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**STUDENT VOICE: NEW FORMS OF POWER AND GOVERNANCE IN
HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND (2003-2013)**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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April 2014

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of student voice, namely the institutionalisation of students' contributions to the evaluation of higher education, is embedded into the daily business of universities. Activities relating to student voice such as national surveys, representation, complaints and protest are subject to considerable emotional, material, and financial investment by managers, academics and students. These developments have had profound effects on the everyday practices and discourses of academics and students alike, yet researchers have not yet explored their implications for the identities and subjectivities of those who participate.

Drawing on two case studies undertaken at English universities (a pre and post-92), the thesis problematises the narratives associated with student voice. The research found that student voice means different things to different people and is underpinned by a range of, at times competing imperatives. These can be empowering, but they shape, in subtle but significant ways, the manner in which managers, academics and students come to regard themselves, each other and the fundamental nature and purpose of higher education. The thesis suggests that by acknowledging power, and the complex identities that student voice shapes, activities could become more productive and empowering. This has practical and educational implications for stakeholders in the university sector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in student voice has been sparked by numerous conversations, experiences and challenges that I, and others, have faced as students and employees within higher education. As such there are a huge number of fellow students and colleagues who have informed the development of this thesis and have provided me with time, support and the space for critical discussion during my time in higher education.

I owe a great deal to my supervisors; Professor David Hartley who provided support and encouragement during the early part of the thesis, Dr Helen Sauntson who introduced me to CDA and encouraged me to get on with the research and more recently, to Professor Kathryn Ecclestone for her generous encouragement, meticulous feedback and for preparing me to disseminate my research. Also to Professor Adrian Blackledge for his feedback at crucial stages of the thesis development. All have informed the way I consider and explore the higher education system in which I work and I am indebted to them for their support and encouragement throughout the process.

I am extremely grateful to the students, academics and managers who gave their time to take part in this study; I could not have done it without them. I hope this thesis does justice to their experiences and opens up opportunities for understanding those experiences in the context of others.

The Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at Birmingham City University provided valuable financial support and time during the first

three years of the study which allowed me to complete the study earlier than I would otherwise have done. I am also grateful to the students and sector bodies including the HEA and QAA who have supported the Student Learning and Teaching Network. The discussions that I have had as part of the network have inspired me to seek to make more sense of the ways in which students and academics are positioned within higher education.

My family have provided endless support, patience and encouragement throughout this process. My parents, Chris and Robert Freeman have allowed me to retreat to Kendal in order to write the thesis, and my husband, John Kirk has endured the ups and downs of research with patience and good humour. I look forward to returning my attentions to you in the months ahead.

Lastly to Ralph Freeman, who sadly died in 2011 before the thesis was completed, for his endless interest in me and how the PhD was going. Ralph's fascination with people and organisations has undoubtedly informed my approach to life, work and research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Student voice in higher education	1
1.2 The higher education policy context	5
1.3 A typology of student voice mechanisms and activities.....	9
1.4 The experiences informing the study.....	13
1.5 The research aim and questions	15
1.6 Overview of the thesis	16
2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1 The rise of student voices as a phenomenon in higher education	19
2.2 The marketisation of higher education	22
2.3 Formal student voice mechanisms in higher education in England.....	27
2.3.1 Representation and governance.....	27
2.3.2 Student questionnaires	29
2.4 Student voice in schools.....	34
2.5 The imperatives for student voice.....	36
2.5.1 Student voice for consumerism.....	36
2.5.2 Student voice for accountability	41

2.5.3	Student voice for democracy and equality	43
2.5.4	Student voice and the development of the self	47
2.5.5	Student voice, power and governmentality	49
2.6	Conclusion.....	58
3	CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....	60
3.1	Introduction.....	60
3.2	Influencing paradigms for research	60
3.2.1	A technical interest.....	62
3.2.2	A practical interest	64
3.2.3	An emancipatory interest	67
3.3	The research design: case study.....	69
3.3.1	The scope of the case study in context.....	70
3.4	Data collection methods	75
3.4.1	Documentary analysis.....	78
3.4.2	Semi structured interviews.....	83
3.4.3	Observations.....	93
3.5	The approach to data analysis – thematic and critical discourse analysis 98	
3.6	Ethical considerations and limitations	102
3.7	Conclusion.....	104

4	CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGIES OF DOMINANCE	105
4.1	Formal mechanisms	107
4.1.1	The National Student Survey (NSS)	107
4.1.2	Course evaluations	118
4.1.3	Student representative committees	122
4.1.4	Students' union officers as management committee representatives 129	
4.1.5	The National Union of Students	133
4.2	Informal mechanisms	135
4.2.1	Informal discussion and personal tutoring	135
4.2.2	Facebook and social media	137
4.2.3	Protests.....	140
4.3	Conclusion.....	145
5	CHAPTER 5: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF	148
5.1	A clash of understandings	149
5.2	The complex imperatives for student voice	152
5.2.1	Student voice as consumerism	153
5.2.2	Student voice for accountability	169
5.2.3	Student voice for democracy and equality	180
5.2.4	Student engagement with learning and evaluation	187
5.2.5	Student voice and identity	191

5.3 Conclusion.....	198
---------------------	-----

6 CHAPTER 6: NEW FORMS OF POWER AND GOVERNMENTALITY 201

6.1 Senior management	203
-----------------------------	-----

6.1.1 Constructing accounts of student voice at the institution	205
---	-----

6.1.2 Constructing the relationship between managers and students ...	207
---	-----

6.1.3 New relationships for students and institutions.....	209
--	-----

6.1.4 The changing role of the students' union	210
--	-----

6.1.5 National and local partnerships with students	212
---	-----

6.1.6 Fear of the informal voice	217
--	-----

6.2 Students	223
--------------------	-----

6.2.1 Student voice and wellbeing	223
---	-----

6.2.2 Student voice and the political	228
---	-----

6.2.3 'Making up' the student representative	231
--	-----

6.2.4 The responsibilisation of the student	235
---	-----

6.2.5 The enterprising student	237
--------------------------------------	-----

6.2.6 Resistance and exclusions	242
---------------------------------------	-----

6.3 Academics.....	244
--------------------	-----

6.3.1 The influence of comparison and commodification.....	244
--	-----

6.3.2 Academic performance and student voice.....	247
---	-----

6.3.3 Academic professionalism and identity.....	251
--	-----

6.3.4 Resisting new subjectivities	255
--	-----

6.4 Conclusion.....	260
---------------------	-----

7	CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	261
7.1	Evaluating the research questions	262
7.2	Section 1: implications of the student, academic and management experience of student voice mechanisms	265
7.3	Section 2: implications of the imperatives and ideologies, coherence and contradictions	266
7.3.1	Awareness of the unintended products of voice	269
7.4	Section 3: The implications for subjectivities and identities	271
7.5	Section 4: Evaluating scholarship.....	274
7.5.1	Reflections on the theoretical framework.....	274
7.5.2	The strengths and limitations of the case studies	276
7.5.3	The process of analysis, reviewing the data	279
7.6	Section 5: Recommendations.....	281
7.6.1	Government ministers.....	282
7.6.2	The QAA	283
7.6.3	The NUS	284
7.6.4	Senior managers.....	285
7.6.5	Students' Unions.....	286
7.7	Section 6: New forms of power and governmentality in higher education 286	
8	APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MODEL	291

9	APPENDIX B: NSS ANALYSIS FOR SUBJECT DISCIPLINE SELECTION.....	292
10	APPENDIX C: COPY OF THE NSS SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	293
11	APPENDIX D: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY	295
12	APPENDIX E: PILOT AND MAIN STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	309
13	APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	317
14	APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	319
15	APPENDIX H: SELECTED ANONYMISED DATA.....	320
15.1	Minutes from the Russell Group, English Department Student Representative Committee.....	320
15.2	Transcript of interview with Head of English, Post-92	324
15.3	Transcript of interview with Head of English, Russell Group	339

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Student voice mechanisms	10
Table 2: Habermas’s model of research interest (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 136)	62
Table 3: Layers of data collection as applied to the research questions.....	77
Table 4: Opportunities for documentary analysis.....	80
Table 5: Analysis of the structural interview sample characteristics	85
Table 6: Detail of sample involved in the main study observations.....	97

ABBREVIATIONS

BIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
CETL	Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
Ipsos MORI	Market research company
KIS	Key Information Sets
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
Nvivo	Qualitative data analysis software from QR
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
Oxbridge	Universities of Oxford and Cambridge
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SLC	Student Loans Company
SPARQS	Student Participation in Quality Scotland
UniStats	Official website for comparing university course data

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“University managers have looked to delay the release of course work marks to avoid upsetting undergraduates before they fill in the National Student Survey forms, an academic study has revealed. Duna Sabri, visiting research fellow at the Centre for Public Policy at King’s College London, said discussion of various “gaming strategies” emerged during interviews she conducted with staff and students for a paper about the NSS.” (Grove, 2013)

“I am writing to you following the disgraceful events that took place on campus yesterday under the guise of student protest led by Defend Education Birmingham; a group which is not affiliated to the Guild of Students or in any way representative of our student body. We also believe that many involved were not students at our University, and clearly had no interest in our University as a place of study, scholarship, and collegiality.” (Eastwood, 2014)

1.1 Student voice in higher education

The phenomenon of student voice, namely the institutionalisation of students’ contributions to the evaluation of higher education, is now embedded into the daily business of universities. As the quotes above demonstrate, student voice in higher education has a wide-ranging influence. It shapes the concerns of management and academics, changes the organisation and content of degree courses and at times, challenges authority. Activities relating to student voice such as national surveys, representation, complaints, protest and social media are subject to considerable emotional, material and financial investment by institutions, managers, academics

and students. These different mechanisms have developed over time and have become more prevalent and embedded in policy in England, alongside the introduction and subsequent increase of tuition fees (Browne, 2010, HEFCE, 2003a, b). These developments have had profound effects on the concerns of university management and the everyday practices and discourses of academics and students alike, yet researchers have not yet explored their implications for identities and subjectivities of those who participate.

For many, the rise of student voice in higher education is empowering. Whereas student voice in the past was for the few, over the past decade the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS), the increasing use of module questionnaires, and the formalisation of processes for student complaints and appeals and requirements for departmental representation, has provided all students with new forms of power within the sector. This power can be both empowering and productive but also marks the intensification of policy and guidance about what it means to be a student, and indeed an academic, within these mechanisms. The rise of student voice in higher education has led to new ways of students, academics and managers understanding their own role within higher education, and that of others and, these new identities and subjectivities, and whether they are necessarily empowering, has been underexplored.

Student voice as a term is used to describe activity concerned with the ontological and epistemological voices of students as individuals, through to voice on a grand scale measured by quantitative national level studies such as the NSS. The term student voice has been used in different ways and is often used interchangeably

with terms such as 'student engagement', 'involvement' and 'participation'. These terms are used to describe both the individual and collective student voice depending on the scenario or activity that is described. In this thesis student voice relates to students participating in the evaluation of higher education in a range of forms. There are of course other areas in which student voice is key, particularly within the classroom where students engage with academics and peers in their discipline, or the voice of students volunteering in the local community. Student voice for evaluation is the primary concern for this study as the main form that has been subject to government and institutional policy and is applied across disciplines throughout the sector.

As a phenomenon, student voice is largely under-researched. In the past, research has taken the form of localised or government driven evaluation, which has focused on the practicalities of student voice activity and ways to do it better (CHERI, 2008, HEA, 2010, 2013a, QAA, 2012b). More recently, more research has emerged which takes account of the experiences and meanings produced for students and academics in relation to particular student voice activities such as student representation (Carey, 2012, 2013) and the NSS (Sabri, 2013). These studies have provided a welcome depth of understanding of the experience of student voice in context at two different institutions and suggest that there is much to be learnt from a more in depth analysis of student voice mechanisms. Uniquely, this study aims to achieve this depth through two case studies, but will focus on the range of different mechanisms for voice in these institutions in order to understand the complex

relationships and experiences within and between mechanisms and the relationship between mechanisms, power and governance.

Student voice and power is particularly underexplored, although it has received some interest in the primary and secondary schools' sector in the UK (Bragg, 2007, Fielding, 2004b) where authors have asked whether the increasing emphasis on student voice has led to the intensification of power. As Bragg suggests:

“the fact that student voice now appears to be fully compatible with government and management objectives and that senior staff are introducing it with the explicit aim of school improvement, causes disquiet, even concern that it might be cynical and manipulative, intentionally or not masking the “real” interests of those in power” (344).

In higher education, student voice is generally assumed to be a neutral activity. It sits outside students' arrangements for study and is rarely timetabled; yet it is pervasive. Student voice often requires a significant investment of time and the self for the students and academics that participate yet the purpose of student voice is often implicit or unclear in the policies and documentation that surround it.

A study funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2009 found that senior managers held a number of distinct perspectives on the purpose of student voice which hint at the range of underpinning management imperatives (CHERI, 2008). Deriving data from a series of interviews with institutional and students' union staff, the report found three common rationales which institutions used to justify their approaches to student voice. These rationales included; “enhancing the student experience”, which recognised students as

customers and valued choice; “listening and being responsive”, which sought student opinion in order to “nip problems and issues in the bud”; and less commonly, a “learning communities” rationale, which sought to engage students as owners or co-producers of their education (CHERI, 2008). The report served to demonstrate the complex and subjective imperatives and ideologies drawn upon by individuals designing and participating in student voice mechanisms. Yet despite these findings, in many studies of student voice in higher education it is often assumed to be neutral and unproblematic (Seale, 2010).

Student voice is subject to significant investment by national bodies and by students, academics and managers in higher education. Bragg (2007) suggests that as student voice becomes more prominent, it becomes harder to interpret. Student voice has become embedded into the governance of universities yet, the effects of engagement with mechanisms and the identities and subjectivities that are shaped through that engagement, are currently underexplored. As a phenomenon which is increasingly drawn upon in the governance of institutions, and which is changing the nature of relationships between students, academics and managers, it is important to understand how student voice ‘works’ and shapes those that participate. This thesis seeks to explore the effects of student voice as a new form of governance in higher education and the identities, subjectivities and relationships of power that are shaped and produced.

1.2 The higher education policy context

Higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) is defined formally as qualifications taken at level 4 and above in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

(QAA, 2008) which sets out the common expectations of students undertaking study at a particular level. Over the last 40 years the government definition of higher education has diversified to include a range of institutions that were previously polytechnics, training colleges and institutes. Modes of delivery have also diversified, ranging from traditional courses, taught face-to-face in a lecture theatre and through tutorials, to courses taken part-time, online.

Changes in higher education policy have brought to the fore questions about the purpose of higher education, how it is funded, who should participate and what students should expect. In this context, different institutions in the UK interpret the purpose of the university in the 21st Century differently. Some operate as high impact research institutions, conducting research in areas considered significant for the advancement of society, while others are focused on teaching and providing a high level of training competence to students, preparing them for a particular career or profession. Some institutions offer a wide range of disciplines, while others maintain a narrow specialism such as agriculture, tropical medicine or art and design.

Towards the end of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st, governments have become increasingly involved in the governance of institutions. Through a series of policies and ambitions, the funding of institutions has changed radically, shifting from a system of largely independent institutions funded by block grants, towards the current distribution of funding based on research performance, contribution to the economy and student fees. These changes have shifted the

nature of higher education towards one which operates as a market and is strongly tied to the needs, or sometimes perceived needs, of industry and society.

Barnett (1990) argues that governments have increasingly come to understand universities:

“in terms of the values and goals of the wider society, and the drive to evaluate the effectiveness of higher education in terms of its demonstrable impact on the wealth-generating capacity of society” (4).

This has led to resources being directed primarily towards areas that are judged as contributing to society, such as science and technology. Barnett suggests that this has diminished the intrinsic value of higher education. Subjects that are seen to contribute directly to the furthering of the economy are favoured financially over humanities and the arts, and the provision of vocational and professional courses has increased across the sector.

In line with the greater alignment with the needs of the economy and business, a greater emphasis has been placed on institutions assuring their value and accountability to the public. Planning, efficiency and accountability are valued in institutions, and universities are subjected to regular quality reviews, financial audits and reviews of research. The changes in tuition fees in England following the Browne Review (2010), which saw the introduction of variable tuition fees of up to £9000 in 2012, was not mirrored across the rest of the UK. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland implemented alternative funding arrangements for students accessing higher education from those countries.

Alongside the changes to the funding system, formal mechanisms for student voice have become increasingly prominent and subject to external promotion and guidance. The implementation of the NSS coincided with government plans to increase tuition fees and the government's aim at the time, to increase participation of young people in higher education to 50% of the 18-30 population (HEFCE, 2003b, 17). Recently the development of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Student Engagement chapter in the Quality Code (QAA, 2012c) has provided a 'definitive reference point' for UK higher education institutions, setting out expectations for the way in which student voice is framed through Student Charters and Student Representation.

The political changes in terms of how higher education is funded and valued in England, have had some visible effects on what is done in universities and how this is valued. In line with these developments there has been an increasing concern with the student voice as reflected in funded projects and research undertaken by national bodies (CHERI, 2008, HEA, 2010, 2013a, QAA, 2012b). The way students are able to 'be heard' in higher education has become increasingly subject to external guidance through a range of good practice guides, conferences and events. In turn, the management of those forms of student voice subject to external guidance has become integrated into the governance of institutions. Many institutions have senior managers with a specific focus on the student experience, managing the NSS, institutional surveys and responding to requirements from the QAA, indicating the high-stakes nature of some forms of student voice. Given this context, it is a salient time for this study to explore the nature of student voice, its

relationship with governance and the experiences of students, academics and managers who participate in order to evaluate the ways that the phenomenon shapes the experience and nature of higher education.

As an aspect of higher education that is increasingly enshrined in government and institutional policy, it is important that student voice is better understood by policy makers, institutions, students and staff. Government and institutional policies and initiatives are not neutral, and neither are the participants involved in these mechanisms. The emphasis by government and in institutions on large-scale quantitative research such as the NSS means that there is very little rigorously collected academic analysis of qualitative data about student voice. The qualitative nature of this thesis was designed in order to redress the balance.

As will be demonstrated in the literature review, the development of student voice across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is entwined. Scotland was home to the first recorded student representative committees in the UK and through organisations such as Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) (2013), has influenced practice in England. However, so far the changes in the funding of higher education have primarily affected students studying in England. As such, and for practical reasons this thesis focuses on undergraduate arrangements in two institutions in England (a pre and a post-92).

1.3 A typology of student voice mechanisms and activities

Student voice in higher education takes place in a variety of formats. Some mechanisms such as student representation on governance committees have

developed and become embedded across institutions over time, while others, such as the NSS have been introduced more recently as a result of national policy.

Student representative systems, module evaluations, the NSS, student complaints and student engagement in governance are all implemented formally in the majority of institutions and are increasingly subject to guidance, for example through the QAA Code of Practice.

Most of the current opportunities for student voice in higher education institutions (those approaches outlined in the 2003 White Paper, approaches that were in place prior to the White Paper and additional informal approaches) can be broadly categorised. A review and categorisation of current practice in the higher education sector as part of this thesis informed the development of Table 1: Student voice mechanisms. Student voice takes place through a series of official and unofficial mechanisms. In Table 1, official spaces for student voice are those structured and regulated by government or an institution, these often link to particular imperatives directed by managers or policy makers. Unofficial mechanisms are those defined or initiated by an individual or group of students who set their own agenda outside of the formal university mechanisms. These mechanisms are also organised by their status as 'individual' or 'collective' in order to illustrate whether students engage as a group or individually with a particular activity. Detail is provided in parenthesis in order to illustrate where a mechanism primarily takes place at a local or national level.

