment criteria and grade expectations regardless of learner development, in order to safeguard economic capital. This devalues qualifications and undermines the purpose of education as transformative and empowering; it also legitimises dishonesty and cheating, with implications that go beyond secondary and higher education (Westminster Higher Education Forum, 2018). Politically-driven performance agendas reduce education to a ‘commodity’, subsequently knowledge is then treated by some students and staff as objective, external and unrelated pockets of information that are needed to meet examination requirements and pass rates; rather than to be understood and engaged with for self-cultivation and transformation – perception, behaviour and empowerment.

Performativity and the changing views of learning and knowledge are, arguably, driving the very ‘skills’ deficits described in HE policies. Students at some institutions were frequently described by interviewees as entering HE requiring support with: thinking; reading; writing; taking responsibility for themselves, their time, their learning and their emotions; developing integrity, and dealing with challenge. Academics, also, were described as requiring support with meeting research priorities, as well as needing guidance in teaching and diversity, and embedding and supporting discipline-related writing. Interviewees described institutional deficits arising from staffing levels and conflicts in research, employability and teaching priorities.

The origins of HEIs, including subject mix and student mix, were described as either an advantage or disadvantage in relation to REF, TEF and employability priorities, therefore creating a cycle of advantaged or disadvantaged institutions accepting high numbers of advantaged or disadvantaged students, thus perpetuating the advantage or disadvantage of both institutions and students. For this to change requires generic performance indicators be lifted so that institutions can continue with their unique specialisms. Enforced performativity agendas and competition at all levels of UK education – compulsory, FE and HE – therefore seem to create and perpetuate deficits and inequalities between learners and institutions, which in turn reinforce existing social inequalities and hierarchies.

#### **2.4 Business – consumer-power and learner disempowerment**

The business, or customer service approach to academic support, emerged more recently with the marketisation of HE, and political drives to improve quality ‘efficiently’ through consumer-power and rates of satisfaction. However, analysis revealed that teaching ‘efficiency’ (BIS, 2016) and consumer satisfaction (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016) conflict. It is not possible to make human contact and learning more efficient, and still expect to transform individuals, particularly those who are perceived (by policy-makers) as needing their aspirations raised and their status changed to achieve social mobility (BIS, 2011; 2016). Students learn at different rates, they will have different perceptions of themselves as learners and different perceptions and positions in relation to education and teachers, based on accumulated experiences (*habitus*). Some students were described as needing much longer and much higher levels of staff contact in order to achieve learning outcomes, and some were described as not achieving expectations regardless of the support they were offered. To achieve ‘efficiency’ would imply a reduction in student and staff contact, which not only impacts on learning but is a common cause of student dissatisfaction, as highlighted in chapter 8 Business. Regardless of institution type or approach of academic support team, students preferred personal exchanges and contact with staff, hence a high demand for one-to-one academic support.



Performativity and the collating and publishing of student satisfaction statistics in the name of consumer-power and choice, is not the same as empowering learners and contributing to social equality; self-development cannot ‘merely’ be achieved by providing individuals with ‘choice’ (Mascolo, 2017) or allowing them power to make judgements on educational experiences. Academics and academic support services were described by interviewees as conflicted in their purpose to teach at the same time as being expected to satisfy students. The message being conveyed to both learner and teacher seemed to be that responsibility for learner satisfaction and development (perceptions and behaviour) is down to the ‘effectiveness’ of teachers; thus undermining both teachers in teaching and the role of students as active participants.

Indeed, several interviewees described students as failing to see their own role in contributing to their own ‘value for money’. This inability to see past consumer rights was described by interviewees as affecting student motivation, engagement and their ability or willingness to engage with anything challenging or outside their enjoyment. Engagement and motivation seemed to be a particular issue amongst students who were not achieving course expectations, or were not achieving course expectations because of their motivations and attitude towards learning and responsibility. In the words of Williams (2013) learning cannot be bought. The use of service industry metrics reinforces learner disempowerment and dependency, echoing concerns regarding the consequences of metrics in the compulsory sector. Students are complicit agents being used by government to enforce ‘quality control’, even though the ‘quality’ measures do not assess teaching effectiveness or appear to contribute to teaching excellence and learning either. Therefore, current UK HE policies driving the business approach – Students at the heart of the System (2011) and Success as a Knowledge Economy (2016) - undermine the very purpose and benefits of education for both social progression as well as a means to economic sustainability.