Table 1: Student voice mechanisms

<p style="text-align: center;">Official Collective (OC)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Union of Students (National)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student Representation Systems (Local – academic department/faculty)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student governance (Local – institutional)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Official Individual (OI)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Student Survey (National)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Course evaluations (Local – academic department)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Office of the Independent Adjudicator (National)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Unofficial Collective (UC)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Occupation of Universities (Local – institutional)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student protests (Local/national)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Group discussions with academics and peers (Local – department)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unofficial Individual (UI)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Litigations (Local)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student complaints (Local)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Discussions with tutors (Local – department)</p>

The mechanisms and activities in Table 1 demonstrate the pervasiveness of student voice in English higher education institutions. Student voice is one of many competing activities with which institutions, academics and students are asked to engage. The level of engagement varies widely between individual students and academics and may be informed by a range of structural and practical issues.

Bragg (2007) argues that by understanding the discourse used by those involved in student voice mechanisms, it is possible to better understand how they shape “students’ and teachers’ possibilities for being and acting” (347). The range of different perspectives and values around student voice in higher education has consequences for the ways that individuals engage and make sense of their participation, or non-participation. To understand the value of student voice it is

necessary to first understand the values held by individuals engaging with student voice mechanism and the meanings that they derive from this activity.

A range of imperatives and ideologies informs the participation of individuals in student voice activity. For the purpose of this study, the imperatives are the reasons that an institution or individual sees an activity or mechanism as necessary, or 'mission critical'. I adopt Hall's (1996) definition of an ideology as a complex social construct which provides the basis for beliefs about student voice:

"By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works." (26).

Drawing on Hall's definition, Van Dijk (1998) argues that ideologies not only provide an approach to *"making sense of society"* but also *"serve to regulate social practices"* (9). Understanding the imperatives and ideologies related to student voice mechanisms is about exploring the underpinning values as well as an individual's experience or perspective. Ideologies are related to power but this does not mean that ideologies are a negative or dominant force. Ideologies can oppose power, legitimate a particular activity or act for cohesion. By critically analysing the mechanisms and the associated imperatives and ideologies, this study aims to explore the relationships, identities and subjectivities that are shaped by student voice and the implications for policy and practice. This is with a view to developing a more critical basis for policy makers, institutional managers and academics to

consider the nature of power in relation to student voice and the impact of different mechanisms on the nature of the experience of higher education for students and academics.

1.4 The experiences informing the study

The research questions guiding the thesis were partly informed by my experience as a student and member of staff in a number of higher education institutions during the past ten years. Throughout that time I have held a diverse range of roles associated with student voice in higher education:

- an undergraduate student and, in my final year, student representative;
- a full-time elected student officer for education at a students' union;
- a Student Representation Manager at a students' union for a post-92 institution;
- an Educational Researcher for the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at Birmingham City University, researching student engagement in learning and teaching;
- and currently, alongside my doctoral studies, as an Educational Strategy and Communications Officer working with academics and students in a large department at the University of Warwick

While working in these roles, and moving between being a student, working for a students' union and working for universities I have recognised a number of different perspectives and approaches to student voice in higher education. Working with students, academics and university managers I have often found that while student

voice activities tend to be regarded as a positive thing to do, there is often a lack of consensus, or indeed discussion, regarding the purpose of student voice in different contexts. The underpinning ideologies informing student voice mechanisms were, only on exceptional occasions, made explicit. This meant that most evaluative discussions that took place regarding student voice were about what people did in practice and the benefits to the institution, academics and students rather than the purpose or value of engagement for those that participated. Often, for example in the case of the NSS, a survey which was trialled during my time as a student officer in 2004, there was a sense that institutions responded to government policy without considering the implications for the way in which participation might come to shape the values of those that participated. As a somewhat idealistic undergraduate in a department of sociology, I felt that the response of the university conflicted with my understanding of higher education as a space for critical thinking, questioning and evaluation. I felt that there was a tension between the way in which government policy was implemented at the top of the university and what we were encouraged to do in the classroom.

I have sought to think critically about my work with students and academics in higher education. Throughout my student and paid roles, I have gained considerable experience of policy and activities related to student voice in different types of institutions, and a much more pragmatic view of the management and organisation of universities. However, I have continued to seek opportunities to research, evaluate and problematise the changing higher education environment and have published a number of articles on course evaluation, student

representation, student governance and students as educational developers (Freeman, 2009, Freeman and Dobbins, 2013, Freeman et al., 2013, Freeman and Wilding, 2009, Rodgers et al., 2011).

I embarked on this thesis in order to evaluate critically the big picture of student voice, and its relationship with the governance of institutions and those working within them. This thesis problematises the nature of student voice in higher education in order to better understand its influence on the lives of those working within the sector. It recognises that student voice is not neutral; it is subject to government and institutional policy but also to subjective and complex interpretation by those who participate. By analysing critically the imperatives and ideologies that inform the ways in which individuals make sense of student voice in higher education the thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of student voice activity and to open up a more coherent and informed discussion amongst policy makers, senior managers and academics. One aim of the study was to enable the development of more knowledgeable and meaningful relationships and practice within the sector.

1.5 The research aim and questions

The overall aim of the research was to explore power in relation to student voice in higher education. In order to inform this aim, the research questions sought to establish a rich picture of formal and informal student voice mechanisms in England; to understand the underpinning ideologies and imperatives informing student voice; to critically analyse these ideologies to understand the complex ways in which individuals make sense of student voice; and to understand the

implications for student voice in the higher education sector. In the light of this aim, the overarching research question is:

Does student voice in higher education in England represent new forms of power and governance in a changing system?

This leads to the following 5 sub-questions:

1. How do students, academics and senior management describe and experience student voice mechanisms?
2. What are the explicit and implicit imperatives that inform student voice?
3. What are the coherences and contradictions between the imperatives?
4. How are the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and managers informed by student voice?
5. What are the implications for student voice policy and practice?

1.6 Overview of the thesis

The thesis contains seven chapters. Chapter 1 explains the background for the study and why it has been undertaken and sets out the research questions that have led the research. Chapter 2, the literature review, sets out the context underpinning the research questions for the study, including the historical and political background for some of the most common forms of student voice in the UK. The chapter goes on to identify the imperatives for, and ideologies that underpin, the existing literature about student voice. An exploration of the literature relating to power and governance provides a theoretical context for the study.

Chapter 3, research methods and methodology, explores the research design and selected methods for the study. The development of a critical-interpretative approach to research is explained in relation to the aims of the research and explored. The selected research design (case study) is presented and a detailed account of each case, and the samples contained within, are provided in order to frame the analysis of the research that follows. The chapter sets out an outline of the mixed methods which were undertaken as part of each case study (documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations). Two approaches to analysis of the data were drawn upon within the study, thematic and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, Fairclough, 2001) and the strengths and limitations of these approaches are discussed. Finally, the ethical issues arising from the study are discussed and standards set.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the data analysis. Two concepts from the work of Michel Foucault are used to frame the analysis presented in these chapters. Chapter 4 presents the analysis relating to the 'technologies of dominance' (203), in this case the mechanisms for student voice. This includes analysis of the documentation associated with these mechanisms and presents the experiences and perceptions of the research participants. Chapter 5 presents the analysis relating to the 'technologies of the self' exploring the imperatives and ideologies that inform student voice in practice and the coherences and tensions that these bring about in practice.

In Chapter 6, the discussion chapter, student voice, and the ways in which participation shapes the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and

senior managers, is explored critically and related back to theory on power and governance in higher education. Finally, Chapter 7 brings together the main findings from the study, reflects upon the approach taken and provides a series of implications and recommendations for policy makers, students' unions, senior institutional managers and academics.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the common formal and informal mechanisms for student voice. It provides some historical context to the emergence of student voice as a phenomenon and the local and international developments that have informed its rise in the UK. Relevant studies that have examined the nature of prevalent student voice mechanisms in the UK are presented and discussed.

The chapter explores some of the discourses that are evident in existing policies and academic literature around student voice. These provide a basis for understanding some of the explicit and implicit imperatives and ideologies that inform current practice. Finally, research into power and governance in higher education, and its relationship with student voice, is critically explored in order to develop the theoretical framework for the study.

2.1 The rise of student voices as a phenomenon in higher education

Student voice mechanisms in UK institutions have developed over time within a changing system. Over the last century, higher education has evolved from the preserve of the elite in the 1800s to the mass and varied system present in the UK today. Some elements of the mechanisms that make up student voice in universities and further education colleges today can be traced back as early as 1883, when a student visiting Strasburg witnessed a 'Studenten Ausschuss' (student committee) and returned to Edinburgh to set up the first Student Representative Council (SRC) in the UK (Day, 2012: 10). This first SRC had three roles that echo those of today's students' unions, the representation of student interests, communication between students and institutions and the promotion of social life (Constitution, laws and

byelaws of the Students' Representative Council of the University of Edinburgh cited in Ashby and Anderson, 1970, p23). This model spread to other universities in the UK and in 1888 a national body brought together the Student Representative Councils of Scotland, forming the basis for the Scottish National Union of Students. This model was adopted in 1921 in England and Wales forming the National Union of Students (NUS). These organisations remain as the national representative bodies for students in the UK today.

By the end of World War 2 the NUS was well established as the representative student body. In 1944 the NUS and the Association of University Teachers (AUT) both issued reports which set out a vision for formalised student involvement in governance in the post-war higher education system (Ashby and Anderson, 1970, 67). This suggests recognition amongst students and academics of the student as a legitimate university constituent, with the right to contribute to the values and direction of an institution. When the Robbins report was published 20 years later, awarding university status to existing Colleges of Advanced Technology and expanding student numbers, student involvement in governance was formalised as a requirement for these 'new' institutions. In 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act enabled polytechnics and colleges to seek university status, further expanding the number and range of further and higher education institutions. The NUS worked with new institutions to establish representation in governance at both institutional and course level, providing the basis for a broadly common formal system of student representation in institutions in the UK.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, there was widespread student unrest and protest internationally. Student protests became a prominent feature in institutions across the world, with 1494 incidents of student protest recorded between 1964-69. An international study of protest throughout this period noted a range of reasons cited for student unrest, including; freedom of expression on campus, education policy, community tensions, national issues such as civil rights, and foreign policy and international issues located outside the nation's boundaries such as apartheid in South Africa (Backman and Finlay, 1973, 12). Tracing the imperatives for protest, Backman and Finlay note that university concerns, such as student suspensions and canteen prices, and national concerns were most commonly cited as prompting European protests in the early 60s, but by the late 60s and 70s, protests had a more international and political focus on events such as the Vietnam War and nuclear power.

Student protests, while not a new phenomenon in the UK, had never before taken place on such a large-scale. They marked a politicisation of the ever increasing student body which the government, and the traditionally apolitical NUS, had not previously experienced (Day, 2012: 38). In 1968, in response to the high levels of unrest, the NUS and the Committee of Vice Chancellors issued a joint statement that set out areas for student participation in decision-making. This statement formalised student representation on university and departmental committees in universities in the UK (Day, 2012: 49). Some students regarded the changes as a success but others, such as NUS president Jack Straw, suggested that the measures had been implemented in order to placate rather than empower students,

a suggestion which hints at some of the inherent tensions of power in student voice mechanisms (Straw, 1969). Student involvement in governance, representation, protest and national politics formed the main forms of student voice in the UK until the 1990s, when changes to the funding for higher education began to change the position of the student within institutions.

2.2 The marketisation of higher education

Prior to 1990, students in the UK received grants from the University Grants Committee, through Local Education Authorities, in order to fund university tuition fees and living costs. However, with the increase in student numbers, moves were made to pass more of the cost on to students. In 1988 the Universities Funding Council replaced the University Grants committee, developing greater links between universities and industry. The change took place in order to align institutional priorities with those of business and to consider and implement changes to student funding (Day, 2012: 69). Following the Dearing report on student funding (1997), the Blair government implemented a number of recommendations, which included the abolition of student grants and introducing means-tested tuition fees for students. These changes paved the way for the White Paper (2003), which set out plans for increased student contributions towards tuition fees of up to £3290 and the expansion of the Student Loans Company, which lends money to students in order to cover the upfront cost of fees.

Coinciding with the introduction and increase of tuition fees, the government has steadily increased the emphasis on choice for students and accountability to the public in higher education policy. Students' evaluations of their institutions were to

be used in order to inform prospective students through a national student satisfaction survey:

“To become intelligent customers of an increasingly diverse provision, and to meet their own increasing diverse needs, students need accessible information. We will ensure that the views of students themselves are published in a national annual survey available for the first time in Autumn 2003, which will explicitly cover teaching quality” (2003)

Survey outcomes would be published along with other standard data for institutions (entry requirements, programme descriptors) to enable students to select and compare programmes and institutions of interest. In this way, students’ perceptions of the quality of the experience at a particular institution would guide their choices.

The NUS, while protesting against tuition fees at this time, welcomed the NSS, seeing it as a credible source of information from students which would balance university marketing materials (DfES, 2003: 46). The survey was piloted in 2004 and implemented nation-wide in 2005.

Also announced in the 2003 White Paper was an increased investment in teaching and in 2005, 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning were funded in institutions across the UK. This funding aimed to recognise and enhance teaching in higher education in areas including assessment and feedback, student employability and partnerships with industry. In some cases these projects provided opportunities for student involvement in evaluation and development of higher education in a range of ways that broke out of the traditional student governance and representation mould, including new roles for students as mentors, researchers, teachers and educational developers (Freeman and Wilding, 2009).

These projects often sought to respond to the introduction of fees, and associated perceptions of students as customers and to establish alternative approaches to working with students. Many of these projects were discontinued once the funding period ended in 2010, but a number of institutions have sought to embed projects and to emphasise these initiatives as unique approaches to student engagement (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011, Freeman et al., 2013, Neary, 2008).

The introduction of capped fees in 2003 was followed by the Browne Review (2010), which saw universities being given permission to set their own fees up to a maximum of £9000 per year. These changes marked a further move towards the US funding system for higher education in which tuition fees are uncapped and set by the institution rather than the government. The government in the UK stopped short of allowing the deregulation of student fees, although calls are regularly made by Vice-Chancellors who would like to see a move towards this model (Garner, 2013). Instead a fee band was introduced that allowed institutions to set tuition fees between £6-9000. This change promoted an ideological shift towards higher education as a market and positioned the university as a business which must compete for students (DfES). In the paper 'Students at the heart of the system' which sought to create competition in the higher education sector, it was stated that:

"The changes that we are making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and to be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful." (BIS, 2011b: 5).

Duna Sabri (2011) has explored the rise in discourse about ‘the student experience’ in policy documents from 2003 onwards. Sabri sees the term as related to the idea that *“all students have the capacity for free rational choice, unimpeded by the limitations of social and cultural background or financial resource”* (658). Along with the raising of tuition fees, the Browne review (2010) recommended a number of measures be introduced in order to support student choice and the accountability of institutions. These included; the making available a standard set of information to inform prospective students’ choices; the publication of external examiners’ reports; availability of information about graduate employment and earnings; the improvement of the handling of student complaints by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA); and, the introduction of student charters setting out student and university rights and responsibilities (9-11).

The government saw the introduction of the OIA as a ‘safeguard’ for students in a ‘freer’ education system. The OIA is designed to provide a national, independent organisation to rule on individual student complaints where they could not be resolved in institutions. The measure recognised higher education as a significant financial investment and sought to prepare the sector for a more demanding student body (DfES, 2003: 49).

Following the announcement of the introduction of increased fees, around 50000 students gathered in London to protest. The protest, organised by the NUS, began peacefully but turned violent as a number of students attacked the Conservative party headquarters. The national protest was followed by a number of smaller protests at institutions around the UK involving smaller numbers of students against

tuition fees (Baron, 2010, BBC, 2010, 2011, Kinder, 2011, Lewis et al., 2010, Porter, 2010).

Against the backdrop of the development of the NSS and student protest in the 2000s, government higher education agencies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the QAA were funded, in collaboration with the NUS to develop a number of projects designed to develop 'student engagement'. The NUS and Higher Education Academy (HEA) ran a high profile project to identify the range of approaches to student engagement in HE and to share good practice between institutions (HEA, 2010). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) employed staff with a 'student engagement remit' to involve students in the evaluation of quality in higher education, and recruited students as members of university quality review panels, emphasising institutional accountability to students (QAA, 2012b). Recently, the development of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Student Engagement chapter in the Quality Code (QAA, 2012c) provided a 'definitive reference point' for UK higher education institutions, setting out expectations for the way that student engagement, including representation is undertaken.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries the phenomenon of student voice has developed in line with a shift from a small-scale, publically funded higher education system, to the mass, student-funded system of today. The emergence of new forms of student voice has often been linked to political developments such as the greater involvement in university governance offered to students in the midst of student unrest in the 60s and 70s, and the introduction of the NSS to coincide with the implementation of tuition fees. However, the links between political ideas about the

nature of higher education and the student voice mechanisms themselves are often implicit and as such, are experienced in different ways by those that participate.

2.3 Formal student voice mechanisms in higher education in England

2.3.1 Representation and governance

Work in this section appears in Rodgers, Freeman, Williams and Kane (2011) 'Students and the governance of higher education: a UK perspective' and Freeman and Dobbins (2013) 'Are we serious about enhancing courses? Using the principles of assessment for learning to enhance course evaluation'.

A number of UK studies have identified student representation at all levels of institutional governance and have sought to provide guidance for institutions and students' unions (Cockburn, 2006, HEfCW, 2006, Little et al., 2009, van der Velden et al., 2013). Student participation as part of governance committees, as members of university management committees, student-led student organisations (Students' Unions and the NUS at the national level in the UK or equivalent) and through departmental representation, is common across the UK and in the USA and Europe (Magdola, 2005, Persson, 2003).

Little et al. (2009) report that student representation on university governing bodies is "near universal". Positions on governing bodies tend to be held by elected student union officers who sit alongside external and independent members as well as academic and management representatives. The governing body is the highest committee with strategic responsibility for the institution, which provides student representatives with access to high-level management decisions and key decision-

makers in an institution (Little et al., 2009). Student involvement in governance tends to include the involvement of a small number of elected student officers on governing bodies and student representation at faculty, college and department level (ibid). Elected student officers are often also the representatives on lower level university committees, including academic decision-making bodies and those which develop aspects of university policy and practice.

At a more local level, many institutions have School or Faculty Boards, which represent courses in a particular disciplinary area (Health and Social Care, Art and Design, Arts and Social Sciences). Representation on these boards is often elected or selected from the student body of the particular school or faculty (ibid: 17). At the department level, student representative committees represent the most prevalent approach to student voice. Student representatives are elected or selected from the student body in order to advocate on behalf of their peers on the course (ibid).

The level at which students have control over what is discussed at student representative committees can vary. Little et al. (2009) found that: *“in the majority of cases (58%), the agenda for such meetings is set jointly by staff and students and in a minority of cases (12%) by staff”*. Discussions at these committees tend to focus on course delivery and “problems” experienced and may involve the negotiation of resolutions (ibid: 23). Indeed Carey (2013) identified in his study in one institution in the UK, that student representatives *“occupy the ground between providing information for the university and offering a mechanism for students to work as partners in their education”* (71). This describes a complex role for student representatives that will be explored further in this study.

2.3.2 Student questionnaires

In contrast to the roles for the minority of students in governance and representation processes, most students are invited at some point to take part in institutional and external surveys, for example the NSS, Student Barometer and institutional satisfaction surveys for undergraduate students and the Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey for postgraduates. These tend to be large-scale and primarily quantitative in nature. Surveys are distributed to students and focus on their experiences, generating a large quantity of data and serving to identify levels of satisfaction with particular institutional activities.

The NSS is publicised as a structure through which all students can 'be heard'. The NSS takes the form of an annual attitude survey of final year undergraduate students in the UK, and is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Participation in the survey is compulsory for all universities in England and it is therefore one of the largest and most influential pieces of research into the experiences of learners in higher education in the UK.