## **2.5 Answering the research questions - How do academic support practitioners perceive the purpose of their role and how is that influenced by the larger policy context?**

As far back as the 1960s the purpose of the centralised role of academic support seems to be the answer to government drives to widen participation, particularly serving the purpose of bridging gaps between secondary education (highlighting the inequality between state-controlled and privately run) and the expectations of HE. Thirty years on government-commissioned papers, such as the DfE report (1993) on Student Support Services, seem to reinforce the idea of overt support roles, to ensure that widening participation – those entering HE from non-traditional schools and pathways - did not mean higher levels of attrition. The current role of academic support post 2011, does not appear to have altered that much in terms of core purpose, for supporting learner independence (bridging the gap between prior education and expectations of HE) stills remains a large part of the role despite government ‘control’ over both the compulsory, access and HE sectors, highlighting the deficits in HE policy.

All academic support teams involved in this study had some form of public service statement, however rather than mention attrition, there were phrases like ‘academic development’, ‘reaching full potential’, ‘raising aspirations’, as well as making use of words like ‘success’ and ‘achievement’. Arguably, these terms and phrases have all arisen from successive government-commissioned reports. However, despite this, all interviewees seemed to endorse their positive and ‘developmental’ service statements, although I would say their views of then role went beyond just academic achievement and instead was about the holistic development of individuals for the greater good. The vision of practitioners did not always reflect the reality of what they found themselves dealing with on a day-to-day basis, and many talked about remedying issues arising from conflicts in educational policy, such as conflicts in what constitutes education and curriculum; conflicts between ‘quality’ and ‘efficiency’; conflicts between teaching excellence and research excellence; conflicts in who accesses HE and how; and conflicts arising from students in dual position – learner and consumer.

Despite at times finding themselves remedying issues arising from flaws in the system, interviewees perceived their role as educator and teacher, with most involved in some form of educational research. Nuances in approach seemed to be a combination of a practitioners' own educational experiences – needs as well as achievements, the different needs of the students that they interact with, the different needs of subjects and institutions, all within the context and constraints of government-policy. Regardless of practices, however, all interviewees saw the value in the role of academic support beyond mere study support, and felt that they could, and did, make a significant difference to those they worked with (staff and students), including affecting institutional practices and policy.

All interviewees felt that the role of academic support had a valuable part to play in contemporary HE, adding value to the HE experience, a role which all of them felt would have made a difference to their own HE experience, had it been available to them. Wankowski (1968) highlighted in the 1960s, that with the increase in student diversity, all levels of HE teaching will require specialist teaching and learning knowledge and experience. The idea of subject specialists being learning specialists was ambitious, even without current policy-driven business agendas, NSS, REF, TEF and KEF. Academic support practitioners seem to be filling the void mentioned by Wankowski (1968), and indeed, interviewees saw themselves as the learning specialist in the field.

## **2.6 Final words and recommendations**

Political powers have increasingly reduced the benefits of HE to economic capital, enforced and controlled by economic-linked performativity, whereby limiting potential to, at best, reaching the pre-conceived ideas of political powers. HE is therefore a site of power struggles, with academic support positioned on a spectrum between academic, administrative and consumer powers, all driven in different directions. It is between these power-struggles and conflicting expectations that problems

arise in both education systems in their duty to educate and the autonomy of individuals – deficits. These deficits are what academic support teams are attempting to address. However, how deficits are addressed depends on the subject and student mix of their institutions and the position and power of teams within their institutions. In contrast, the holistic development of individuals (aspirational approach to academic support), is about using education to unleash individual and societal power (rather than control it), in order to transform individuals and society beyond pre-conceived aims, targets and learning outcomes, commonly devised by political powers. Deficits cease to exist when education is for the purpose of unleashing potential, replacing pre-defined targets with possibility (Wolf, 2002).

The first hand experiences of interviewees is what drove their own sense of purpose, the disadvantages and disempowerment of political rhetoric in compulsory education and inequality appeared to be their motivation for developing individuals holistically in HE. However, to achieve the far-reaching benefits perceived by interviewees, it needs for those in power to reconsider the current narrow focus on economic capital, at all levels of education. This would also require a devolving of power to professionals within education systems, thus replacing performativity and judgements (Ball, 2003) with relationships, professionalism and knowledge, for holistic development rather than surface vocational training. Maybe through the devolution of power the evolution of individual and societal habitus can occur, not just for private benefit but for society as a whole, not just for economic good but for social harmony and a quality of life.

### **3. Critical appraisal and impact of my research on practice**

#### **3.1 Critique and future research**

There are three main issues that I am conscious of, the first is about my selection process for obtaining participants. I chose interviewees based on the diversity of their institutions in order to obtain insights into a range of HE contexts; however, some might argue that this random selection of participants has meant that I have ended up with interviewees from comparable centralised services. The perceptions and practices discussed in chapter 3 (Literature Review) indicate that not all institutions adopt a centralised approach to academic support, therefore this thesis and the conclusions drawn may have proven different if I had considered participants rather than institutions in the selection process. However, I feel that in light of this enquiry selecting diversity of context is more relevant than diversity of academic support models, although a comparative analysis of centralised and devolved approaches to academic support, in context, may make for an interesting future enquiry.

The second issue I would like to raise is regarding the shared habitus and perceptions of academic support. When embarking on this research I was expecting to assess the relationship between the perceptions of academic support services in terms of role and purpose of HE, and how perceptions coupled with context shape practices. However, through the perceptions of academic support practitioners I got a wider sense of expectations and perceptions beyond interviewees, gaining insight into the power struggles and conflicts in capital prior to and within institutions, and between different HE stakeholders. What I discovered was far more nuanced and richer than I was initially expecting, however, the issue with this is that accounts of power struggles are mediated through the eyes of those in academic support roles, mine included. Therefore our power positions could render our perceptions biased.

In order to circumnavigate potential biases it was important to draw upon a wide range of literature - beyond academic support, Bourdieu and HE. Supporting literature came from a wide range of educational researchers, practitioners and social and political commentators, enabling me to situate

and critically evaluate interviewee responses within the broader context of education and society. To some extent however, academic support practitioners seemed to be position-aware and reflective; there was a general sense that managers and staff were adept at assessing and negotiating HE stakeholder expectations and relationships (staff, HE governance, students), including their own expectations.

The third issue I would like to raise is also about the backgrounds of participants. Although I posed questions and elicited themes regarding the relationship between interviewees' educational backgrounds (habitus) and approaches to their role, I consciously made the decision not to evaluate critically the relationship between individual backgrounds (habitus) and decision making in detail. One reason for this was due to the word count constraints of this thesis; the second reason was because I felt that that level of detail would be far too complex with seventeen interviewees and six different HEI contexts; the third and most important reason is because I feel that context (political, institutional and team habitus) possibly played a bigger role in defining practice than the habitus of individuals – results of analysis seemed to indicate this also – due to the control of political, administrative and academic powers. In a lot of cases interviewees indicated that they were restricted in what they wanted to achieve, instead having to make compromises to fit with their institutional context. However, as a practitioner I am conscious of my own habitus when making decisions about my practice and the nuances between different approaches of individuals within a team, despite there being some mutual and underpinning philosophies and approaches.

### **3.2 Impact on my practice**

Academic support is context-bound – political and institutional – for no two institutions or situations are exactly alike. The mix of governance, staff, coupled with the nature of the institution (origin, subject mix, students and funding streams) all make up a unique context (or field), which shape the practices individuals adopt. It is, therefore, questionable whether there can be such a thing as 'best'

practice or whether there are only examples that could be deemed ineffective or immoral, however practice is always relational – between habitus, capital and field. The main difference between my role and that of other institutions is the two-pronged approach – curriculum development as well as student development. Similarities between my role and that of interviewees was the shared philosophy to make a positive difference – to individuals and society as a whole - to support the development of independent and capable individuals, able to make a difference in their own world and beyond. However, how and whether we are able to do this, as with any other educators, is dependent on a lot of factors (as discussed in the previous chapters), largely the prior educational experiences of students when they arrive with us and whether we have sufficient resources to be able to make a difference.