All final year students are invited to complete the NSS. Due to the nature of the survey, as the largest census of student opinion in the UK, the intended and unintended audiences use the outcomes in a number of ways. The decision taken by HEFCE to opt for a survey design for the NSS illustrates a tendency amongst government policy makers and university managers to favour technical, scientific forms of research that seek to capture 'facts' about the social world. For critics, this reflects an assumption made by those in power that design and method can ensure

objectivity in research (Hodkinson, 2004). By placing their trust in technical research, policy makers ascribe to the ontology of an independent, homogenous student voice which can be 'heard' through the use of systematic, longitudinal, research methods (Hodkinson, 2004 see also, Usher, 1996). The intention is that prospective students can then use these in order to inform meaningful choices and judgements about the best higher education course for their needs. This approach is highly contested. Practical and critical social scientists suggest that a technical approach to researching the social world risks saying more about the voice of those in power than any logical, objective reality of the student experience (Usher, 1996).

An unintended, yet significant, way that the data are used is to inform national league tables of university performance. Newspapers such as the Guardian and Times Higher Education use the outcomes of the survey as a measure of student satisfaction and combine the scores gained with other criteria, such as entry qualifications of new students and student/staff ratios, to produce tables of perceived overall quality. It has been suggested that the overall satisfaction scores produced by the survey are fairly meaningless as the majority of institutional ratings fall within a narrow range and are not statistically different (BBC, 2007, Harvey, 2008). Valid or not, the status and prominence of the survey evolved rapidly to shape the public perception of an institution's reputation placing the survey high on the agenda of most UK institutions.

Institutions were not originally seen as an audience for the data from the NSS. The data collected were designed specifically for quality assurance purposes and consequently were not designed to provide the detail required for outcomes to

effectively inform quality enhancement processes (Richardson et al., 2007).

However, the current NSS website claims that the data will be: *“useful to your university, students’ union or college to facilitate best practice and enhance the student learning experience”* (IpsosMORI, 2012) and recent reports have drawn conclusions about the enhancement of quality from the outcomes (Williams and Kane, 2008). This view of the survey for enhancement is often supported by institutions in their own internal promotions with ‘you said, we did’ campaigns, seeking to demonstrate the responsiveness of an institution to student voice (Queen Mary University of London, 2010, University of Warwick, 2014).

The format of the NSS as a satisfaction survey is quite different from that of similar surveys internationally. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which is undertaken at 1554 colleges across the USA and Canada, and has similar versions in Australia, New Zealand and China, collects data on the *“time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort universities devote to using effective educational practices”* (Kuh et al., 2008: 542).

The focus of the NSS on satisfaction has proved controversial, as commentators such as Furedi have argued that it positions students as consumers rather than active participants in higher education (Attwood, 2012). In recent research Sabri (2013) has suggested that the NSS has become a ‘fact-totem’ which is the *“site of intense social attention within universities”*. She argues that the power of the NSS is significant *“because it focuses the public gaze upon those aspects of HE [higher education] work that are measured by the NSS and it renders other aspects less important”* (2). While providing a useful overview of satisfaction for league table and

management decisions, surveys such as the NSS tend to provide only a limited understanding of the complexity of students' experiences. Surveys of this type also fail to identify the experience of the academics and senior managers with whom students interact through representation and other engagement activity.

Prior to receiving the NSS, undergraduate students in the UK are likely to receive a range of other institutional satisfaction surveys about services such as the library or careers service, along with discipline level surveys for the evaluation of courses, modules and lecturers (Little et al., 2009). While there is no standardised policy on course or lecturer evaluation, the practice is common in most UK institutions and as a student voice mechanism, enables the majority of students to express an opinion about teaching. These evaluation measures feed into internal institutional annual monitoring and quality processes and are in some institutions used to inform decisions about academic staff promotion.

Much of the critique of course evaluation surveys comes from the US where the equivalent 'student ratings' have been operating since the 1920's. Course evaluations have traditionally been paper-based and passed around by an academic, but recently many institutions have moved to the provision of these questionnaires online. Within the US context of students paying tuition fees, course evaluations have been seen as a site of increasing tension as a result of:

“federal legislation that called for improved teaching in higher education, increasing demands for accountability ...the increasing use of student ratings in personnel and curriculum decisions, the gradual democratization of the nation's campuses, and a developing consumerism in the nation's students” (Calkins and Macari, 2010: 7)

Calkins and Macari (2010) highlight the significant research in the US which has sought to challenge the validity of student ratings. Criticisms of course evaluation in the UK have followed a similar path. There have been suggestions that questionnaires have merely become a ritual to be followed by students and educators (Kember et al., 2002, Richardson, 2005), have led to a type of 'edutainment', as lecturers seek to make learning fun in order to secure good evaluations from students (McMillan and Cheney, 1996: 6), and that they should be more evaluative and focused on development rather than the monitoring of academics (Freeman and Dobbins, 2013).

Recently, the US, and to some extent the UK, has seen a rise in online rating systems such as ratemyprofessor.com, a website upon which students' publically comment on their lecturers. As yet there is little evidence that institutions use these sites for official purposes, but students report looking at comments on websites in order to decide which class or module to take. Calkins and Macari (2010) argue that given this context it is necessary to consider the impact that formal and online course evaluations have on the relationship between students and academics, and of the position of higher education in society. Using the example of ratemyprofessor.com, on which students are able to award lecturers a number of 'chilli peppers', which represent 'professorial hotness', they suggest that these types of evaluation belittle the role of the academic and enable academics to dismiss the student voice as inauthentic and illegitimate (17). They argue that in contrast, institutional evaluations should consider the quality of questions asked, to ensure

that they are focused on student learning rather than level of enjoyment or satisfaction (18).

Calkins and Macari's (2010) discussion of course evaluation, the tensions around the NSS and the history of the involvement of students in university governance hint at the range of different histories, perspectives, meanings that underpin the formal mechanisms for student voice that are described in this section. Before exploring some of the different imperatives and meanings associated with student voice that are present in the literature, the next section provides a brief note on the relevance of student voice in schools in the UK.

2.4 Student voice in schools

One area in which there has been significantly more research undertaken to consider approaches to student voice, and the consequences for the students and staff involved is within the school sector. As Seale (2010) has suggested "*what little student voice work that has been done in higher education tends to be reported in conference papers and institutional or project reports*" resulting in work which tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative (996). In contrast the same phenomenon in schools has received considerably more attention, in part due to earlier policy imperatives that guided work in that area (Seale, 2010: 995, Walker and Logan, 2008).

The historical context for student voice activity in schools has developed differently to similar mechanisms in universities. Linked to international rather than national policy, student voice (commonly called 'learner' or 'pupil' voice in schools) became

a significant theme, and subject to government policy, following the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The convention set out children's rights in Article 12 as:

"1. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." (UN, 1989)

In this context, the Education Act in 2002 placed a requirement on all schools to consult with students, and that inspectors seek evidence of schools acting upon children's views during Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections. Drawing on research conducted by Davies et al. (2006a, b), Walker and Logan (2008) identify a range of agenda which have driven the adoption of student voice in schools. These include *"children's rights, active citizenship, school improvement and the personalisation agenda"* and behaviour management (Walker and Logan, 2008: 3). It is perhaps unsurprising given the shared government influence and growing control over schools and universities, that despite the different context, the ideologies that influence student voice in schools, mirror some of those present in higher education. Studies pertaining to student voice in schools have been included in this study where relevant.

2.5 The imperatives for student voice

Most evaluation of the mechanisms for student voice has taken place through government funded evaluation projects rather than through academic research. These reports tend to take a general view that student voice work is positive, for institutions and those involved, and rarely engage explicitly with the ideologies and imperatives that inform the different mechanisms. As such, evaluations have tended to focus on the practical aspects of how particular mechanisms and initiatives operate and on the pros and cons of particular methods. Despite the deficit of research in this area, it is possible to identify some different discourses that provide clues to the imperatives and ideological values informing student voice in policy and the literature. The following sections explore some of these discourses in more detail in order to frame the research in the study.

2.5.1 Student voice for consumerism

The most common discourse since the introduction of tuition fees in 2003 has been the notion of students as customers (Gibbs, 2001, Lomas, 2007, McCulloch, 2009). This ideology is first set out in the Dearing report (1997: 64) which states *“There is now greater emphasis on the recognition of the individual as customer or consumer”* and was built upon further in the White Paper in 2003. Positioning students as consumers has been seen by the government as an approach to strengthen individual rights, as students take on the financial burden for higher education. The idea of students as consumers has been contentious. Some have seen it as empowering students within the system by giving them increased rights. McMillan and Cheney (1996: 3-5) identified a number of benefits which the idea of

students as consumer brings that McCulloch (2009:172) summarises as; encouraging institutions to respond to changing environments; ensuring they maintain financial stability; recognising the importance of employability for students; and “*contributing to the university’s long-standing role in developing the students confidence and enabling them to find an authoritative voice*”. McMillan and Cheney argue that the notion challenges institutions to think more about the outside world, business and the economy, and their role in preparing students for that world.

However, McCulloch has argued that the metaphor can also act to restrict the role of the student within institutions:

“In the metaphor, and related model, of the ‘student as consumer’, the university acts as the provider of products and services, in the form of programmes of study and support for the pursuit of those programmes, and the student acts as a consumer of those products and that support” (McCulloch, 2009: 171).

McCulloch suggests that the impact of the discourse of students as consumers has pervaded changes in academic areas such as quality and enhancement as well as student support and marketing. He brings together a series of concerns about the model of student consumers which he sees as inadequate as it:

- a) overemphasises one aspect of the student’s role and of the university’s mission;*
- b) suggests undue distance between the student and the educational process, thereby de-emphasising the student’s role in learning;*
- c) encourages passivity in the student;*
- d) fails to encourage deep learning;*
- e) implies in the student a level of knowledge and information, and the possession of the tools to use them, that are unlikely to be present;*
- f) serves to deprofessionalise the academic role and encourage the ‘entertainment’*

model of teaching;

g) compartmentalises the education experience as 'product' rather than 'process'

h) and, reinforces individualism and competition at the expense of community."

(McCulloch, 2009: 177)

These concerns have serious consequences for the nature of higher education and suggest a shift in higher education that extends beyond the funding system and pervades all aspects of the experience of students and academics. McCulloch provides a detailed picture of the implications of the ideology of students as consumers in higher education in order to underpin his call for the adoption of the metaphor of students as co-producers, which he sees as challenging some of the negative implications of the model. Students as producers and other alternative approaches to understanding the role of students in higher education are discussed later in this chapter.

In line with the focus on students as consumers and a focus on student choice, marketing has become a key component of all institutions in the UK. Institutions produce increasingly glossy marketing brochures, regular open days and websites in order to present the university in the best light. As was discussed earlier in the chapter, league tables appear regularly in national newspapers, with information drawn from a range of measures and prospective students are encouraged to use these to compare higher education providers. Most recently the Key Information Set (KIS) which presents sets of information about university courses, have been presented on UniStats, a website introduced following the White Paper in 2003 to offer information to support students to make an 'informed choice'.

Gibbs (2001) reflects on the notion of 'choice' in the higher education marketplace and its relationship to the customer rights of individuals. Drawing on MacIntyre (1993), Gibbs argues that:

"rights are conferred in the choice, not in what is chosen. Individuals are thus primary and society secondary and... this may lead to a view that 'the identification of individuals' interest is prior to, and independent of, constructions of any moral or social bonds'" (Gibbs, 2001: 86 citing, MacIntyre, 1993: 250).

Gibbs goes on to suggest that the increasing focus on marketing by institutions and the associated discourse of consumer rights contributes to students that are outcome driven:

"here process is incidental and the outcome sought is not an educated person in the classical sense, but an accredited person able to use their educational outcomes (or competencies) to further their economic desires" (2001: 87)

In this context, student voice becomes about the right to choose, notions of personalisation and about value for money.

Hartley (2007: 633) views the discourse around choice and personalisation that is increasingly used in schools and universities, as the *"appropriation by policy-makers of consumerist and marketing discourses (which appeal to the emotions and to the 'self')"*. Referring to the rise of discourse around choice and personalisation in schools, Hartley (2007) and Fielding (2008) suggest that concepts of personalisation have become a rhetoric of empowerment which disguise increasing managerialism in education. Opportunities for choice such as

modularisation, semesterisation and self-directed learning in higher education mask fundamental inequalities. As Fielding suggests that personalisation is preoccupied:

“with individual choosers, with little if any, account being taken of the claims of wider allegiance and the common good. Yet, this foregrounding of choice, whether at a classroom level or in its systematic expression through multiple pathways, masks the deep dishonesty that ignores the many barriers to choice within the system, whether through ability labelling or entry requirement” (Fielding, 2008: 59)

Applying this to the higher education sector, while students are given increased opportunity to choose, they are simultaneously encouraged to limit their voices to the legitimate options available. Thereby, the ideology of students as consumers becomes a rhetoric of increased student rights, which masks the intensification of the management of what is available to students in higher education.

Sabri (2011) identifies a further tension within the discourse around student choice. Students are expected to act as customers, making judgements about value for money, while simultaneously *“distancing themselves from the realities of education such that they are not put off from participating”* (660). This, Sabri argues, referencing work by Reay, David and Ball (2005), is challenging *“for students with low levels of social and cultural capital in relation to higher education. They will have both fewer resources to act as savvy consumers and more anxiety about future debt”* (660).

Since the original association of the term ‘consumer’ with the increase of student fees in the 2003 White Paper, the term has been notably absent from government policy documents, replaced instead by a focus on the ‘student experience’ yet it

continues to shape the way that students are viewed in a fee-paying education system. The following section explores the links between the notion of students as consumers and that of accountability to students, parents and the wider public.

2.5.2 Student voice for accountability

In line with the introduction of increased tuition fees, the HEFCE Strategic Plan 2007 stated, “students increasingly see themselves as consumers, entitled to agreed standards of provision and to full information about the quality of what is provided” (HEFCE, 2007: 5). With the introduction of fees, the performance of institutions has been under increasing scrutiny and policy makers have sought to gain “*authoritative, quantitative measures of key attributes of the activities of institutions and their component units*” in the name of public accountability (Gibbs, 2001: 85). This trend has grown alongside a wider trend, in the wake of the economic crisis in the UK, for a concern with accountability to the public.

The emphasis on accountability has been followed by the strengthening of the agencies responsible for monitoring quality on behalf of the public. These agencies include the QAA, Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), now the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which monitor the quality of education and research respectively. Critics (Ball, 2003, 2012, Canaan, 2008, Power, 2007) see the increasing emphasis on accountability as a desire by government for greater regulation and control, which results in a skewed effect on the priorities of higher education institutions. Canaan (2008) places QAA institutional review in this context, seeing it as:

“the disciplining arm of neoliberal marketised restructuring, resting on the assumption that “the norms of the free market [should provide] the organising principles not only of economic life, but of the activities of the state itself and, even more profoundly, of the conduct of individuals” (Canaan, 2008).

In this way, that which is auditable has gained increasing value in the higher education setting, influencing the value placed upon different activities by those who manage institutions. What is audited and monitored by the QAA, NSS and REF comes to be valued over those things that are not easily measured. Canaan (2008), echoing Hope (2013) and Ball (2003, 2012, 2013), finds this to be a destructive trend as what is reviewed are those aspects which are *“second-order activities that are created solely for the needs of audit”* rather than *“first-order activities (for example teaching, administration and research”* (2008: 261). Canaan suggests that this leads to a form of higher education that values activities that are standardised and measurable over social processes.

There is evidence for Canaan’s view in the current method for reviewing the quality of institutions by the QAA which contrasts sharply with the previous mode of review, which involved a team of academics visiting individual university departments for an extended period in order to develop an in depth understanding (Baty, 2005, Broady-Preston, 2002, QAA, 2000-2001, 2012a). The more recent approach aims to be ‘light-touch’ by analysing top-level policies and data relating to teaching. This means that the process is quicker than previous formats, but also that judgements are made about institutions without the reviewers witnessing teaching in an institution.

In 2009, in line with the emphasis on student voice in the sector, the QAA began to employ students as part of the review panels that visit institutions. In 2012, the QAA developed a student engagement chapter in the Quality Code, which guides institutional practice and are considered during review. This serves to formalise the role of students in holding their institution to account. The chapter embeds student voice as an aspect of university life that is reviewed during QAA visits, including the requirement that:

“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.” (QAA, 2012c).

These measures have strengthened the imperative of accountability to students in the policy and guidance provided to institutions. Requirements placed on the sector through agencies such as the QAA, in order to hold institutions to account, provide an ideological structure in which institutions must operate in order to maintain their reputation and, at times, funding. This emphasis on accountability shapes what is valued in institutions and the types of student voice that are prioritised over others.

2.5.3 Student voice for democracy and equality

Ideas about democracy have long underpinned the development of student voice in higher education. There are two distinct ways in which democracy is approached in the literature; one is the formal form of democracy as elected students represent others through formal mechanisms, the other is the idea of radical collegiality that will be discussed later in this section.

As was explored earlier in the chapter, many of the mechanisms for voice in the early days of the student movement were based on a desire for students to be represented as 'members' or citizens of higher education, and to establish a local or national representative presence. For many in the student movement, students are seen as having a fundamental right to participate in the management and enhancement of higher education provision.

Traditionally, those student voice mechanisms regarded as democratic have been those associated with university governance, and concerns have been focused on securing greater student membership or opportunities to contribute. Institutions and students' unions have tended to focus on the practical issues of democratic processes such as the election of students to students' union offices and departmental representative committees. In the Little et.al. (2009) study, they identified a number of limitations to the representative role of students including confusion amongst students and staff and difficulties encouraging students to take up the role. Other research (Bergan, 2003, Carey, 2013) has suggested that issues about representation as democracy may be more fundamental and lead to questions about what student involvement in governance is designed to achieve. For example in Bergan's (2003) study of students participating in governance in 15 countries including England, he found that students felt that they had most influence on 'immediate issues' such as the social and learning environment, but very little influence on 'hard' issues such as finance or criteria for recruiting staff. This suggested that students, while valuing the opportunity for involvement in university governance, understood that their capacity to contribute to formal committees was

restricted. Issues around the extent to which students are fully able to engage in university governance are on going with the recent Manifesto for Partnership published by the NUS, challenging institutions to allow students to be involved in university governance beyond issues seen as directly relating to the experience of students (NUS, 2012).

An alternative way in which democracy and equality are discussed in the literature focuses on concepts of partnership and dialogue rather than on formal mechanisms and processes. Fielding defines this as radical collegiality, that is:

“constitutive of a professionalism commensurate with the move towards a more dialogic form of democracy. Here teachers learn not only with and from each other, from parents and from their community, but also, and more particularly, from their students.” (2001b: 130)

The rationale for this is that when students are able to participate actively it enhances learning and as a result, where work has taken place to this end in higher education, it is often referred to as student engagement in learning. Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felton (2011) provide a series of examples of students co-creating teaching, course design and curricula undertaken in the UK, Ireland and the US based on the principles of radical collegiality. These include students advising on teaching approaches, students designing courses and students developing curricula. Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felton identify a number of advantages for the student and for academics through engagement in this way which include; gaining a deeper understanding of learning; increased engagement and enthusiasm; and the

development of different ways of relating to each other, developing a better understanding of the perspectives of each group.