The process of researching and writing this thesis has enhanced my knowledge and understanding of the way in which societal habitus and practices are shaped by education, and the ill-considered ramifications of economically-motivated decision-making. I have also developed much more of a joined-up view of current UK HE and am much more conscious of how varying levels of management and departments work, or do not work, effectively in developing students and safeguarding institutions. This broader, and more joined up knowledge and view, has enabled me to play more of an active and strategic role in my institution beyond my role, such as contributing more to institutional policies and procedures, and flagging up concerns. In terms of teaching, over the last six years I have tended to place much more emphasis on facilitating active learning and unpicking thought processes behind the formation of ideas and work, as I feel it creates more of a dialogue and encourages reflection, which aids self-understanding and the development of autonomy.

I am much more conscious of creating an environment that stimulates enquiry, the development of thinking, knowledge (subject, general and self), and the evolution of the habitus (perceptions, intellect, emotional resilience), aiding individuals to move beyond self-limiting beliefs and actions or reactions.

I spend much more time listening and assessing perceptions and habitus, in groups and with individuals, in order to facilitate reflection, criticality and positive change. I too have become highly tuned to my own actions and reactions and how they affirm or challenge perceptions and behaviours, and the nuances of language, actions and exchange. I feel I now do less teaching in a session to achieve a more significant change, however I tend to prepare and offer more incremental sessions to support development.

My view is that education should be for the greater social good of both individuals and community. I believe that out of the development of cultural capital - underpinned by social values - individuals will naturally be resourceful, and will work together, in developing economic capital. However, making economic capital the focus of education denies a holistic education, and without whole-person development we are likely to perpetuate dependency and a lack of economic and cultural capital. I see the role of academic support as not merely a small team of support workers, with strong moral values, trying to make the world a better place, but a team of educational specialists helping to build an infrastructure from the inside of HE, helping to lead on a whole institution approach to empowering individuals for a more empowered and community-focused society.



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## **Appendix 1: Sample participants information sheet**

Thank you very much for your interest in my research into the role of academic support in UK HE

### **My research questions are:**

1. How do academic support practitioners perceive their role?
2. How are practitioner perceptions influenced by the larger policy context?

### **My research and what it will involve:**

I am interested in finding out what the relationship is between the perceived purpose of higher education and that of academic support provisions within different universities, and how these perceptions and experiences of individuals inform practice. In order to do this I am looking at a sample of universities arising from different periods in English politics (pre-WWII, post-WWII & post 1992), for different periods gave rise to different universities with different purposes. My intention is to explore the perceptions and practices of different staff and managers as well as make brief observations of academic support departments and institutional websites, to contextualise interviews and responses. I would like to interview you in order to discuss your perceptions and experiences and how these inform or influence what you do. I wish to reassure you that no data will be used to make any judgements or draw any conclusions about whether practices are good or bad, directly or indirectly.

### **Interviews, confidentiality & anonymity:**

Interviews will take around 1 hour in your place of work, at a date, time and in a specific space that is convenient for you. I will digitally record the interview. I will transcribe the interview myself and all transcriptions will then be anonymised using an unrelated letter to distinguish the university and a number and role to distinguish interviewee .e.g. A1: tutor. Once transcribed the interview recording will be deleted. Anonymised transcripts will appear in the appendices of the PhD thesis and information from these will be represented in this and future related publications by pseudonyms. Your contact details, including pseudonym lists will be securely stored in my password protected files and will only be shared with one other person, my PhD supervisor, and only when absolutely necessary. All of your details and my pseudonym list will be deleted 12 months after my thesis submission.

## Appendix 2 – Sample participant consent form for managers

- I have read the information sheet about this study
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers to all my questions
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study up to 2 weeks after the interview
- I agree to take part in this study and for my research data, in an anonymous form, to be used by the researcher in publications related to this research. I am also consenting for this research to proceed within my department with members of staff

**Signed (participant)**

**Date**

**Name (participant) in block letters**

**Signature of researcher**

**Date**

**This project is supervised by:**

Dr Joanna Williams, Dr Fran Beaton and Dr Janice Malcolm (supervisory panel chair)

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent, Canterbury.

**Researcher's contact details (including telephone number and e-mail address):**

Tracey Ashmore

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent, Canterbury.

Email: ta286@kent.ac.uk

### Appendix 3 – Sample participant consent form for staff

- I have read the information sheet about this study
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers to all my questions
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study up to 2 weeks after the interview
- I agree to take part in this study and for my research data, in an anonymous form, to be used by the researcher in publications related to this research.

**Signed (participant)**

**Date**

**Name (participant) in block letters**

**Signature of researcher**

**Date**

**This project is supervised by:**

Dr Joanna Williams, Dr Fran Beaton and Dr Janice Malcolm (supervisory panel chair)

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent, Canterbury.

**Researcher's contact details (including telephone number and e-mail address):**

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## Appendix 4 - Sample summary of team responses per question

### Defining effectiveness of the role

Definitions of 'effectiveness' largely related to the one-to-one scenario and ranged from: when students 'can hear' the tutor's voice while they are writing independently (A2 tutor) and no longer need the tutor's support (A3 tutor; A6 tutor), to, 'positive responses' and follow-up bookings (A4 tutor). Also mentioned were: positive changes in a student's emotional state (A4 tutor); growth in student 'confidence' (A2 tutor); the achievement of a 'realistic goal' (A3 tutor) or student independence (A2 tutor; A3 tutor; A6 tutor). One tutor spoke about defining effectiveness in numerical terms, such as the amount of students the team have engaged with (A5 tutor). Although the manager defined effectiveness in terms of high student satisfaction rates, they largely defined 'effectiveness' of the tutors in 'forming a cohesive part of the team' (A1 manager), 'having the right attitude ... the right approach ... the right heart and mind' being open, 'tolerant' and having the ability to discuss approaches with each other without it becoming 'personal' (A1 manager).

### Measuring effectiveness of the role

There was considered to be no obligatory reporting each year (A2 tutor) however several tutors mentioned the university's interest in how many students they see (A2 tutor; A3 tutor; A5 tutor) and the 'ethnicity and class ... and all the protected characteristics of ... [these] students' (A2 tutor). The manager mentioned that regular 'surveys' for all aspects of service delivery were employed in order to capture student 'views' and 'opinions' (A1 manager); there was also a mention of a one-off attempt by 'central secretaria' to use 'metrics' (A3 tutor) to measure impact of teaching by:

looking at evidence for students who had passed through ... and how ... the students' performance correlated with students who hadn't ... but of course the wonderful thing about that is you have no idea how ... [they] would have performed without ... [us], so it's a useless comparison (A3 tutor)

There was considered to be too much of a 'fixation' with 'metrics' (A3 tutor), but one tutor pointed out that universities and departments were being 'pushed into this trap' in order to get funding (A4 tutor). Several tutors felt that measuring effectiveness of education 'with intellectual slide rules' (A4 tutor) was 'one of the problems with education' (A4 tutor) 'everything has to be measurable and life isn't like that' (A3 tutor). On the whole it was considered to be 'hugely difficult' to measure 'positive impact' of teaching (A2 tutor; A5 tutor) although several of the tutors still mentioned different approaches to attempting this, such as: identifying a positive change in the quality of a student's work (A5 tutor); seeing if there had been an improvement in student grades although 'you can't necessarily say that was all down to me or half down to me you just don't know (A2 tutor); and, gauging the 'extent' in which a tutor has helped a student towards the 'goal of independent learning' and therefore 'less' or no longer dependant on the service (A3 tutor; A6 tutor).



## Appendix 5 - Sample of cross-institution responses per question

### Fulfilling need – Institution A

The whole team tended to refer to one-to-one tuition for improving student's writing, as one tutor stated 'classes don't work very well [because] people are at such different levels' (A2 tutor). However tutorials are thought to be 'labour intensive', and not 'a very scalable model' because 'issues with writing ... [are] engrained ... [and therefore] take a long time to get out of[,] ... [about]three years' (A2 tutor). One tutor mentioned the 'Pareto analysis' approach of just prioritising one thing that may have the biggest impact on a student's work (A5 tutor); whilst another explained their approach using a 'swimming' analogy: 'we will be the armbands in the first year and then [in] the second year ... [the students] can take off one ... and do a bit of side stroke and then in the third year maybe they are a bit more independent' (A4 tutor). However it was raised that some students tend to 'cling' onto the service 'like a drowning person' (A4 tutor) attending as regularly as they can regardless of whether their work is developing or not (A2 tutor; A4 tutor; A6 tutor). Although the manager was clear that tutorials are not for proof-reading (A1 manager) and tutors are 'not allowed to look at whole essays' (A4 tutor), it was raised by several tutors (A3 tutor; A4 tutor; A6 tutor) that some students find 'less legitimate' ways of maximising the 'safety net' provided by the service (A3 tutor) and other student services, subsequently ending up with a better degree 'than they are capable of attaining' (A4 tutor).