Further examples of more collegiate forms of student voice have emerged in higher education. Many of these have been prompted and promoted through national enhancement initiatives designed to develop learning and teaching including the aforementioned Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLS) and joint HEA and NUS student engagement projects. These have often sought to reposition students away from being consumers of higher education into more active roles as producers, researchers, partners or change agents. Some projects have drawn upon radical collegiality to encourage students and academics to co-develop projects, for example at Birmingham City University where students are employed to work alongside academics to develop and implement educational development projects (Freeman et al., 2013). Others have sought to place the student at the fore, providing the space for students to lead projects and developments for example students leading learning and teaching change projects at the universities of Exeter and Sheffield (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011, University of Sheffield, 2013). Others have drawn on critical pedagogies such as Friere (1970), Giroux (1983) and Boyer (1990), arguing that education must be grounded in the lives of students, and that students should be active in the production of knowledge rather than passive recipients for example the emphasis on student as producer through undergraduate research at the universities of Lincoln and Warwick (Taylor and Wilding, 2009, University of Lincoln, 2013). Moves towards these more radical approaches to student voice have proved persuasive and have been promoted at the sector level

through an HEA project ‘Students as Partners’, which seeks to shift the focus to the *“principles and processes of working with students”* (HEA, 2013a).

These types of student voice demonstrate the different identities that it is possible for students to adopt through student voice mechanisms. While currently taking place on a relatively small scale in institutions, they suggest that the identities of students are linked to the types of mechanisms with which they are able to engage. The following section explores research relating to student identity at the level of the individual in order to consider what it means to engage, or not engage, in student voice mechanisms.

2.5.4 Student voice and the development of the self

There is a tendency, in the literature on student voice, for authors to focus on the collective voice rather than individual. While some studies looking at different types of voice have sought to establish reasons for low participation in particular forms, there are few studies which have focused on why some students participate and others do not (Little et.al., 2009). This is significant as where these types of suggestions are made there is often an implication that certain groups, such as those who study part-time, or those who are the first in their family to access higher education, are underrepresented in student voice mechanisms.

Barnett distinguishes two types of voice that he suggests should be developed as part of a higher education (2007). The first is the pedagogical voice that he describes as the *“capacity or willingness of the student to give voice to her thoughts or feelings”*; this is the autonomous voice that is ‘heard’ by others, and the second is

the metaphorical, educational voice, or the distinctive voice, of that student as a critical being. Barnett concludes that for real, life-shaping learning to take place the student must realise both types of voice.

“In her epistemological voice, the student offers her own interpretations, her own interventions, within the demands of the discipline or professional field” (Barnett, 2007: 96)

The student explores and produces knowledge and through affirmation of her offerings she feels herself recognised “as a person”. In this way Barnett suggests that the student’s ontological voice precedes the epistemological:

“unless the student feels herself affirmed as a person – and something of her challenge acknowledged – there is little likelihood of her giving herself to the challenges of the situations in which she is placed” (Barnett, 2007: 96)

Barnett’s arguments suggest a need for students to receive affirmation of their identity in order for them to establish voice in higher education. He suggests that for an individual student to participate in a student voice mechanism, he or she must first feel acknowledged as an individual. These types of recommendations are also present in the work of Mann (2001) and Case (2008) who discuss ideas around the alienation of students in higher education. This work identifies a number of desirable characteristics for an ‘engaged’ as opposed to alienated student, including concepts such as a sense of belonging, intrinsic motivation, creativity (as opposed to compliance), equality and ownership of the learning process. While there is space for some of these characteristics in the more radical approaches to student voice described above, they have not traditionally been seen as the priority of

student voice mechanisms. However, the lack of these characteristics in most forms suggests that it is hard for some students to participate fully.

Duna Sabri (2011) has written about the rise of the term 'the student experience', a term which has come to be regularly used in policy and practice and describes students as a homogenous group. Sabri suggests that the term has become reified and disguises the reality that students' experiences differ because they take place in different institutions, which have different levels of financial resource, offer different support and different levels of social and cultural capital (664). Sabri also argues that the concept ignores the connection between students' experiences and their relationships with academics.

Research into student voice has tended to focus on students, and indeed academics and managers, as homogenous groups. This study is concerned with exploring the nature of power in relation to student voice, and the identities and subjectivities of those who do, and do not participate and may contribute to a better understanding of how different mechanisms support or deter engagement. Through research that focuses on the experiences of those participating in official and unofficial voice mechanisms, this study aims to provide the basis for further research into the ways that race, gender, class or disability might inform participation, or non-participation in student voice in higher education.

2.5.5 Student voice, power and governmentality

An area in which the schools sector has progressed further in exploring student voice is through the analysis of the implications that different approaches have for

those involved. In the Learner Voice Handbook, Rudd et al. (2006) utilised Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation and the work of Hart (1992) in order to develop a model which illustrates different mechanisms for student voice and the level of participation that each type requires from the student (Rudd et al., 2006: 11). This is a model which a colleague and I adapted for the higher education setting in order to encourage course teams to reflect on the implications of different approaches to working with students (Bartholomew and Freeman, 2010) (APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MODEL). This provides a practical model which illustrates the role that academics or managers play in providing students with the permission to have a voice in different scenarios. More recently, other organisations such as the HEA (2013a) have sought to develop their own models, yet there is not currently the substantive research to underpin these models in higher education.

Power in relation to student voice in higher education is under-researched and few studies in higher education engage with issues of power in relation to students at all. Writing about student voice in schools, Fielding (2004b) discusses power relationships between those who initiate student voice activities and the students who contribute their voices. Fielding expresses a concern for student voice activity undertaken due to 'fadism' which:

"leads to unrealistic expectation, subsequent marginalisation, and the unwitting corrosion of integrity" and "manipulative incorporation" which "leads to the betrayal of hope, resigned exhaustion and the bolstering of an increasingly powerful status quo" (296).

These concerns are also relevant in higher education; particularly where mechanisms are applied uniformly or cynically in order to fulfil institutional requirements. Fielding (2004b) goes on to identify three ways in which voices can be used for the purposes of those in power. Through *accommodation*, in which voices are reassured and reconstructed; *accumulation*, in which voices are used to provide knowledge which strengthens the status quo and; *appropriation*, in which voices are used to legitimise the dominant group's position. Fielding's work suggests that without acknowledging relationships between power and student voice mechanisms, it is possible to disguise complex and, at times, manipulative relationships, which may have significant implications for students involved.

Power in relation to student voice in higher education has not received the same level of analysis; however, there are a number of studies which have explored the ways in which students experience power in other areas of higher education.

Looking at the student experience in relation to assessment, Read et al. (2001) have described the complex ways in which higher education institutions define the nature of the 'good student', requiring that certain standards are met and competencies achieved before a student receives an award. They describe how these forms of power are often present implicitly through expectations, or habitus, rather than through explicit expectations and guidance. Read et al. (2001) draw on Bourdieu in order to understand the power dynamic between the student and academic in higher education and found that many students felt, even at the point of graduation, that they had not really understood the 'rules of the game'. Students recognised the need to demonstrate a particular kind of academic voice in

assessment but many lacked *“the confidence to do so as they felt they were not able to challenge the opinions of ‘established’ academics”* (2001: 394). In this account, the lecturer is seen by students as the possessor of the ‘truth’, an authority that is underpinned by cultural and symbolic capital, or the symbolic power, invested in the lecturer as a representative of the institution (Bourdieu, 1988: 117). This status translates into a relationship in which the academic possesses a greater legitimacy to communicate than the student, creating an imbalance, or a game, around academic writing, which must be deciphered by the student.

This example demonstrates an aspect of what Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) describe as:

“Every power to exert symbolic violence i.e. every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations” (4)

As Read et al. (2001) and Mann’s (2001) work suggests, for a student to be successful they require the cultural and social capital in order to fulfil the expectations of the institution. This is a notion that Bourdieu’s critics have challenged, suggesting that Bourdieu’s views are deterministic. For example, Green (2013) has argued that Bourdieu pays too little *“attention to the capacity of individuals to act in the world”* and Jenkins (2002) has suggested that Bourdieu suggests a *“self-perpetuating and mechanical model of society”* (118) which does not account for the way that institutions change over time. Yet his arguments do

provide an approach to considering how institutional practices may implicitly provide the basis for subtle understandings of power in higher education.

In a similar vein, Grant (1997), Hope (2013) and Ball (2003, 2012) have applied the work of Foucault (1979) in order to present an analysis of the nature of school and university governance. Foucault's concept of power represents a shift from ideas of domination and subordination, to the production of a range of practices through which individuals can act upon the self. Foucault refers to a type of 'capillary' power through which:

“power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives” (1980: 39).

Foucault was concerned with the structures, institutions, agencies, strategies and techniques of governance and how these produce individuals, actions and practices and *“harnesses their bodily powers to its ends”* (Garland, 1990: 138). Foucault described the processes through which this occurs as a series of 'technologies of governance':

“(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” (Martin et al., 1988: 17-18)

Foucault suggests that in advanced liberal democracies, humans are constructed as autonomous and unique individuals, who can be governed by various *technologies of domination* (technologies 1-3) and *technologies of the self* (technology 4). Through these technologies, Foucault argues that power should be understood as a “*way of doing things*”, or “*art*”, for acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves” (Burchell, 1996:19). The technologies are the ways through which “*authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize, and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable*” (Miller and Rose, 1990: 8). Foucault argues that in order to understand power one: “*has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the technologies of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think, government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word ...is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.*” (1993, 203-204)

In contrast to the account of Read et al. (2001), Grant describes how institutions’ and students’ perceptions of themselves are shaped through the experience of higher education:

“the student is both subject to the controls (regulations) of the institution and to her or his own ‘conscience’ which ‘knows’ what it means to be a good student. This conscience or self-knowledge is constituted by the contemporary discourses of student hood which are dynamically produced by, and in turn produce, the institution – its beliefs, practices, rhetoric, physical arrangements, and representatives ‘on earth’, the lectures and administrators. Because of this conscience the student-subjects work to produce themselves as good students and, powerfully, the institution rewards their efforts...” (Grant, 1997: 101)

Bragg (2007) extends discussion of governmentality to the nature of student voice in schools, suggesting that by considering Foucauldian concepts of power in relation to student voice, it is possible to:

“challenge the homogeneity of many discussions of student voice” and explore elements including “the self-understandings and identities student voice produces for teaching-staff and students, the technologies through which “voice” is constructed, and questions of whom and what is problematized or rendered “abnormal” in the process” (345).

Bragg focuses primarily on the way in which governmentality relates to ‘student as researcher’ projects in schools. These are projects in which students are trained to investigate learning and teaching, and report their findings to teachers and senior staff. Her analysis of the discourse used by senior staff and students provided some insight into the ways in which individuals understood the projects, and suggested that discourse did *“not so much describe as produce understandings and subject positions”* (348). In her discussions with senior staff and students, she found that student voice was mediated by a range of techniques that *“delimit what can be said, and how speakers conceive of themselves”* (349) demonstrating the complex technologies which are in use, and inform student voice practice in schools. The

study illustrates the complex and embedded nature of power in relation to students as researchers and opens up questions about the nature of government in relation other student voice mechanisms.

Bragg (2007) values Foucauldian concepts of power and governance as, she argues, they recognise relationships of power as productive. For Foucault power is embedded in all interactions and is not necessarily a force of dominance or coercion. This, Bragg argues, allows for the positive effects of student voice to be recognised while enabling the development of an understanding of the disciplinary framework in which it is constructed (346).

Governmentality in schools and universities has also been explored by Ball (2003). Drawing on Foucault and Lyotard, he describes a culture of 'performativity':

“a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons, and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (216).

Ball argues that embracing performativity is essential for teacher and academic survival in an increasingly audited world. Ball sees performativity as a new form of governmentality in which the imperative of the performance (high levels of student satisfaction, paperwork for quality reviews, excellence in the REF), become valued over the activity itself. This is relevant to the area of student voice as academics, particularly those with responsibility for teaching management, have an increasing and changing role in student voice mechanisms. As Furedi, reported in the Times Higher Education (THE) suggests, staff are increasingly encouraged to adapt what

goes on in the classroom with a view to securing student satisfaction (Attwood, 2012). As such, performativity has implications for the nature of relationships, amongst and between, students, academics and managers and for the types of learning that are delivered in institutions.

While Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality provides one version of power, it is useful in the context of this study. Foucault's conception of power challenges traditional notions of power as dominance or oppression opening up a space to understand power as an embedded and changing force. Foucault provides a version of power that enables the development of a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between power and student voice. He recognises that power can take many forms and is not necessarily:

“exercised against the interests of the other part of the power relationship, nor does it signify that “to determine the conduct of others” is intrinsically “bad”. On the contrary, power ...could result in an “empowerment”, or “responsibilization” of subjects, forcing them to “free” decision making in fields of action” (Lemke, 2002: 53)

Foucault's thinking on governmentality allows us to place analysis of policy and management practices to a wider context, in order to consider how these interplay with the self-understandings and subjectivities of students, academics and teachers and wider social and cultural shifts (Bragg, 2007). In this context the student voice mechanisms, and associated guidance identified in this chapter, might be seen as the technologies of dominance, while the imperatives and ways in which researchers and participants perceive student voice, as indicators of the technologies of the self.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set the historical context for the ascent of student voice as a phenomenon, and have linked recent changes to government funding for higher education to an increasing emphasis on student voice in higher education. An overview of the current formal mechanisms for student voice demonstrated a preoccupation in the UK and internationally with student involvement in university governance for the few, and course evaluations and surveys for the many.

Research and reports that have explored student voice in higher education have often been descriptive and have been developed with a view to identifying guidance for the sector. There is a lack of research that looks at the way in which mechanisms shape the experiences and identities of those that participate.

An exploration of the literature associated with student voice has demonstrated a range of imperatives, discourses and ideologies that interplay and produce complex understandings of the nature of student voice. Notions of students as customers and a focus on accountability to the public, dominate the literature in line with the repositioning of students as fee-payers, yet other imperatives were present in the literature. Many existing mechanisms have strong historical links to democracy and equality which underpin some of the most formal and also some more radical approaches. The imperatives and ideologies identified were primarily informed by research which has analysed discourse in policy, rather than the lived experience of those working in higher education. There is limited research that has focused on those that experience student voice in higher education suggesting a need for research which focuses on the experiences of individuals as they interpret and use

policy, and that evaluates the complex picture of interrelating mechanisms in higher education.

Research which has focused on student voice in schools has focused on power and student voice, but this has only been applied to further the understanding of student voice in higher education in limited ways. There is scope for research in a number of areas to better understand:

- the ways in which individuals in higher education interact with, and make sense of, their engagement with student voice mechanisms;
- the implications of different imperatives and ideologies on the participation and identities of students, academics and managers;
- whether student voice can always be assumed to be a force for good;
- whether engagement in student voice mechanisms is constrained by class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, mode of study or responsibility for dependents;
- and the complex nature of power in relation to student voice mechanisms.

The research questions identified in Chapter 1 provide the basis for developing a clearer understanding of student voice in relation to these gaps in the literature.

Foucault's concepts of governmentality allow a focus on both the mechanisms and policy structures for student voice, and the individual experiences, identities and subjectivities that are shaped and produced. As such, Foucault's concepts of government have been adopted as the theoretical framework for the thesis.

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how student voice has come to the fore in policy and has become embedded in higher education institutions in the UK. Having argued in the last chapter that the experiences of individuals in relation to student voice mechanisms, and the associated relationships of power and the identities and subjectivities produced are under-researched, this chapter sets out the approach taken to address these gaps in the literature.

This chapter presents and justifies the approach taken to the study. Analysing a range of research choices, I first set out my orientation to the research, positioning myself as a critical-interpretive scholar. I then explain the methodology and methods selected for the study, arguing that the case study approach, utilising mixed research methods was the most suitable approach to provide answers to the research questions. I then go on to discuss the potential limitations of the chosen approach, and the associated ethical and practical decisions, in order to ensure that the necessary practical and ethical measures were in place, and that the study was valid. Detailed descriptions of the field for the research and sample are included in order to frame the analysis presented in the following chapters.

3.2 Influencing paradigms for research

The overall aim of the research was to explore power in relation to student voice in higher education. In order to explore this aim it was necessary to adopt a range of research lenses. The research questions sought to establish a rich picture of formal

and informal student voice mechanisms in England; to understand the underpinning ideologies and imperatives informing student voice; to critically analyse these ideologies to understand the complex ways in which individuals make sense of student voice; to explore the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and managers that are shaped by student voice; and to understand the implications for the higher education sector.

As a part-time student, I worked full-time in an educational research post in a central learning and teaching department at Birmingham City University during the first half of this study. Working as a researcher I gained experience in developing and implementing a wide range of different research designs and am aware of the importance of ensuring that research methodologies are informed by the aims of a particular research project, rather than an attachment to one particular research paradigm or practice (Gorard, 2002, Janesik, 2000: 390). Having established the research aim and associated questions for this study, I undertook the analysis of the range of different paradigmatic lenses in order to inform the development of a research design for the thesis that was aligned with the research questions.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) provide a useful overview of the three main research paradigms (Table 2.). The model is based on the work of Habermas, and informed my exploration of the types of knowledge about student voice which may be gained by adopting a particular perspective.

Table 2: Habermas’s model of research interest (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 136)

Interest	Knowledge	Medium	Science
Technical	Instrumental (causal explanation)	Work	Empirical analytic or natural sciences
Practical	Practical (understanding)	Language	Hermeneutic or ‘interpretive’ science
Emancipatory	Emancipatory (reflection)	Power	Critical sciences

3.2.1 A technical interest

Habermas’s conception of the ‘technical’ broadly correlates with what is commonly known as positivist research, and seeks to deploy scientific methods in order to establish an objective truth. The concept of ontological objectivity in social science can be seen in the work of early positivist sociologists. Positivists believe in the objective existence of a reality which is governed by natural laws, and suggest that research design can control for bias, enabling the laws to reveal themselves through data. Positivists tend to use quantitative techniques to limit the influence of the researcher assuming that with controls they may discover generalisable and replicable truths about the nature of reality (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006: 193).

Currently, much of the research into student voice in the UK higher education sector is conducted from a positivist perspective; a practice which critics such as Hodkinson terms, the “*new orthodoxy*”, based on the assumption by those funding research that “*method can ensure objectivity in research, and that more objective ‘safe’ research to inform practice is needed*” (Hodkinson, 2004: 9). Student satisfaction surveys and smaller scale module evaluations tend to use quantitative,

'scientific' tools such as Likert scale questionnaires to establish the 'level' of student satisfaction with a number of areas of their experience. The largest of these questionnaires, the NSS, uses a quantitative approach to provide results which inform national league tables and identify national trends in student satisfaction (IpsosMORI, 2012).

The government-funded NSS claims to provide an 'objective' measure of the student experience. However, as previously highlighted in Chapter 2, there have been a number of challenges to its integrity as a measure of 'reality' and its value neutrality. Firstly, as a measure of the reality, IpsosMORI provide statistical data at institutional and programme level, illustrating students' responses by an average numerical value. This provides management with an easily digestible snapshot of student satisfaction, but does little to promote understanding of the reality for individual students' experiences of the programme. Secondly, while an independent company conducts the survey, the content of the survey is defined by a group of government and university policy makers. The information that is acquired through the survey is therefore guided by a definition of the student experience of which students themselves have no ownership. Thus the relationship acts in a way that Carr and Kemmis define as "*hypothetico-deductive*" rather than objective-inductive (1986: 63).

Given that the research questions informing this study relate to understanding the imperatives and ideologies that guide student voice, and how they are translated at a local level, the purpose of this research was to focus on the subjective interpretations of individuals, rather than seeking to establish an objective truth. The

statistics established through positivist-influenced research into the student voice provided some useful insight into levels of satisfaction at different institutions during the formulation of this study, but provided little or no insight into the dimensions of voice with which the study was concerned.

3.2.2 A practical interest

Habermas' conception of the practical approach aligns closely with the interpretative approach to research, which understands reality as a subjective product of "*individual meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour*" (Usher, 1996: 18). This has implications for the approach that interpretative researchers take to investigate the social world as they seek to reveal and describe the complexities of human thoughts and actions in a particular context. This focus means that qualitative research methods, concerned with individual meaning and understandings, are usually favoured (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Researchers such as Hodkinson suggest that:

"it is helpful to view [qualitative] research as contributing to better understanding, in ways that owe more to the quality of interpretations of the data than to the objective purity of any methods used" (Hodkinson, 2004: 9).