There is considered to be lots 'of emotional pressure from ... students [for the service staff] to do the work for them, and if that is resisted they ... create waves which ... ripple through the institution' - 'it's all about the student experience isn't it?' (A3 tutor). One tutor described regularly getting into 'a lot of trouble' for refusing to do the work for students (A3 tutor), they felt that the team and the university should be 'encouraging people to acquire the patterns of thinking that will enable them to succeed academically on their own' (A3 Tutor). A couple of the tutors mentioned the impossibility of meeting students' spectrum of needs 'what am I to do' about '12 ... or 13 years of inadequate schooling' in just a '45 minute appointment [?]', particularly with those who are disengaged and repeatedly looking for quick fixes to get through their assignments "oh so you've plagiarised again, as you did last time" (A6 tutor). This tutor felt that all they can do is discuss the patterns of behaviour with the student, listen to what they have to say, and then advise them again (A6 tutor).

### Fulfilling need – Institution B

One tutor felt that the team is 'too small' to be able to help all students, 'we are not reaching most of the students even though we could help most of the students, and that again is a funding question because our staffing levels are determined by the funding we are given' (B3 tutor). However they mentioned some 'new initiatives to try and reach higher numbers'. One tutor mentioned running 'improve your draft' sessions with about 60 students per class, 'they were kind of guided self-editing workshops' (and handout) designed to coincide with the first draft submission deadlines across the institution; however they noted the importance of balancing a wider reach with manageable class sizes (B3 tutor). According to another tutor 'one of the spirits of the centre' is the conversation around writing 'conversation itself is very useful, it's [a] process, we're not going to give them the answers ... but just the conversation around it' (B2 tutor). The manager considered "criticality' to be at the heart of everything ... [they] do' (B1 manager/tutor) 'the most important thing to teach students at Masters and doctoral [level] ... is how to work critically (B1 manager/tutor), including 'reading', because reading 'gets neglected' (B1 manager/tutor).

## Appendix 6 - Table of sub-themes and extent of agreement

<b>Remedial</b>	<b>10+</b> mentioned the term or idea
	<b>All</b> mentioned the phrase or idea
<b>1. academic skills</b>	
1.1 gaps in student learning	<b>13+</b> talked about this
1.2 academic literacies	<b>8+</b> mentioned the phrase or idea
1.3 academic literacy versus basic literacy	<b>8+</b> talked about basic literacy
1.4 reading, writing and knowledge development	<b>All</b> participants talked about reading and writing  <b>4+</b> talked about reading and writing in relation to knowledge development
1.5 critical thinking	<b>15+</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
1.6 different institutions different types of students	<b>5+</b> mentioned this
1.7 access agreements and writing deficits	<b>6+</b> mentioned this
1.8 inadequacy of traditional qualifications	<b>4+</b> mentioned this
1.9 educational targets and collusion	<b>5+</b> mentioned this
1.10 education and the reinforcement of social divides	<b>7+</b> mentioned this
	<b>8+</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>2. emotional resilience and self-management</b>	
2.1 time management and performance targets	<b>6+</b> mentioned this
2.2 managing social activities and study	<b>3+</b> mentioned this
2.3 imposter syndrome	<b>4+</b> mentioned the phrase or idea
2.4 different students and different pressures	<b>7+</b> mentioned this
2.5 transition into HE	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
2.6 increase in mental health, anxieties and demand for tutorials	<b>6+</b> mentioned this
	<b>10+</b> mentioned the phrase or idea
<b>3. motivation</b>	
3.1 student engagement and failure	<b>4+</b> mentioned this
3.2 motivation and poor attendance	<b>4+</b> mentioned this
3.3 pressured into doing a degree	<b>5+</b> mentioned this
	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>Development</b>	
	<b>3+</b> mentioned this
<b>1. rite of passage</b>	
1.1 independence	<b>7+</b> mentioned the phrase or idea
	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>2. choice and identity</b>	
2.1 moving beyond social trajectories	<b>7+</b> mentioned this
2.2 breaking free of the national curriculum	<b>5+</b> mentioned this
2.3 employment agendas and the arts	<b>4+</b> mentioned this
2.4 liberal arts and power	<b>3+</b> mentioned this
	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>3. challenging the status quo</b>	
3.1 school and self-limiting beliefs	<b>5+</b> mentioned this
3.2 raising aspirations	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
3.3 shared habitus and the student experience	<b>All</b> mentioned this in a variety of forms
3.4 enabling individuals to challenge policy	<b>5+</b> mentioned this