At the heart of this research study, was a desire to understand the complexity and diversity of students', academics' and senior managers' experiences and to consider the complexity of those in relation to the ideologies and imperatives upheld in higher education policy and the literature. In line with the views of Reay and Arnot (2002), my own experience working with students in higher education indicated that there was "*no homogenous pupil voice, even in a single working group, but rather a*

cacophony of competing voices” and indeed, no single voice of academics or senior university managers (39). This research study aimed to create a rich picture of this ‘cacophony’ in order to develop an understanding of the complexity of the ideologies and practices around student voice activity, rather than to develop a scientifically generalisable ‘answer’.

The selection of the interpretative paradigm did not mean that the concept of ontological objectivity was abandoned completely. Phillips (1993) argues that:

“‘objective’ seems to be a label that we apply to inquiries that meet certain procedural standards, but objectivity does not guarantee that the results of inquiries have any certainty” (67)

Yet Phillips, drawing on the work of Popper, does not see this as a reason to abandon the quest for objectivity altogether. Phillips sees the truth as an ‘essential regulative ideal’ which leads us to ask, *“how can we hope to detect and eliminate error?”* by limiting subjectivity in research (Popper, 1968 cited in Phillips, 1993:67) . Striving for objectivity in qualitative research is not, therefore, a baseless exercise. Research that focuses on meaning and individual truth can accept that the ‘truth’ or ‘truths’ uncovered may not be ‘certain’ while applying acknowledged checks and balances to transparently increase research objectivity.

This leads to the idea of ‘procedural objectivity’, which refers to the aspiration which many researchers aim for, to eliminate personal feelings or opinions in the research process. As is illustrated with the example of the NSS, many positivist research studies use methods to detach the researcher from the subject in order to eliminate subjectivity. While these methods may offer a level of generalisability and

replicability, the outcomes may, at times, tell us more about the priorities of those in power than those of the research subjects. Blair (1998) advocates the identification of power relations in the research process and highlights the importance of making values explicit, to enable the evaluation of the impact of power. Blair suggests that researchers who make claims of value neutrality are on dangerous ground ethically, as their position acts to *“mask the fact that research interpretations are arrived via styles of reasoning and deduction which fit particular theories and particular world views”* (1998: 244).

Throughout the research period, I worked full-time in an area relating closely to the research conducted. There were times when the values and goals of my employer conflicted with those in which I was engaging in the research. Reflexivity throughout the research process was paramount, not just in terms of identification of personal values, but also as a method for examining and justifying decisions. Techniques such as the triangulation of themes, using a range of data sources, keeping notes to track and justify decisions, critically discussing and analysing data with my supervisor to explore interpretations, and the sharing of research decisions for critical review by peers, were all measures which were utilised in the research model (Greenbank, 2003). Further to this, the publication of aspects of the research during the period in which it was undertaken (Freeman, 2013), meant that I was able to subject my work to rigorous peer review, thereby providing some verification for the interpretation of the data.

The interpretative approach worked well as an approach for addressing the research aims for the thesis, as it enabled the collection and analysis of data to

inform an understanding of the ways in which individuals experienced and espoused discourses in relation to student voice. This was informed by Argyris and Schon's (1996) notion of 'espoused theories' and 'theories in use', which makes a distinction between the values that people believe inform their practice, and the implicit theories that inform practice in 'reality'. Silverman (2001) regards qualitative research as a strong approach for "*its ability to analyse what actually happens in naturally occurring settings*" (p259). Thereby, the interpretative, practical interest informed the development of the study to address those questions relating to the lived experience of students, academics and managers, but I also sought to utilise techniques described in the following section, to problematise and move beyond a descriptive analysis of student voice.

3.2.3 An emancipatory interest

In addition to an interest in describing current practice, this study was also concerned with the nature of power in relation to student voice, the nature of the imperatives and ideologies that inform it, and the identities and subjectivities that are shaped for those who participate. The critical or emancipatory approach offered a lens through which power relationships and ideologies might be revealed.

For critical theorists, social research means "*understanding the causes of powerlessness, recognising systemic oppressive forces and acting individually and collectively to change the conditions of life*", with the intention of creating a more just and democratic society (Usher, 1996: 23). Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that this is, by necessity, a "*participatory and collaborative*" (156) process through which the researched and researchers are able to "*bring their pre-understandings*

into contact" with a view to emancipation (Usher, 1996: 24). A number of recent studies relating to student voice in institutions have utilised participatory research methods in order to engage students seen as vulnerable or 'oppressed' (Dinsdale, 2002, O'Neil and Wyness, 2005, Read et al., 2001, Seale, 2010). Definitions of the oppressed in these studies have included disabled students, students from groups that are under-represented in higher education, and in one study all students, as subject to institutional hegemony.

While recognising participatory research as a powerful approach, the aim of this research thesis was to identify and reveal the contradictions and compatibilities between ideologies, imperatives, practice and meanings for individuals, rather than to directly promote transformation within the duration of the study. This thesis problematises student voice in higher education, in order to facilitate a deeper, and potentially, transformative understanding of the nature of student voice. Critical approaches were an important element, providing the tools to consider the nature of power in the study, but bringing individuals' pre-understandings into contact was not an element of the research study itself. As such, a critical-interpretative approach was adopted in order to focus a critical lens on the ideologies and power relationships behind mechanisms and experiences.

The critical element of this study draws on the work of Foucault in order to problematise a phenomenon that is largely considered to be power neutral in the existing literature. This study draws upon Ball and Olmedo's (2013) approach to analysing performativity and the role of teachers by "*following the flows of power in the 'opposite direction'*" (86). By starting with the experience of the students,

academics and managers, the study aimed to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between the theory and practice associated with student voice. As Ball and Olmedo (2013) suggest, *“these accounts enable us to visualise the gaps between power and domination and offer opportunities to think about ourselves differently”* (86). The use of Foucault’s concepts of governmentality was drawn upon as a theoretical framework for the thesis enabling the problematisation of different experiences and practices.

3.3 The research design: case study

In order to develop an understanding of current mechanisms for student voice in a number of different contexts, the methodology for the research was based on a comparative case study model. Robson provides a basic definition of case study research as *“a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”* (Robson, 2007: 178).

The advantage of the case study approach is that it enables the researcher to look at a number of different processes and practices that occur simultaneously and to reveal *“multiple realities”* (Stake, 1995: 12). Stake (1995) also identifies that case studies have the capacity to identify *“different and even contradictory views of what is happening”* within a particular setting (12). This study sought to develop a rich picture of student voice mechanisms in higher education and to understand the ways that individuals and institutions operate in and make sense of these mechanisms. The case study approach enabled the research to move beyond a description of policy and practice to identify and explore some diverse and

sometimes competing meanings and understandings that informed participation in student voice.

Case studies as an approach enable a focus on the 'particular' rather than the 'general' (Stake, 2002: 22). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that the idea that *"one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development"* is a common misconception (219). Flyvbjerg argues that generalisation *"is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress"* (226). He suggests that generalisation is one of many ways that researchers can gain knowledge and that the production of work that has limited capacity for generalisation has often provided the basis for further research and innovation (226-227). Using case study research, this study has sought to provide that basis in the context of student voice and power. Conclusions drawn from the study are acknowledged as highly situated and sufficient detail has been provided in order to enable those engaging with the thesis to relate themes to their own context. Within Chapter 6, the discussion examples are used from the press, and research undertaken in other education institutions, in order to demonstrate where the findings presented in the study share commonalities with those evident elsewhere. This enables the research to make a contribution to the wider research area and provides the basis for further research into power and student voice.

3.3.1 The scope of the case study in context

The inclusion of two institutions ensured a richness of data and provided opportunities to consider the differences in practice and experiences across two locations. Two universities located in the English midlands were selected based

both on geographical convenience and on access to these institutions. The pilot work was carried out in the Post-92 institution and the main study at the Russell Group institution. This enabled exploratory research to take place during the pilot phase of research without influencing the participants who later took part in the main study. Conducting the pilot also enabled some comparison between institutional mechanisms, and provided a basis for the development of working hypotheses and themes which could then be explored in the main study.

3.3.1.1 Case study 1 – Post-92 institution

The pilot institution is located in a large city and was formed from a number of specialist colleges that had existed previously as standalone institutions in the city. The institution became a polytechnic in the 1970s and in 1992 was awarded university status. The university operates across several campuses and offers a range of different courses in art and design, English, technology, engineering, teaching, social sciences, law and healthcare. Alongside a range of full-time courses, the institution has a large portfolio of part-time study options. Of the 23000 students studying at the university, almost half of the full-time students are from the local area and a large percentage of these are from ethnic minorities. Around 3500 students are postgraduate.

3.3.1.2 Case study 2 – Russell Group institution

The case study that was selected for the main study was a large, single campus institution. Formed in the 1960s, the institution has around 23000 students, of which around 13000 are undergraduate and 10000 are postgraduate. The majority of students are full-time. The institution is organised into four faculties - Arts, Medicine,

Science and Social Sciences. A range of traditional academic subjects such as chemistry, English and maths, as well as those designed to prepare students for a particular profession, such as business, medicine and engineering, are all taught at the institution. As a research-intensive institution, a considerable amount of the university's funding is gained through research activity.

The formal student voice mechanisms at each institution were managed by the students' union, headed by elected student officers, in collaboration with university management. Each institution ran a number of internal student satisfaction surveys for students in all years of study, along with the NSS for students in their final year. Module evaluations did not take place in a standard format in all departments although they were prevalent. At the Post-92 institution there was a move to standardise module evaluation processes during the period of study. Student representative committees are a requirement for all courses and the students' union at each institution supported the election of students at the start of each academic year. At each institution the central learning and teaching department was also leading a number of projects that sought to develop collaborative relationships between students and staff (at the Post-92 institution) and to engage undergraduate students in research (at the Russell Group).

In order to understand the extent to which practices and ideologies differed depending on particular subject disciplines, students and academics from two contrasting subject areas in each institution were asked to participate. This approach was taken in order to support the development of a rich picture which took account of different subject disciplines. Disciplines are often based on different

theoretical and intellectual principles and may be taught differently (for example, science subjects are often taught through lab work, while arts often have a greater emphasis on seminars and group discussion). Booth (1997) suggests that students who select certain disciplines within higher education share similar goals and characteristics, so by contrasting two disciplines in each institution it was possible to explore these differences.

The NSS provides the largest data set of higher education student opinion in the UK, and levels of participation in the NSS from students in different subject areas informed the courses selected as cases (APPENDIX B: NSS ANALYSIS FOR SUBJECT DISCIPLINE SELECTION). The national and local NSS was considered for different subject disciplines, and the subjects selected were those that had reasonably high levels of participation, but were neither the best nor worst. On a pragmatic level, it was also important to select subjects that were represented at both the Post-92 and Russell Group institutions in order to enable the research to be replicated for the pilot and main study. The subject areas of English and engineering were chosen as the case studies for the study. Both nationally and locally, English had a slightly higher response rate in the NSS than engineering. Additional factors considered in the selection of case studies included a desire to consider an arts and a science discipline, in order to explore the participation of students in different subject areas, and to include a traditional academic subject and a professional discipline. At each institution, the English department contained a higher proportion of female students, and the Engineering department, a higher proportion of male students. However, in the pilot work, recruiting students in each

of these subject areas proved difficult and as a result, students from different subject disciplines were involved at the development stage.

Following the pilot interviews, the decision was taken to focus only on undergraduate student voice mechanisms. The rationale for this decision was that the majority of Government and higher education institution policy relating to student voice has focused on the undergraduate group. While postgraduate students are surveyed through the Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research Experience surveys, the results of these are not made widely available to the public, nor do the results receive notable media coverage. Approaches to funding for postgraduate courses have remained relatively stable over the period of the study and as such there has been less attention paid, in recent years, to student voice at the postgraduate level, both within institutions and externally. This is not to say that there is not a place for consideration of student voice mechanisms beyond that of the undergraduate population, but that the undergraduate group offered the greatest scope for consideration in this study. A final reason for not including postgraduate students, in this study, is that it may be premature to study postgraduate mechanisms at this particular point, given that this group may well be influenced to a far greater extent within the next 5-10 years as the postgraduate population becomes increasingly composed of individuals who have experienced the new undergraduate funding regime.

In each case study, student voice mechanisms were considered at the macro (government and university policies and practice), meso (senior manager interpretation and implementation of these policies) and micro levels (students and

academics, interpreting, understanding and practicing in student voice mechanisms) in order to develop a full and holistic picture. In addition, the student voice mechanism typology (Table 1, Chapter 1) was utilised to ensure that each study focused on a range of official, unofficial, collective and individual activities. This enabled the development of a richer understanding of the complex picture of student voice mechanisms.

3.4 Data collection methods

In order to develop a rich picture of student voice the research employed a number of different methods. As a critical-interpretative study, the methods aimed to create both a picture of student voice mechanisms, practices and how individuals operate within them and to explore the ways in which these produce relationships of power. In order to achieve this aim, multiple layers of data collection were undertaken in order to understand both what was happening in practice and how this was informed by particular ideologies and imperatives.

The main research methods used in the study were documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations. All methods were tested through the pilot phase of research in order to ensure that they were fit for purpose and obtained the types of data that would facilitate a greater understanding of the research questions. The collection of data at the macro, the policy or strategic level of student voice; meso, institutional structural and management level; and micro, the operational and experiential level, was selected in order to differentiate layers of activity. To take one example, a study of 'official' student voice mechanisms included:

- analysis of written documents such as government policy documents at a 'macro' level;
- interviews with senior managers to explore interpretations of these documents at a 'meso' level;
- and interviews and observations of students and academics in order to see how mechanisms were experienced and understood in practice at a micro level.

Practical issues were also considered when selecting the methods for research including the cost and time investment required on the part of the participants and researcher. Table 3 illustrates the approach taken to combining these methods in order to address the first three research questions. The fourth and fifth research questions were explored based on an analysis of the data collected.

Table 3: Layers of data collection as applied to the research questions

Research question	Purpose	Documentary analysis	Observation/ structured observations	Interviews
1. How do students, academics and senior management describe and experience student voice mechanisms?				
Macro				
Meso	To develop an understanding of the approach to the operation of student voice mechanisms at an institutional and departmental level.			Senior management perceptions of official and unofficial student voice mechanisms, their implementation and purpose.
Micro	To develop an understanding of the ways that students, academics and senior managers engage with student voice mechanisms and the perceived purpose of official and unofficial activities.		Observations of students completing course evaluation documents and in student representation meetings. Observations of academics and senior managers' role in these processes.	Academics' and students' perceptions of student voice mechanisms, their implementation and why they do or do not engage.
2. What are the explicit and implicit imperatives that inform student voice?				
Macro	To establish the motivations and ideologies behind the development of student voice mechanisms in institutions.	Analysis of government, institutional and union policy documents relating to official and unofficial student voice mechanisms.		
Meso	To establish the translation of these motivations and ideologies through national mechanisms and at an institution wide level.	Analysis of primary documents relating to mechanisms e.g. NSS survey, student union representative handbooks and students' union election manifestos.		
Micro				
3. What are the coherences and contradictions between the imperatives?				
Macro				
Meso	To identify the coherences and contradictions between different types of student voice activity			Senior managers' perceptions of the purpose of student voice mechanisms. Awareness and identification with imperatives explored in the interviews.
Micro	To identify the coherences and contradictions between different types of student voice activity		Observation of behaviours around student voice mechanisms – do they differ depending on the perceived purpose of an activity?	Academics' and students' perceptions of the purpose of student voice mechanisms. Awareness and identification with the imperatives explored in the interviews.

The following section explores each of the chosen methods in order to outline their suitability for the study and to highlight strategies for addressing their limitations.

The selected methods were refined during the pilot phase, which led to the development of the approach to the main study.

3.4.1 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis enables the use of a variety of pre-existing documentation.

May (1997) summarises the potential value of documents stating:

“they can tell us a great deal about the way in which events were constructed at the time, the reasons employed, as well as providing materials upon which to base further research investigations” (157)

In order to develop a picture of existing practice, it was necessary to consider artefacts that had informed the development of mechanisms. Other methods such as observations and interviews provided a considerable amount of information about how mechanisms were understood currently, but many of the individuals involved in the development of mechanisms were not accessible as direct participants for the research. Policy documents and guidance provided insight into the process through which mechanisms were constructed. Documentary analysis offered an insight into the official and historical development of student voice mechanisms at the macro level of government and institutional policy and the opportunity to trace these down to practice.

As well as providing some insight into the development of student voice mechanisms, documentary analysis was used to explore artefacts produced by

mechanisms. These took the form of 'official' artefacts such as the NSS, local course evaluation surveys and minutes of staff-student committees in addition to 'unofficial' documents such as blogs associated with student protest and students' union election manifestos. These sources offered some insight into practice within student voice mechanisms and, at times, to the imperatives and ideologies that informed particular practices.

The documentary analysis that took place was by necessity selective in the time available. However, it was possible to be flexible with the choices of documents included in the study, to follow up on leads when participants in interviews mentioned particular documents and to seek documentary evidence for common forms of student voice such as the NSS and students' union election manifestos.

In the context of this research, the nature of documents as biased and selective was viewed as a benefit rather than a hindrance. As unsolicited documents, the artefacts were written with a particular purpose and audience in mind. Documentary sources in this context represent a source of data that cannot be amended or changed as a result of being researched (Burgess, 1990: 124). This provided a balance to the more direct research methods included in the study, for which the possibility that the participant may knowingly or unknowingly alter their response due to being involved in the research, had to be accounted.

Drawing on the format of Table 1: Student voice mechanisms (Chapter 1), the following table illustrates the artefacts that were considered as part of the study. Analysis of these informed the literature review and enabled the development of a

greater understanding of the nature of documents and how they frame student voice activity in Chapter 4.

Table 4: Opportunities for documentary analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">Official Collective (OC)</p> <p>Student Representation Systems (University and Student Union policy documents, student representative handbooks and guidance for students and staff, minutes from student representative meetings)</p> <p>QAA Student Engagement chapter of the quality code</p> <p>NUS, HEA and other guidance</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Official Individual (OI)</p> <p>National Student Survey and promotional material</p> <p>Office of the Independent Adjudicator</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Unofficial Collective (UC)</p> <p>Student protests (NUS and press reports, blogs from university occupations)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unofficial Individual (UI)</p> <p>Students' union election manifestos</p>

The collection of documents that informed, and were produced by student voice mechanisms, provided an initial range of evidence from which to begin to develop a framework of official and unofficial activity at the institution. Prior (2003) suggests that documents can serve to “*make ‘things’ visible and more traceable*” (87). The framework illuminated a variety of different phenomena and practices both in institutions and more widely.

A number of researchers stress the importance of seeing texts as situated in a context. For example Foucault (1991) sees documents as part of the way in which knowledge, practice and 'truth' is produced, studying them:

"in order to study this interplay between 'code' that rules ways of doing things (how people are to be graded and examined, things and signs classified, individuals trained etc.) and a production of true discourse which serve to found, justify and provide reasons and principles of these ways of doing things" (79)

In this way, Foucault sees documents as traces of the way in which particular practices and ideologies are founded, developed and interpreted. Prior (2003) advocates the consideration of documents as part of *"fields, frames and networks of action"* rather than as static, pre-defined artefacts (2). In this context, Prior stresses the importance of taking documents in context and in conjunction with other evidence.

Fairclough (2001: 97-98) developed a model for the analysis of discourse as an approach to unpicking the underlying assumptions, imperatives and ideologies in a text. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) recognises the complex layers of meaning in a text, how meaning is constructed and what this says about the wider social and political context in which it is located. Fairclough's model provides an analytical approach to understanding the relationship between language and other aspects of social life such as power relations, crises and social change.