3.5 linguistic habitus and capital	10+ mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>4. opening minds</b>	All mentioned this
4.1 thinking, empowerment and satisfaction	5+ mentioned this
4.2 thinking and democracy	4+ mentioned this
4.3 thinking and leadership	4+ mentioned this
<b>5. holistic development and social values</b>	14+ mentioned this in a variety of forms
5.1 the habitus – emotion and learning	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
5.2 helping individuals to meet their own ideas of success	4+ mentioned this
5.3 social integration, values and tolerance	4+ mentioned this
5.4 emotional well-being and teaching	13+ mentioned this
5.5 the power of 1:1s	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>Business</b>	All mentioned this is a variety of forms
<b>1. student expectations</b>	9+ mentioned this
1.1 fees and individual ‘tuition’ versus ‘collusion’	5+ mentioned this
1.2 the quick fix service	10+ mentioned this
1.3 employment conflict – obtaining a degree versus desire to learn	7+ mentioned this
<b>2. funding and efficiency</b>	10+ mentioned this
2.1 at capacity	10+ mentioned this
2.2 struggles to bring about strategic change	9+ mentioned this
2.3 space	13+ mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>3. footfall as measure of success</b>	8+ mentioned this in a variety of forms
3.1 quantity and popularity	9+ mentioned this
3.2 quantity as mixed indicator of success	4+ mentioned this
3.3 metrics, teaching and funding	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>4. grades versus progress as measure of success</b>	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
4.1 grades	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
4.2 impossibility of cause and effect	14+ mentioned this
4.3 grades versus learning	6+ mentioned this in a variety of forms
4.4 learner independence	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
4.5 academic progress	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
<b>5. satisfaction as measure of success</b>	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
5.1 relevance	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
5.2 positive feedback	All mentioned this in a variety of forms
5.3 formal versus informal mechanisms of feedback	All mentioned this in a variety of forms

## **Appendix 7 - Sample of unsuccessful attempt at data reduction**

### **What is the specific perception of role that academic support play?**

There were a range of responses regarding the role (purpose) of academic support however there seemed to be five broad themes, these are:

1. To equip students with what they need to be able to engage with and complete their studies
2. To enhance student development of those who want to explore their full potential in particular areas such as writing
3. To enhance the student experience
4. To provide support or guidance for academics particularly in the areas of setting assignment briefs, teaching discipline-specific writing, and giving feedback (teaching development - TEF)
5. To provide a service to all staff in developing their own writing practice for research and publication (research development - REF)

The above themes encompass and represent the range of responses from interviewees in relation to the purpose of their role, however the collective responses from the individual teams do not relate to all five themes. In other words the responses from each team tend to indicate an emphasis on, or affiliation with, one or more themes but not necessarily all themes and not necessarily in equal amounts. It is therefore useful, before moving on to discuss the five themes, to give a very brief overview of how each team's collective views relate to the five themes. This will not only help to demonstrate the most common and not so common notions of purpose and role, but it will also indicate the spectrum of 'purpose' and 'role' that academic support teams are positioned on.

On the whole team A tended to emphasise equipping students with the skills e.g. writing and independence, as well as confidence, to be able to engage with their studies (theme one); they also mentioned enhancing student development (theme two) but this seemed to have a much smaller emphasis. Responses from institution B tended to focus mainly on student development (theme two), particularly in the area of postgraduate academic writing, argumentation (B1 manager/tutor) and also reading (B3 tutor), with a lesser emphasis on providing support for academics in guiding their students (B2 tutor; B3 tutor) (theme four). Similarly to institution B, interviewees at institution C also tended to mainly focus on enhancing student development (theme two), however their work involved more general areas such as academic skills, thinking and reflection, using feedback, as well as writing (C2 tutor). However, they also briefly talked about theme three 'enhanc[ing] the student experience' (C1 manager).