Practically, CDA involves the analysis of texts at three levels; "description of text, interpretation of the relationship and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context" (2001: 91). In his detailed explanation of the

process, Fairclough suggests that by considering the properties of a text, such as the vocabulary, grammar and text organisation, it is possible to reveal layers of meaning that can serve to indicate the underpinning ideologies and power relationships evident in a text. For example, Fairclough (1993) used CDA to consider aspects of authority and identity in two undergraduate university prospectuses, one from 1967-8 and the other from 1993. The focus of the 1967-8 prospectus is primarily for information transfer to students whereas a similar document in 1993 has a much clearer focus on promotion and 'selling' the institution to the student (1993: 153-157). His analysis shows how the text is a realisation of both the underpinning processes of production and the ideologies and shifts in ideologies that underpin the production of each text.

Elements of CDA were used as an approach to analysis in order to critically explore the texts and interviews. In order to gauge the potential of CDA as an approach, an exploratory analysis was conducted based on the NSS questionnaire (APPENDIX C: COPY OF THE NSS SURVEY QUESTIONS). Aspects of this are included in Chapter 4, and the full analysis is included as an appendix (APPENDIX D: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY). Using Fairclough's model, the survey questions were analysed in order to consider the vocabulary, grammar and textual mechanisms used. The resulting analysis highlighted some underpinning imperatives that have been included in Chapter 4. The use of elements of CDA to supplement the thematic analysis, of the data and

the balance between the use of CDA and thematic analysis is discussed later in the chapter.

3.4.2 Semi structured interviews

The use of interviews in social research allows the researcher to ask questions of participants in order to gain insight into their experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings. Different forms of interviews may be used for different research purposes. Structured interviews are often most closely associated with positivist research methods as they tend to emulate the structure of a survey in an oral form (May, 1997: 110-13, Robson, 2007: 270). In contrast, the unstructured interview is open-ended. The interviewer may provide a general area of interest, but beyond this, they allow participants to develop the content and direction of the interview, thereby enabling them to shape the agenda of research and, it is suggested, reveal to the researcher their personal understandings (May, 1997: 112). While it was felt that the capacity of the interviewee to inform the agenda of research afforded by this method was useful, it was necessary to focus the interviews in this study on a number of key areas in order to inform the research questions.

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to approach the task with a set of pre-defined questions and to probe responses to gain clarification or elaboration. This allows the interviewee to shape the interview in a particular topic area. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with managers, academics and students. Through the pilot work, interview questions were developed and refined in order to ensure that the data collected would pertain to the research questions (APPENDIX E: PILOT AND MAIN STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS). The use of open

questions allowed participants the space and encouragement to share their experiences and perspectives on student voice.

On a practical level, the semi-structured interviews were a combination of standalone interviews with key individuals, who were not observed as part of the study, and interviews that took place following an observation. Typically the standalone interviews were with senior managers, students and academics who were not directly involved in the student representation committees that were observed.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in order to ensure minimal intrusion and to free the researcher to engage fully in the interviewer role. Practical considerations such as maintaining the depth of the study, along with the breadth within a limited time frame, limited the size of the selected sample.

In order to gain a range of responses the following interviews took place at the two institutions. The students who participated in the pilot were not from the identified sample departments as these proved difficult to recruit:

Table 5: Analysis of the structural interview sample characteristics

Post-92 Pilot (include dates)		
Participant	Date	Status
Final year student, Business - male	July 2011	Student representative, BME, had assisted on university open days, showing students around the department
Final year student, Education - female	July 2011	Student representative, who lived locally to the university, BME
Students' Union Officer - male	July 2011	President, coming to the end of his term of office
Students' Union Manager – female	July 2011	Member of Students' Union staff with responsibility for student representation
Pro-Vice-Chancellor - female	July 2011	Education focused role, responsible for overseeing the NSS and student representation
Academic Registrar - female	July 2011	Worked closely with the students' union to develop policy associated with student representation
Director of Education - male	July 2011	Senior manager with oversight for learning and teaching at the institution
Head of English Department - male	June 2011	Oversaw all English courses, line manager for academics in the department
Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 - male	July 2011	Oversaw management of a degree, regularly attended student representation committees
Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 – male	July 2011	Oversaw management of a degree, regularly attended student representation committees
Main Study - Russell Group		
Participant	Date	Reflections
First year student, Engineering - male	June 2012	Student representative, international student
Final Year student, Engineering - male	June 2012	Student representative and Chair of the student representative committee, undertook casual work in the students' union
Final Year student, English - female	June 2012	Student representative
Final year student, English - male	June 2012	Involved in protest on campus
Students' Union Officer - male	February 2012	Education focused, member of university governance committees relating to education
Pro-Vice-Chancellor - female	February 2012	Education focused role, responsible for overseeing the NSS and student representation
Academic Registrar - male	February 2012	
Head of English Department - female	May 2012	Head of Department, line manager for academics in the department and attended student representation meetings
Academic, English - female	May 2012	Had participated in committees in the institution
Academic English - male	June 2012	No direct involvement in student representation
Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering - male	March 2012	Oversaw teaching management in the department
Academic, Engineering - male	May 2012	No direct involvement in student representation

Senior managers interpret government policy in order to develop policies and mechanisms in institutions. Semi-structured interviews with these members of staff sought to explore student voice mechanisms at the university and to establish the purpose of student voice mechanisms from their perspective. Access to senior managers at institutions can be difficult to arrange and time limited. An initial documentary analysis informed some of the interview questions. By conducting the documentary analysis, it was possible to discuss the historical development of some student voice mechanisms. Students' union managers and officers also play a part in the strategic direction of student voice mechanisms and so where possible, these individuals were also approached to participate in the research.

Departmental managers, such as heads of department and academics with responsibilities for managing courses, usually have a role in operationalising university mechanisms. In order to understand the ways in which policies were interpreted and implemented, it was important to talk to a range of academic staff representing the selected departments at each institution. For the purposes of the study, semi-structured interviews took place with members of academic staff representing each course, including both academics who saw themselves as directly engaged with student voice activity, and those who did not. It was recognised that the perceptions of student voice mechanisms and the perceived underlying imperative, was likely to influence how staff engaged. In order to enable some comparison of staff perceptions of mechanisms and the ways that they operated within them, interviews at this level were supplemented by observations of

academics operating within student representative committees (Argyris and Schon, 1996).

Interviews took place with students who engage with student voice mechanisms to different extents. Where possible, these interviews supplemented observations in order to develop an understanding of how students behave in, and interpret, a variety of official and unofficial mechanisms. Semi-structured interviews supplemented observations of student representation committees (students and academics engaging in the committee were interviewed following the event).

The focus of the study meant that all participants had some experience of student voice in higher education. This ranged from those who had minimal involvement, for example, students who had completed an institutional survey, to those with more significant roles. The sample was identified in two different ways. Senior managers and academics with teaching management responsibility were specifically targeted due to their role. In turn, these managers suggested other academics, who were not as directly involved in student voice mechanisms, to involve in the study. The student sample was self-selecting. Invitations were sent out in departments and followed up with targeted requests where participants had not been identified. However, because I was present in student representative committees, and so students could respond to my requests directly, this resulted in some bias amongst the student participants. Similarly, only 2 of the academics interviewed had not at any point been members of the student representation committee in their department.

It was difficult to recruit those students and academics that did not see themselves as having a formal role in student voice mechanisms. Of course all students and most academics are likely to be involved in completing or responding to surveys or course evaluations at some point during their time at an institution, but many did not see engagement with a study of student voice as relevant to them. This perhaps suggested that these participants derived little meaning from this activity or did not define these mechanisms as student voice. For this reason the responses of those individuals who saw themselves as less involved in formal mechanisms, have been included in the analysis as a counter-balance, and areas for further research to explore the experiences of those who do not self-define as being involved in student voice, are discussed in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

3.4.2.1 Developing the interview questions: an exploration of students' approaches to course evaluation

As part of the pilot, an additional approach to the collection of data from students engaging in course evaluations was developed and some exploratory work conducted. Some initial pilot work using a self-guided semi-structured interview format with students was carried out in order to trial an approach to gathering data from students undertaking course evaluations. The approach was designed to gather data around the knowledge and understandings that students draw upon when engaging in existing evaluation activity. Six undergraduate students from an education course and six from an English course at a Russell group institution took part in December 2010.

Students were asked to engage in a paired discussion while completing module evaluation forms. In order to replicate the normal course evaluation process, the course lecturers had not briefed the students involved about what would take place. Participants completed consent forms and were assured that their paper evaluations would be well shuffled into the pile of course evaluations from the rest of the group, and that the audio recordings would not be shared, enabling their identity to remain anonymous when considered by university staff. This worked well in the group of students from the education student group, as those involved were part of a much larger group present on the day. However, the English student group evaluation took place after lunch and only 6 students attended the session. This meant that it was not possible to shuffle the 6 participant evaluations into a larger pile. In this instance the students were consulted and gave their consent for the research to take place. The class lecturer was not present for the completion of the forms.

In preparation for the activity, a brief introduction outlined the research to the students. Each paired discussion was recorded using a digital audio recorder placed between them. Students were asked to articulate the individual decisions taken, and the basis on which these decisions were made. The pairs worked independently and were observed from a distance by the researcher so as not to interfere with discussion.

Each pair was given a piece of paper with several questions designed to prompt student discussion:

1. Talk about what you are thinking about as you read the questions and the decisions that you make when you score each question.
2. What (if any) evidence or examples do you think about when you answer each question?
3. How do you feel about the process?

Once a pair signalled that they had completed the questionnaire by raising their hand, an additional question was asked with the intention of gaining some understanding of students' perceptions of the purpose of course evaluation:

4. What is course evaluation for?

The students responded to the task well and rich discussion was recorded. Most pairs worked through the questions together, completing the form and discussing each question as they went along, often reading an individual question out loud and then articulating the reason for a particular response. Once each pair had finished their discussion, the supplementary question was posed in order to gain some data around the perceived purpose of evaluation. I was concerned that had this question been included as part of the prompt questions at the start this may have influenced some students' responses.

Overall the technique proved useful as an approach to gaining data from students around an activity that is usually conducted by students individually. The data gathered through the exercise was analysed and elements are included in the data analysis chapters. Most interesting, in the context of this research, was the range of responses given to question 4, which suggested a number of different perceptions

about the purpose of course evaluation. The data collected in response to this question informed the questions for the semi-structured interviews, which asked respondents to identify the purpose of different mechanisms for voice.

3.4.2.2 Refining the interview questions following the pilot

The pilot work took place with students, academics and senior managers in the Post-92 institution during June and July 2011. The semi-structured interview questions provided in Appendix E were piloted. On the whole the questions worked effectively, produced data that informed the research questions, and the participants were able to give full responses to the questions asked. A couple of minor amendments were made to the questions where respondents were unsure about the meaning behind a particular question. For example:

What internal mechanisms exist to allow students to evaluate their experience of learning at university?

Was amended to become:

What are the ways in which students are able to evaluate their experience of learning at university and what is your role in these mechanisms?

This was amended as a number of respondents responded to the first question by listing several different mechanisms without explaining their role in them. Some respondents naturally identified their role in different processes as they listed the different mechanism and this felt like a more natural start to the interview. An additional question was also added:

Are these mechanisms effective?

This felt like a natural point at which to gather their assessment of each of the activities in turn. Other minor amendments added additional descriptive detail to the questions in order to aid clarity where individuals asked for further clarification.

An additional question was added at the end of the interview in order to enable some exploration of the imperatives that informed student voice structures. This question was designed to provide respondents with the opportunity to engage with some of the imperatives for voice that were identified through the literature review. This was in part as a checking mechanism, to see whether these imperatives were seen as bearing any relation to their experiences of student voice in practice but also served to identify whether there were any additional perspectives that had not been reflected in the literature. This question was the last question asked in the interview as I did not wish to influence the way in which the respondents answered the previous questions by discussing the related literature. The question developed was:

As part of my research I have been looking at some of the different purposes for student voice that appear in the literature. If I run through these purposes I wonder if you would reflect on them individually and provide examples of how they have any resonance in your context:

- *Student voice for consumer choice*
- *Student voice for accountability*
- *Student voice for democracy and power sharing*
- *Student voice for the development of student identity*
- *Student voice for the improvement and enhancement of provision*

Through the pilot interviews two additional purposes were identified by respondents that were integrated into the literature review.

- *Student voice for ownership of learning (buy in)*
- *Student voice for academic professional development*

Through the participants' responses to this question some of the coherences and contradictions were explored which revealed the complexity of their experiences as espoused earlier in the interview. This enabled the interviews to move beyond descriptive accounts of what they did, to reflect on how they understood their role and those of others.

The data collected from the interviews formed a substantial component of this study. The interviews provided an opportunity to understand, from the perspective of those involved, the experiences, identities and subjectivities that were associated with student voice. Data from the interviews provided the basis of the analysis that demonstrated the distinct, and at times contradictory, concerns of students, academics and managers, and highlighted the incoherence of the concerns of the different groups.

3.4.3 Observations

One of the aims of this research was to explore how people behave when participating in student voice mechanisms. Observation involves the immersion of the researcher "*in the day-to-day activities of the people whom they are attempting to understand*" (May, 1997: 133). May talks about the '*pragmatic*' roots of observation suggesting:

“people act and make sense of their world by taking meanings from their environment. As such, researchers must become part of that environment for only then can they understand the actions of those who occupy and produce cultures, described as the symbolic and learned aspects of human behaviour which include customs and language.” (May, 1997: 134)

Observation of individuals participating with student voice mechanisms played an important role in allowing access to ‘theories in use’, which could be compared with those espoused in the interviews and documentation (Argyris and Schon, 1996).

The observations were conducted overtly. Permission was sought from participants and a broad description of the research provided to enable informed consent to be given. This meant that the role taken by the researcher during observations was fairly formal. Gold (1969: 36) suggests that a more formal approach can be limiting as short term observations may not allow time for the researcher to gain familiarity with the culture and language used. However, my background, working in higher education, and preparatory analysis of related documents, provided some pre-understanding of what to expect. Access to participants was requested through senior management at each institution and then with the heads of each department involved in the study.

Student representative committees were observed as one of the main student voice mechanisms, bringing together students and academics, in use in the UK. One meeting was observed at the Post-92 institution in 2011 in order to develop the approach to observation and field note taking. Throughout the research I sought to develop an approach to field note taking that allowed for some acclimatisation with the individuals, roles and power mechanisms in a given observation. As a starting

point Bruyn (1966) suggests that notes are taken which include time, place, social circumstances, language, intimacy and social consensus. As the meetings were recorded using a digital audio recorder, I was able to focus on the interaction in the committees without becoming overly concerned about recording the detail of what was said. Field notes noted the characteristics of participants, roles and body language and were used in conjunction with transcriptions of the audio recordings in the data analysis.

Bruyn (1966: 204 cited in, May, 1997: 144-5) notes the importance of acknowledging power relationships as a researcher undertaking an observation and the influence that this has on the perceptions and behaviour of those observed. At least one observation took place in each location before interviews with those academics and students involved, which meant that when I met with those involved they were able to reflect on particular discussions that had taken place in meetings. There was a notable shift in the perception of those observed over the period of the study. While the membership of the committees was subject to some change throughout the year, as students and academics were not always able to attend, those that attended appeared to become increasingly comfortable with my presence. This was particularly notable at the start of meetings as committee members explained to new members, why I was there, and following meetings as students made informal comments about particular discussions that had taken place.

The committees observed had a large number of members and so once meetings got underway participants did not seem overly aware of my presence. However,

when particular incidents or controversial discussions took place, students often discussed these with me as we left the meeting, keen to highlight their 'real' view on a situation. This was interesting in that it suggested that they were keen to ensure that I gained an authentic understanding of their perspective, rather than basing my study purely on interactions in the meeting. This suggested areas that students experienced as a tension or conflict.

Table 6: Detail of sample involved in the main study observations

Department of English Student Representative Meeting		
Date	In attendance	
Dec 2011	1 female head of department 1 library representative 5 male students 5 female students	Students from all year groups were represented
Feb 2012	1 female head of department 1 male academic with teaching management responsibility 2 representatives from the careers service 1 library representative 4 male students 6 female students	Students from all year groups were represented
Department of Engineering Student Representative Meeting		
March 2012	2 senior male academics with teaching management responsibility 1 library representative 2 careers representatives 1 Students' Union representative 14 male students 2 female students	Students from all year groups were represented
May 2012	3 male academics with teaching management responsibility 1 library staff 2 female students 17 male students 1 Students' Union representative	Students from all year groups were represented

The make-up of student representative committees reflected the balance of students within each academic department. Female students, in particular, were underrepresented in engineering, which reflected the lower number of female students taking the degree. However, this was not the case in the English department where male and female students were represented evenly. Similarly the academic representatives on the engineering committee were both male, whereas one female and one male academic attended the English meetings.

I had hoped, at the outset of the study, to be able to observe student protest, but while a number of protests took place during the study, the spontaneity of these, and working full time negated the possibility of gaining direct access to these. This meant that the accounts of students, through the interviews were relied upon for data in these areas.

3.5 The approach to data analysis – thematic and critical discourse analysis

Two layers of analysis were undertaken in line with the critical-interpretive paradigm adopted for the study. An initial layer of analysis of the data was undertaken based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) detailed outline of thematic analysis as an approach for *"identifying, recording and analysing patterns"* (79). Thematic analysis recognises that the researcher is always actively engaged in the process of analysis, identifying themes, refining and selecting those to present to the reader. Braun and Clarke challenge accounts that suggest that themes 'emerge' from or 'reside' in the data and emphasise the importance of articulating clearly the sources of themes.

An initial round of thematic analysis was conducted as part of the pilot work. The transcripts were reviewed and themes were identified as aspects of the data which were important in relation to the research questions, or which demonstrated a common pattern in the data set, as identified by a number of different individuals. Where a theme reoccurred, either within a particular group of respondents (such as senior managers) or across the whole data set (and were pertinent to the research questions), these were identified as major themes. Also noted within the analysis chapters were the outliers, those accounts which represented resistance or a unique perspective.

The initial analysis of the data was inductive. The data were audio recorded during the observation or interview, or subjected to an initial reading if documentary. Recordings of the interviews and observations were transcribed as part of the analysis process, and considered alongside field notes, prior to any coding being applied. This facilitated familiarisation with the data, prior to the analysis being undertaken. Once written up, the interview transcriptions were returned to the participants for comments and an additional accuracy check. Observation transcripts were checked against the minutes of the observed meetings. Reading through the entire data set enabled some initial thoughts about potential patterns in the text to be formed. The data were then transferred onto NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package and each line of the data coded, with one or more code, without a pre-existing coding framework.

The same theming process was undertaken for both the pilot and main study data. Many of the themes shared commonality and so were combined with care being

taken to include the complexity of a theme in the analysis chapters. Themes were based on areas that preoccupied a number of the respondents or that provided an alternative perspective on an existing theme. Where the emerging themes aligned with the imperatives identified in the literature review, similar terminology was used but care was taken to establish the complexity of these themes as individuals understood them. This comparison also enabled the identification of areas that presented an alternative view. Once the coding was complete, an initial reading and refining of the codes was undertaken in order to identify where these aspects were of a common theme, or distinct, standalone items.

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight the subjective decisions that researchers make when drawing conclusions from data. Checks and balances were put in place to ensure that the data were analysed thoroughly and that conclusions were verified. Themes were allocated to all aspects of the data collected to ensure that it was subjected to the same level of analysis. The emerging themes and process of analysis were discussed and refined with my supervisor, enabling verification of emerging themes. The inclusion of data from interviews and observations enabled analysis which looked at both the ways in which individuals understood student voice, and the ways in which they behaved in practice, which allowed for some triangulation of the data. The inclusion of data from two institutions and four departments enabled correlations to be made where similar themes occurred across locations.