Unlike the previously described institutions, D tended to be fairly equally split between three themes: enhancing student development (theme two), particularly around academic writing (D1 manager; D2 tutor; D3 tutor); and providing guidance for academics in both their teaching of writing (theme four) as well as developing their own writing for research (theme five). The responses from institution E/F covered five out of the six themes but not all officially. The main emphasis seemed to be split between equipping students (theme one) and student development (theme two), both in the areas of encouraging independent learning practices (E/F1 manager/tutor; E/F2 tutor; E/F3 tutor) and the development of communication, mainly but not exclusively, through writing (E/F2 tutor; E/F3 tutor). Support for teaching (theme four) had a smaller emphasis, as it did not seem to be an official purpose but more about troubleshooting, and there seemed to be even less of an emphasis on providing a tutoring service for academics around writing for publication (theme five) as this happened 'covertly' (E/F3 tutor). However, the aim of this research is not necessarily to compare institutions per se but to undertake a thematic analysis of contexts, perceptions and practices. Therefore now that we have identified the positions that the participating teams hold on the thematic spectrum, each theme will be discussed in detail and the underlying perceptions and practices analysed.

## Appendix 8 - Sample of unsuccessful attempt at data reduction

### Student Development

Student development (A3 tutor; A5 tutor; B1 manager/tutor; C1 manager; C2 tutor; D1 manager; E/F1 manager/tutor) seemed to be the 'officially' (A3 tutor; E/F1 manager/tutor) accepted purpose that all teams had in common. However, what the teams were expected or expecting to 'develop' in students varied between institutions. Three of the teams covered a range of developmental areas, some of which were defined as 'skills' (A4 tutor; C1 manager; E/F1 manager/tutor); whereas the other two focused specifically on academic writing (B1 manager/tutor; B2 tutor; D1 manager; D2 tutor; D3 tutor).

The managers of the two 'academic writing' teams defined their purpose as: to 'serve' as a writing development hub for the university (D1 manager); and 'to support and ... develop academic writing, academic communication more broadly' (B1 manager/tutor). Supporting 'academic communication more broadly' was strongly influenced by the American writing centre model underpinned by an 'academic literacies philosophy' (B1 manager/tutor). The manager defined 'the goal' of the centre as 'primarily' 'enhance[ing] students' academic writing skills at postgraduate level' as well as being specifically 'education focused' (B1 manager/tutor), both of which were the main business of the institution; the 'majority' of students were thought to be 'midcareer professionals' (B1 manager/tutor).

The focus on academic communication was thought to involve teaching things like 'argumentation, [and] how to be critical in a literature review' (B1 manager). One tutor defined their role as providing 'writing and reading support' (B3 tutor) they considered reading, writing and knowledge development to be interlinked (B3 tutor). Any specific needs for the centre were considered to be driven by 'self-selecting' students signing up for one-to-ones and in-session programmes (B1 manager/tutor; B2 tutor). Widening participation students just 'lack confidence' despite the fact that they 'can write great' (B2 tutor); it was thought that 'native speakers ... returning to education', for example maths teachers, may not have written an essay in years and need inducting back into a different form of communication. Whereas 'non-native speakers', such as Chinese students, tend to be 'worried about their writing and it's probably from feedback that they've had about structuring, referencing, criticality' (B2 tutor).

Similarly, the writing hub was also based on the American writing centre model (D1 manager; D2 tutor). This writing centre provided 'academic writing for all ... stakeholders ... [of] the university, everyone from foundation students' through to staff (D2 tutor). One team member felt that 'almost everyone needs help moving up to a new level of their writing ... [even] Howard Becker ... a vastly published academic ... found benefit in getting people to read ... his articles' (D2 tutor). They also considered 'academic writing' to be 'no one's first language' (D2 tutor). This team's 'work with students' involved developing 'students' confidence and abilities as academic writers' (D1 manager). Whereas one of the tutors saw their individual purpose as making sure that the students who have 'good idea[s]' have 'the tools to express' them (D2 tutor – institutional purpose). The expectations in terms of student development were partly defined by how they use the centre. Some students 'want to literally understand the difference between writing at university and writing in their previous education' or they may be from 'a different cultural academic background (D3 tutor). There were 'also people who want[ed] to know ... their possibilities as writers' identifying their 'strengths' as well as what they can 'improve on' (D3 tutor).