The thematic analysis proved a useful approach to informing the interpretative aims of the study as respondents articulated their experiences, approaches and

imperatives for engagement and non-engagement with student voice mechanisms. The thematic analysis also informed the critical aim as it identified accounts of the ideologies, imperatives and identities that contained contradictions and complex experiences of power.

Additionally, in line with the critical framework for the study, the data set was analysed using CDA. Using elements of CDA provided the basis for the identification of the imperatives and ideologies, and aspects of power that underpinned responses to questions relating to the purpose and experience of student voice mechanisms. CDA proved to be particularly useful for the analysis of the documents as described earlier in the chapter. Certain documents, such as the NSS and student representative handbooks, were subjected to a full CDA as described by Fairclough (2001: 97-98). The principles of CDA were used more loosely in order to analyse the interview data, as certain aspects of the model proved less revealing in a context where the participants were able to talk more explicitly about their experiences of mechanisms and relations of power. This additional approach to viewing the data offered the opportunity to problematise documents, relationships and practice that in the past have been assumed to be power neutral, or inherently positive. Fairclough's method provided an opportunity to look at government and institutional texts through a critical lens in order to identify the implicit ideologies and power relationships, and complemented the thematic analysis.

Following the analysis of the data, the majority of the data presented in the analysis chapters were selected as a typical example of a particular theme or sub-theme.

Data were also presented where a minority response suggested an outlier view, experience or perspective in order to illustrate those views that did not align with the majority. The inclusion of these 'black swans' is important because they evidence alternatives to the common view or experience and individuals for whom the dominant discourse did not apply. Throughout Chapters 4 and 5, as I present the data, I have sought to clarify where the themes represent a single voice or those of a number of participants.

3.6 Ethical considerations and limitations

There are a number of ethical issues that have been considered in the design of the research. Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Birmingham in order to ensure that the research adhered to University policy and guidance.

BERA's revised ethical guidelines (2004: 5) outline the principles of ethical research as *"respect for; the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom"* and provide guidance on the researcher's responsibilities.

All participants in the research were provided with information about the study and their requested involvement prior to the commencement of research (APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET and APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM). Participants were asked for their voluntary informed consent and were assured that all confidential data would be kept securely. All participants were made aware at the time of consent that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Plans were made to consider the circumstances under which withdrawal had taken place if participants chose to withdraw, in order to establish whether the

research approach had contributed to withdrawal. There were no respondents who chose to withdraw from the study. At no point was any form of coercion undertaken to persuade participants to take part (BERA, 2004: 7).

All research took place with adults aged 18 or over in higher education institutions. Much of the research took place during or alongside existing mechanisms in an institution and as such incentives were not used to secure engagement. BERA (2004: 8) highlights the importance of recognising the 'bureaucratic burden' of research on participants. Careful monitoring took place of the level of engagement requested from individual students and staff, and channels of communication enabled participants to contact the researcher if they felt over burdened by engagement in the study at any time. A large proportion of the data collection used methods that drew upon existing activity, although semi-structured interviews required an additional time investment from participants. Most interviews were left until later on in the project in order to maximise time spent with participants.

In order to protect the privacy of participants, the names of the institutions studied and the names of individuals involved have not been disclosed in the thesis or any other publications. Care has been taken in discussion with research participants to ensure that data about other participants did not contaminate the research process. Data collected were stored securely on a personal computer which is password protected, any printed data were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Selected anonymised data are made available for external scrutiny as appendices to the research thesis (APPENDIX H: SELECTED ANONYMISED DATA). The minutes of an English student representative committee are included as secondary evidence of

an example relating to the Careers Service, which is discussed later in the thesis, along with the transcripts of the interviews with the Head of English at each institution, in order to illustrate the format of the semi-structured interviews in the pilot and main study phases.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented methodology and methods for this research study. In order to explore the research questions which aim to explore the experiences of those participating in student voice mechanism in higher education, and to understand power in relation to these mechanisms, a critical-interpretive approach has been adopted.

Case studies, undertaken at two different institutions (one pre and one post-92) provide the layers of analysis, at macro, meso and micro levels, in order to develop an understanding of the complexity of student voice mechanisms. Within these case studies, a selection of research methods; documentary analysis, observations and semi-structured interviews, provide the basis for exploring policy, experience and subjectivities in higher education.

In line with the critical-interpretive approach, two forms of analysis, thematic and critical discourse analysis, have been used to explore the data collected. The combination of these processes has produced the themes that are presented in the following two chapters.

4 CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGIES OF DOMINANCE

This chapter provides the data analysis relating to the different student voice mechanisms that were referred to in the case studies, and provides the first step in answering my overall research question, 'does student voice in higher education represent new forms of power and governance in a changing system?'. In this chapter I examine the documentary, observation and interview evidence associated with the mechanisms for student voice in higher education and explore the experiences of the interview respondents in relation to these mechanisms. The accounts of the interview respondents are presented with the associated CDA analysis of documents in order to examine the implicit and explicit ways in which students, academics and managers experience and act within the mechanisms. The exploration of how the mechanisms are experienced, as technologies of dominance, is crucial to the development of discussion in relation to sub-question 1, 'how do students, academics and senior managers describe and experience student voice mechanisms?'.

Having set out the design of the research in Chapter 3, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the themes that were developed from the thematic and CDA. In this, and the following chapter, Foucault's (1993, Martin et al., 1988) concepts of the 'technologies of dominance' and 'technologies of the self' frame the overarching themes within the data. In this chapter the data relating to student voice mechanisms as 'technologies of dominance' are presented, as the ways in which the conduct of individuals are influenced through certain structures, policies, signs and meanings. Examples of these are the aspects that make up the 'mundane',

day-to-day management of higher education institutions such as policy documents, charters, handbooks, forms of assessment, surveys, presented data, systems of training, vocabularies and habits through which power is understood and becomes personal. Many of these elements reflect those that were identified by the respondents throughout the interviews as they spoke about their experience and understanding of student voice.

In the interviews and documents analysed there were a number of distinct mechanisms for student voice. These fell into two categories, formal and informal, through which those who participated understood the different mechanisms. The data relating to the different mechanisms are set out under these headings. Where CDA was conducted in relation to a mechanism the results of this are explored first in order to explore the policy framework for the participants' experiences.

The data from the research are presented in the next two chapters without reference to the literature in order to allow the data to stand on their own. Initially I considered combining the analysis of the mechanisms and imperatives in these chapters, with relevant theoretical references, in order to develop the discussion throughout. However, as this study aimed to explore the broader picture of student voice, and to explore the complex ways in which different mechanisms, experiences and identities interact, I instead chose to present the data analysis alone in Chapters 4 and 5, and to synthesise the analysis and theory in Chapter 6. This enabled discussion of the data in a broader context and for links to be made between the technologies of dominance and the subjectivities and identities that are

shaped, produced and responded to, in complex and intertwined ways across the data.

4.1 Formal mechanisms

4.1.1 The National Student Survey (NSS)

This section includes excerpts from the CDA of the NSS. The full CDA is provided as APPENDIX D: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY. The survey sets out a series of transactions (assessment and feedback, organisation and management, personal development) with the implicit suggestion that these, by nature of their inclusion in the survey, are assumed to be essential components of a 'satisfactory' student experience. The classification schemes drawn upon in the NSS present higher education as a mechanistic process. The language is largely instrumental and functional rather than developmental and transformational. For example, in the '*assessment and feedback*' section of the survey, the questions focus on the administration of assessment (clarity of assessment criteria, fairness of marking, promptness of feedback) rather than whether assessment and feedback has provided challenge, enabled learning or furthered students' understanding of development needs.

There are a number of words and phrases that do not sit comfortably in the text and which suggest an assumption on the part of the author of a shared understanding which may, in fact, be ideologically located. The verbs used in the NSS to describe the student role include 'to receive', 'to need' and 'to satisfy'. These suggest a model of education in which the students' role is largely passive. In contrast, the

verbs used in relation to the role of staff are 'to enthuse', 'explain' and 'to enable', setting the role of staff as the facilitators or providers of education. As such, students in the survey are positioned as relatively passive consumers and staff are positioned as responsible for 'provision'. This relationship is reinforced by the formality of the text used in the survey which sets up a mechanistic relationship between the survey author and the student. The formal language of university administration is adopted rather than a more neutral, plain English tone. Terms such as; 'marking', 'criteria', 'feedback', 'library resources', and 'communication' present an institutionalised vocabulary that may be interpreted by participants as representing a transaction between the official and the student, rather than a more dynamic relationship.

An additional consequence of the formality of language may also serve to distance students from understanding the intended meaning of particular questions. There has been some debate amongst academic staff about students' understanding of the term 'feedback' as it is used in the survey (Robertson, 2004). Some students may understand 'feedback' as encompassing a wide range of formative and summative activity including discussions between an academic and personal tutees, peer feedback and written feedback on assignments, while others might respond to '*detailed comments **on** my work*' (my emphasis added) literally, considering written feedback received on assignments.

A number of questions offer no clarification of who is responsible for a particular action or event e.g. 'feedback on my work has been prompt'. Following 'the teaching on my course' section of the survey, the majority of questions refer to a

series of inanimate nouns ('the course'), and nominalisations ('assessment'), in place of an animate agent. This creates a position in which the student must engage in a high level of interpretation of the statement on his or her own terms. There is a question of the validity of data if every student interprets questions in a different way since many of the questions in the survey require a considerable amount of subjective interpretation.

Fairclough (2001: 96) identifies over-wording or near repetition of particular words and themes as an indicator of preoccupation with a particular aspect of reality. In the NSS, there are a number of areas in which questions might be seen as asking the same or a similar question in a slightly different way. For example, in the personal development section of the survey, two out of the three questions focus on presentation: the course has helped me to present myself with confidence, and my communication skills have improved. This suggests a preoccupation with higher education as a mode for developing students' communication skills and self-esteem over other aspects of student development.

Fairclough (2001: 98) also suggests that the use of expressive values may be ideologically significant as they seek to persuade the reader of a particular argument or viewpoint. As a large-scale survey, the expressive values in the NSS are relatively mild, but nevertheless the choices made about the words used suggest a particular ideology. The use of the adjectives such as 'smoothly' and 'stimulated' illuminate the priorities of the text and the nature of their understanding of a desirable higher education experience.

The NSS provides only a limited scope of issues that students are permitted to evaluate. Although there is some space provided for free text at the end of the questionnaire, it is likely that these responses are largely framed by the tone, approach and ideologies that inform the questions that come before. Given the knowledge-constitutive nature of the survey, it is useful to identify aspects of students' experiences that have been excluded. Fairclough suggests that what is not included in a text, provides insight into that which is not valued or is deemed to be less important. For example, the NSS includes nothing about:

- equality and diversity;
- the welfare or pastoral role of academic staff;
- the interpersonal relationships between staff and students;
- the development of the student as an independent learner or constructor of knowledge (as well as a consumer);
- university management;
- the general culture, how students feel they are positioned and whether they like this or not.

By dictating the areas on which students are able to evaluate their experience, their ability to reflect critically, and in their own terms, is constrained. Although students are given the opportunity to provide 'positive' or 'negative' comments there is no opportunity or invitation for students to make suggestions for changes or improvements to the institution. As a result students are placed consistently as a passive consumer in the survey and academics are positioned as the providers of

knowledge. This suggests a particular type of relationship for students and staff in higher education which reflects a particular value position.

4.1.1.1 Participants' experiences of the NSS

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the prominence of the NSS, the survey was mentioned by all of the participants interviewed at the two institutions. Perceptions of the NSS varied between students, academics and senior managers. The Russell Group institution tended to do well in the NSS. In comparison the Post-92 institution did less well and this was acknowledged by the staff that were interviewed. Perhaps due to their relative success, while the survey was recognised as significant at both institutions, staff at the Post-92 institution talked significantly more about the survey and 'tactics' for encouraging participation.

Senior managers regarded the NSS as important because of its relationship with the reputation of the institution. The Pro-Vice-Chancellors at each institution had a role in ensuring that academics promoted the survey in departments. The Head of Education at the Post-92 university discussed the importance of league tables to senior management. The quote reflects a conscious cynicism and pragmatism regarding the NSS at a senior level:

"It would be hard to get the Vice-Chancellor interested in conversations that take place in corridors or in group work or whatever, though he ought to be more interested in those, but it's very easy to get him interested in the NSS because it will affect one league table after another for the next 12 months and it will determine the future ... [and] how the university is perceived and has the potential, in the new world, to have a significant influence on recruitment. Whether or not it's valid is

irrelevant if it's going to be used in that way."

Head of Education (Post-92)

Amongst academics at both institutions, there was a suggestion that the primary purpose of the NSS was as a measurement for government, national bodies and university management rather than as an accurate reflection of a course. The NSS was viewed as a process or activity, which had to be adhered to for the purposes of accountability:

"The NSS seems to be one of these national standard damn lies and statistics things"

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

Concerns about the framing of the questions arose in both institutions and mirrored those identified in the CDA, suggesting a practical frustration with the survey:

"The NSS feedback is important. And that is sometimes depressing. The problem with the NSS ... is that you sometimes have comments but you can't track them back. They [the questions] are so poorly framed that you can't pin down what the problem was that the students thought they had."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Russell Group)

Senior managers also reflected some concerns about the NSS and how effectively it could be used at an institutional level given the level of feedback that it provides.

The quote also indicates the high-stakes nature of the NSS for institutions, and a sense that scores could be improved by better understanding what informs

students' responses:

"There's something about the NSS which isn't always easy to understand because, let's face it, if you could look at the NSS and know what's wrong, we could all have

cured it and everybody would be 100% satisfied. But we can't. And us dropping so significantly in the league tables. Why? I don't know. I really don't know. And we as an institution - the sector as a whole has probably got to try and sort it out."

Academic Registrar (Post-92)

Similarly, senior management at the Russell Group institution were philosophical about the NSS, understanding it primarily to be of use as a tool for publicity with some, limited use for enhancement:

"We all know what purpose it serves in terms of publicity for the university ...[and] the information it gives us, which we send back to departments. There is a whole ...heart-searching period that goes on post NSS results but ...There are areas it doesn't cover or there are areas that may sometimes be misleading so you need other surveys to do other things."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Russell Group)

Academics in the Post-92 institution talked about the methods that they used to encourage students to participate in the NSS. Different persuasion techniques were used and time was set aside for the survey's completion. There was recognition that the survey was important for the reputation of institutions and consequently for the value of students' degrees:

"We sell it to them on the basis that the league tables are set up [based] on the data from the NSS. If you're going to a job, your employer will look at our ratings and you can turn around to your employer and say 'yes, I went to that University'."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

However, in the English department at the Post-92 institution, there was a recognition that bringing the reputational value of the survey to students' attention was something of which the government disapproved. In this department, student

representatives were asked to explain the survey to their peers in order to distance academics from any coercion which took place:

“Because of the legal and procedural niceties of doing it we tend to leave it to the student reps and student course assistants to do the explaining because I ...don’t want ...to get anywhere near that problem of ...trying to sell the place through the student survey.”

Head of English Department (Post-92)

All students interviewed were aware of the NSS. There was recognition amongst some students at each institution of the reputational importance of the survey. This suggests that the validity of the survey as a measure of quality, may be undermined by ‘survey savvy’ students, who are concerned with institutional reputation over the representation of their authentic experiences. One student, described his approach which reflected that of the other students at the Russell Group institution:

“I don’t think the National Student Survey is effective because I personally put everything on it good, because you know that it’s going to improve the capital of your degree ...I’m happy to be honest on internal surveys but it seems silly to be negative on a National Student Survey that’s going to affect the way that your university is perceived.”

Final year student, English, (Russell Group)

One Engineering academic was particularly concerned with the dangers for academics and managers who are seen to encourage students to complete the survey, citing an incident in another department. His account suggests some of the risks associated with practices designed to encourage positive feedback, and an awareness of the power held by students:

"I was speaking to some students ...from [department of art and design]. They arranged en masse almost a kind of protest vote; ...on the [internal survey] rather than the NSS. There was one course ..., which had 85% - 90% return of information, and they were all dreadful, but just because they felt bullied, so I think it is a really careful balance. Because we do ask for a lot of feedback - there's a lot of questionnaires. I think they get a bit questionaired - out. For me the key on the NSS is to get them before they get stuck in the telephone hassle."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

At both of the institutions, all of the senior managers and academic staff with teaching management responsibility had theories about why students might give institutions a particular score. In the Post-92 institution, all of the academics interviewed described some tension between students being satisfied, and the maintenance of academic standards. This was seen as a barrier to the institution receiving high scores in the survey:

"...there is an irreconcilable tension sometimes between those two things. If a student says - and I get this all the time - they need to get a 2:1 and you are absolutely certain that their abilities or their commitment to work will mean that they will only ever get a 57 or a 58, they're not going to be happy ...And quite a lot of time is spent explaining that ...satisfaction is not necessarily about thinking that you've got the degree that you think you deserve."

Head of English Department, (Post-92)

There were also concerns that the timing of the NSS, and design of courses, could have a negative impact. The pedagogical activities going on in departments were seen to have an impact on the number of students who completed the survey:

"It's done just at the point of when students are going 'Hang on a minute, I've only got 10 weeks of being a student left. My final year project is on the rocks. I haven't

attended as much as I should have done ...because I've got to earn money or for whatever reason, I'm in trouble and actually, maybe the faculty's to blame'."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

At the Post-92 institution, the Student Union Manager was involved in the marketing of the NSS. She described how the university encouraged the students' unions involvement in order to provide some legitimacy to the survey:

"The university like us to get involved because they assume that if the student's union is saying this is a good thing to do ...students will pick up on that and ...not think it is something [that] the university wants out of them. So we try and tell them it is really useful because it matters and the university will improve things based on what the survey results say."

Student Union Representation Manager (Post-92)

There was a marked difference between the perceptions of ownership of the NSS between different academics. Those academics without responsibility for teaching management were aware of the survey, but did not regard it as a concern for them unless it was identified that they personally, had done something wrong;

"I think one thing that we weren't particularly good at was apparently returning of marks in time. OK well again it doesn't affect me because I usually return it early."

Academic Engineering (Russell Group)

At both institutions, all academics with management responsibility at department level, talked about scrutiny from university management due to the high-stakes nature of the survey:

"So at university level, so the PVC [name removed] looks at the NSS results for every department; she looks at every department's response to the NSS, or whoever is in her position, and obviously the NSS is published in the national

newspapers and so on, so it's in the university's interest as a business to advertise its product as a good product that satisfies its customers."

Head of English Department (Russell Group)

Academics with teaching management responsibility at both institutions understood that when departments did not do well in the survey, they would be required to form a response in order to improve results the following year. At both institutions, departments were required to submit 'action plans' to senior management, stating what they would do to address the survey outcomes for the following year.

At the Post-92 institution additional satisfaction surveys took place with first and second year students using similar questions to the NSS in order to identify student issues before they were highlighted in the NSS:

"Our internal survey is clearly designed for us to pick up key issues that are happening and to help us put them in place while the students are still here. If I'm being cynical, it's for us to put them in place before those students ...get to the NSS. And I don't think we're the only university doing that. But with my non-cynical hat on, I do want to know what is going on."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

Additional surveys took place at both institutions that focused on particular services such as the careers service or student support, or that focused on particular groups of students, such as international students:

"And then there are all the consultations with students where the different service units come into play ...careers work very closely with students. The library works very closely with students and often when there are projects ...students will always be involved in those projects."

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

The way in which academics and senior managers described the NSS suggested that the survey is perceived to have considerable power as an external measurement of university and department-level performance. Scores in the NSS were seen as high-stakes and linked to institutional reputation. This shaped the engagement which senior managers had with students and academics. Most students who mentioned the NSS did not see it as a form of voice, as they felt that other mechanisms allowed them to make a greater contribution, but many recognised the link of the scores to their institution's reputation and recognised that the survey was high on institutional agendas.

4.1.2 Course evaluations

At a more immediate level for students and academics, course evaluation questionnaires were used widely in departments at both of the universities in the study. Questionnaires were completed at the end of a module, either on paper or online, and evaluated module content and lecturer performance. The questionnaires tended to include questions in a similar Likert format as used in the NSS, but the questions related to module rather than overall experience. One Students' Union Officer felt that module evaluations provided significant insight into the day-to-day experience of students:

"I think the most important ones ...happen at a module level where individual modules in faculties are ...asking students what they think and how they think they should be working."

Students' Union Officer (Post-92)

One student at the Post-92 institution had noticed a link between the format of module evaluations and the NSS, and suspected that this form of evaluation acted as an early warning system for academics:

“The module evaluation is to feed the NSS or feed the institutional awareness of what is going to happen on the NSS ... And then they will probably try to solve those issues because ...if it does indicate that there is a problem with assessment and feedback, which is most likely, then they have to obviously think of solutions, but at least they have an early indication of it before it goes on to a national scale.”

Final year student, Business (Post-92)

Most questionnaires focused on the provision for students, content and the performance of the academic, however in the English department (Russell Group) students were also asked to evaluate their contribution to the module:

“they’re also asked ...to evaluate how much preparation they personally have done for the seminar so they are not just passive vessels; they are ...invited to be honest and to say how much prep they’ve done, have they done the reading and so on. And they are very honest. Sometimes they say ‘I haven’t’ or they say that it was too much or not enough or whatever.”

Academic 1, English (Russell Group)

Some of these perceptions of the purpose of evaluations were echoed in the audio-recorded pilot work undertaken at an additional Russell Group institution. Students’ responses to a question about the purpose of course evaluation reflected a level of confusion about the purpose, which was not explicitly stated on the form. Their responses suggested a range of perspectives about the motivations for course evaluation that included for enhancement, publicity and reputation, and as an administrative process:

"I just think it's done"

Education student (Russell Group institution 2)

"In the course before this one, they told us that they do listen and have made changes on last year, but I imagine it has to be the majority of people that say something for it to make a difference."

Education student (Russell Group institution 2)

"I don't know what it's for. Do they actually take something from it or is it just for their little books about how good the course is?"

Education student (Russell Group institution 2)

"I think improvement is part of it but I think it's political in that it is for the University to see how the course is doing, even more so now that people will be paying more for the course than before."

English student (Russell Group institution 2)

There was a perception held by one student at the Russell Group institution that most students did not participate in module evaluation because they did not understand the purpose of evaluations or the systems for using them:

"You can express your concerns and opinions there quite easily but ... many students choose not to complete them ...because they aren't aware ...of [how they will receive] feedback ... If you don't know what effect a certain stimulus has and how a certain system responds...you don't know anything about the system."

Year 1 student, Engineering (Russell Group)

For academics without management responsibility, course evaluation was seen as one of the main ways through which they could understand student perspectives on their teaching. They combined the feedback gained in these evaluations with other

informal feedback provided by students, through emails, discussion and levels of participation in lectures etc. Course evaluations were seen to provide useful information but it was not always a comfortable process. One academic spoke about feeling exposed in the evaluation process:

“I take [course evaluations] very seriously both personally and as someone who designs or tries to improve modules. ...I ...wish I took the student evaluations less seriously because it’s very nerve wracking getting them but nevertheless ...I would say I do take them seriously. I think that’s probably true of most people.”

Academic 1, English (Russell Group)

At both institutions academics were aware that results contributed to annual documentation about the course and were reviewed by senior managers. Course evaluation was used alongside other information such as assessment outcomes and external examiner reports to monitor the quality of teaching:

“They ...go onto annual course reports and all the official mechanisms for reporting what’s going on in a course. They go on up to [PVC]. She looks at them. I know she reads them because I’ve seen her act on something I’ve put in one of my reports before, so I’m really happy that the process works in terms of reporting it.”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

Course evaluations were felt to be less high-stakes than the NSS due to the fact that the results were considered by an internal audience. Their primary audience was seen for the academics teaching on modules and for senior managers as a monitoring tool. Students were aware of, and often participated in, course evaluations but were confused about the purpose of evaluations, rarely seeing any

tangible outcomes from feedback This was attributed primarily to the timing of evaluations at the end of a module.

4.1.3 Student representative committees

Excerpts from this section appear in Freeman (2013) "Student engagement in practice: ideologies and power dynamics in course representation systems". In Dunne, E. & Owen, D. (Eds.) Student engagement handbook: practice in higher education. Bingley, Emerald 145-162.

All of the respondents interviewed mentioned the student representative committees as a mechanism for student voice. Many respondents, particularly the students and academics with teaching management responsibility, saw this as the primary student voice structure as it took place at department or course level and involved direct contact between students and staff. The SU Manager summarised the process at the Post-92 institution, which also serves as an accurate articulation of the process at the Russell Group institution:

"In theory, at least every year group within every course should have at least one elected student representative who attends meetings with the university staff for that particular course ... and gathers in the views of students and ...feeds that back to the university and works with staff to try and find solutions...."

At both of the institutions studied the students' union and the institution, jointly oversaw student representation. At each institution, the students' union produced and distributed a handbook, which set out the aims, process and procedures for representation. Students were also offered training by the students' union.

A CDA of student representation handbooks was conducted and served to illustrate some of the relationships evident in the formal processes as described by universities and students' unions. The manner in which representation is described in official documentation sets a framework for what is seen as legitimate and expected in an institution. While a range of factors (for example departmental cultures, training, and the confidence of individual academic convenors) informed the way in which representation was carried out in the different contexts, the official process in the form of a representation handbook set out the formal standards for representation. Individuals and student representative committees could, of course, choose to reject the given roles, but in most interviews and observations the processes were broadly adopted at face value. The links between student representation, institutional quality processes and the QAA requirements served to further strengthen compliance with the guidance provided to departments.

The formal language of university administration was adopted in the handbooks rather than a more neutral, plain English tone. Terms such as; 'feedback loops', 'academic concerns', 'agreed actions', 'transferable skills' and 'enhancement' presented a formal institutionalised vocabulary. The description of the process underlined the 'official' nature of the system and defined the nature of the transactions that could legitimately take place. The use of formal language to describe otherwise familiar activities professionalised the remit of student representation committees and emphasised institutional ownership of processes.

Systems were described in ways that focused on the practical role of the student representative, staff member and the institution rather than their role in relation to

learning or the emotional or political components of representation. The focus in the handbooks was on *what* people were required to do rather than *why* they should do it. Individuals could develop their own understanding of engagement, or discuss the purpose in course representative training, but the exclusion in the documentation may have presented the impression that formally, the practical process was valued over the experiences of the participants.

The handbooks set out the different roles in the process for students and staff. The verbs used to describe the student role in the handbooks were largely mechanistic.

For example (emphasis added):

***“To report** agreed action back to students*

***To read** minutes and ensure you **follow up** on any actions **allocated** to you”*

Russell Group

***“Read and respond** to emails and other communication from the Students’ Union*

***Signpost** University and Union services that may be of use to students”*

Post-92

In contrast, the responsibilities listed for staff at the Russell Group institution were focused more on managerial processes (emphasis added):

***“Ensures** that [Student Representative Committee] concerns and requests are **considered** at staff meetings...*

***Assists** the Chair and Secretary in the **organisation** of agenda items...”*

The verbs used for students and for staff respectively, create a hierarchy of responsibility. Students are required *to do* certain things while staff members are

responsible for *ensuring* that things happen. This underlines subtle but important differences in the allocation of power and responsibility in the process which may inform the way in which individuals participate, and their perception of their ownership of the process.

The subtle differences in roles outlined in the handbook were illustrated in practice in the following account from an academic. There was a clear perception that in order to be a *good* representative a student must act within the guidelines set out in the handbook. The text at the end of this statement mirrors some of the language present in the handbook of the institution:

“I think the student rep system is pretty good if the student does it properly. You’re very reliant on the student. But we have excellent students. They’re not there to represent their thoughts; they’re there to represent students, they hold meetings and take it forward.”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

The academic clearly understood that students should play the approved representation role, and felt students often did this well. It was clear from the interviews with students that they also had opinions about the quality of staff participation in representation processes, but recognising the greater level of authority held by staff, did not feel empowered to articulate these. The formal aspects of the process consequently had a greater impact in defining the role of the student, than of the academic.

Students acknowledged and demonstrated a level of frustration about the constraints of their engagement in formal systems, understanding that they held

little or no power in student representation systems without the support of academics:

"I've found at times that the tutors aren't always that good at listening to problems that are brought up ... if it's more of 'oh no, we don't think that's enough of a problem' it's quite easy to dismiss it ... I do think that is an issue. There have been times when people have brought up problems and the Department has ...been very 'oh well, we can't change that.'"

Final year student representative, English (Russell Group)

There was a perception amongst academics that some student representatives were more effective than others and that students who volunteered for representative roles were a certain 'type' of high achieving student:

"In Engineering there's a variety of commitments and abilities and so forth and you quite often find the [student representatives] who are very capable would set very high, demanding conditions on everybody. If you did that, actually a lot would fall by the wayside."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering (Russell Group)

Academics and managers also questioned whether those who volunteered as representatives were always equipped to represent the views of those in a different student demographic:

"Your peer group is likely to be your peers in other ways so if you are a mature student you are likely to associate with other mature students not 18 year olds who live in the halls of residence [and] if you're trying to represent their views it is harder for you to pick up on and similarly for 18 year olds, they are likely to be with their peer group ...they're not necessarily getting at what mature or part-time students think about the module."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

Some academic respondents recognised the professionalisation of student representatives, through guidance and training and felt that it had influenced the way in which interactions took place in meetings. Differing views emerged as to whether or not this was a positive sign of students understanding their formal role or whether they had become, to use Fielding's (2004b) term, *accommodated* into the system to the extent that they were no longer comfortable representing student views directly:

"I mean they're so well trained strangely, that it is very common now for reps to speak at [student representation committees] as if they are academics. It's almost as if they have crossed the divide. They've so fully understood the nature of the business and this is an interesting one. Is this a criticism of where this has led? They've so fully understood the nature of the business that they've almost stopped speaking directly for the students if you like."

Head of English, Post-92

This comment summarises behaviour that was observed in student representative meetings. There were a number of instances in which students distanced their own views from those of their peers when raising issues that they felt might not be palatable to academic committee members. Students recognised that their role as a representative allowed them a certain amount of power but, at times, demonstrated a reluctance to jeopardise this by expressing unpopular views:

"They'll sit on the student board. They have said before; 'I'm just going to say this opinion isn't my opinion, I actually think this is not a problem, but ... this is what's coming from the student body.'"

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

Fairclough (2001) recognises terms as 'ideologically contested' where they do not sit comfortably in the text, suggesting a level of discomfort or an adoption of language owned by the 'other' (in this case, management). The Students' Union Manager at the Post-92 institution saw the term 'student representation', as a terminology owned by university management and felt that this had implications for the level of academic engagement:

"I think that's where there are problems ...staff are not really inclined to do favours for the management or the university. I think that's a factor in that they maybe see student representation as something that's being imposed on them from above. And so they don't really want to do it."

This did not necessarily indicate that student representation as a concept was not regarded highly by academics, but reflected a concern that the management ownership, and high-stakes nature of the activity, detracts from the value of the process at department level. Practice in English at the Post-92 institution supported this view. Formal student representation was not felt to be sufficient and so supplementary approaches had been developed:

"Because the [student representation committee] is engaged ...in regulatory things to do with the course, that are not perhaps immediately related to student evaluation, we've also got a ...rapid response thing called a student forum which consists of student reps plus. That student forum is supplemented by a system of comment boxes where any student can take a card, post a comment, stick it in a box and then that comment is considered."

Head of English (Post-92)

At department level, student representation was seen to be a strong mechanism for student voice and those students and academics that participated valued the

structure. At a more strategic level, the students' union provided representation on institutional committees. These are discussed in the following section.

4.1.4 Students' union officers as management committee representatives

The students' union at each institution had its own internal council which all students within an institution could join to influence union policy. In addition to this, Students' Union Officers representing a range of remits, for example education, welfare, societies and sport, were elected through annual elections to represent students on institutional committees.

An analysis of the manifestos that students at the Russell Group produced for the 2012 and 2013 students' union elections was conducted in order to identify some of the key areas of policy for students seeking election. The manifestos set out the policies that an elected student intends to achieve if elected and provides some insight into the concerns of students. Thirty-two students stood for election for 7 full-time sabbatical officer roles in 2012 and twenty-nine in 2013. The analysis enabled the identification of the topics that those standing for election deemed to be popular or necessary for the students' union to address.

For those standing for the positions of president and education officer, policies focused primarily on campus provision, educational priorities and welfare. Under campus provision these included; improved accommodation, better food, opportunities for parking on campus, greater numbers of PCs and books and a larger library. Policies on education included; campaigns for a detailed receipt to be given to students detailing the breakdown of the £9000 fees, increased contact

hours, demands to record lectures (*“you should not have to miss a lecture because of sports”*), and quicker and better quality feedback and feedback on exams.

Additionally, policies focused on welfare, campaigning for peer mentoring, increased contact with personal tutors and the promotion of the careers centre.

Common across all of the manifestos was the sense that students felt that the role of an elected officer was to demand from the institution, what rightfully belonged to students. A number of elements were notably absent from the manifestos, for example; no student advertised that they were affiliated to a particular political party or view, no student demanded additional democratic representation for students in university structures and no student engaged with the curriculum, or particular degrees or departments.

The elected students' union officers at each institution were members of a number of university level committees. Both students' unions conducted their own surveys into student views in order to inform the representations made on university management committees. For senior managers, and academics on university committees, student officers were seen as an important student voice mechanism.

This was particularly evident at the Russell Group institution. While senior managers at both institutions said that they valued student input, they acknowledged the limitations of representation at this level:

“Formally in decision making bodies ... we can say we've ticked the boxes in governance terms because we've got ... formal representatives ... elected by the student body ... but if we actually want to know in a richer way what ... the student view [is] on this issue, it's not ... always going to be the right thing to just go and talk

to the sabbatical officer because, of course, they are an individual and very often they have their own particular and personal experiences.“

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

This tension was reflected by the student officer at the Post-92 institution, who felt that, at times, university managers had a misplaced perception of his role on committees, expecting him to summarise the experience of *all* students:

“It’s very difficult when you go to a university and there’s ...one or two of you representing so many different students and the university turns to you and says ‘what do students think?’ Because there isn’t one answer.”

Elected Student Officer (Post-92)

Alongside student representation on formal committees, senior managers at both institutions talked about valuing informal discussions that took place with student officers:

“there are lots of other informal contacts which ...are quite important, although you don’t show them in a document for the QAA or something like that... We have formal processes which ...take account of a student perspective, but we also have informal processes which are very often the things which make the relationships work effectively, and allow the student voice to be taken account of in thinking before stuff is written down...”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

At the same institution, an academic who attended university committees felt that the students’ union were effective in challenging university management, but questioned whether they had the necessary power to hold the university to account:

"[The student officer] will ask the right questions regardless of how difficult they are. Now the thing is - he's good at challenging, but then I don't really know what happens afterwards. And I know that the Vice-Chancellor does listen to them and respects their opinion but, what happens as a result of those challenges, I don't know."

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

This view was also reflected by the student officer at the same institution who recognised the limits of student power on committees:

"We sit on all the committees but ...it doesn't necessarily transfer into us having power on those committees. I think hopefully that will move in another direction but I'm not that hopeful ...especially at Russell Group institutions - that will be more difficult because they are more secure in their ... governance ...and they feel more confident in a new environment."

Elected Student Officer (Russell Group)

The same officer described the complex strategies that he adopted when engaging with the university in order to balance their relationship with the legitimacy of the students' union. These suggested highly articulated approaches to negotiating formal and informal student voice mechanisms:

"there [are] insider and outsider strategies. You have to think of the relationship with the university. You have to maintain an on-going relationship - not least because they are ... a main funder of the student union. But regardless - they have political independence and you have to make a good relationship. And you have insider strategies in terms of lobbying and presentation of evidence etc... protests and such are ... an outsider strategy. They mustn't be over-used because they allow opponents to pigeon-hole [the] student movement and unions in general if ... used inappropriately. But they are ...an appropriate response to national policy changes

[and] local changes to people's education."

Elected Student Officer (Russell Group)

Both the staff and students involved in governance recognised that their relationship was complex and existed in both formal, and informal spheres. Complex approaches to interactions were developed informally and were used by the university and students' union to gauge which approach would glean the most beneficial results for each interest group in a given instance. This suggests a high level of complexity in the relationships between students and staff at this level.

4.1.5 The National Union of Students

Most respondents understood the nature of the NUS, as a national representative body for students, but there was some uncertainty from the students' union manager about whether the majority of students would feel an affiliation with the NUS:

"My guess is that most students at this university wouldn't know a huge amount about NUS, wouldn't really be able to tell you very much about them. I guess the exception would be over the past year [2010] – [students] may be more aware of the student activism and student campaigning [in response to the increase in tuition fees] that NUS have been mostly leading."

(Post-92)

The student officer at the Russell Group institution talked about the links between the NUS and those who influenced university policy at a national level. There was recognition of the close work undertaken between the NUS and government:

"... the NUS provides national policy analysis and lobbying on a national policy level, parliamentary lobbying, support in terms of implications of national policy

changes at a local level, resources and help in terms of various quality assurance campaigns. I think that larger students' unions use them less than smaller students' unions and there's probably a certain amount of cross-subsidisation but, in general ...[the] NUS allows us to become involved in national policy discussions around higher education funding, quality assurance and also it's key - they allow us to interface with key sector bodies like the QAA, HEFCE, Office of Fair Access, Office of Independent Adjudicator etc. "

Elected Student Officer

Senior managers also noted that the NUS had become more influential in national policy, with a greater presence at conferences for university management. There was a desire amongst a couple of senior managers (one at the Post-92 and one at the Russell Group), for the NUS to do more to help universities manage student expectations about learning in higher education:

"... the NUS of old might have felt that it was fighting the universities and that therefore, it needed to be seen as a challenging body, as an organisation body on behalf of students and that its remit was ...to hold universities to account ...I think there is an element of holding universities to account which it has to do, but if it could use its maturity to help us work with students to make them see what's going to be the best learning experience that would be helpful I think."

Head of Education (Post-92)

The accounts of those who had encountered or worked with the NUS suggest that it is seen as playing a significant role in higher education governance, and in supporting students' unions to understand their role following the introduction of fees. This account suggests some tensions between how students' unions and institutions see the role of the NUS. Some of the approaches utilised by, what the Head of Education describes as, the '*NUS of old*', refer to the informal and student-

led approaches to student voice. Experiences of these are explored in the following section.

4.2 Informal mechanisms

4.2.1 Informal discussion and personal tutoring

Informal discussions between students and personal tutors and other key staff were seen as valuable ways for students to give continuous feedback in both institutions. Informal discussion formed a site for student for voice that was not constrained by formal voice mechanisms and was therefore considered to be more authentic by the academic respondents at both institutions:

“I know some courses where students have come to me and said ‘I’ve got a problem with this module but I don’t feel like I can talk to that tutor’. But then there’ll be another module where they’ll go straight to the tutor so obviously it is personal relationships that are effective.”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

There was a consensus amongst the academic respondents, that discussions with personal tutees provided one of the most significant ways through which students evaluated their experience. One academic talked about his perceptions of students’ willingness to evaluate the course with him in an informal setting:

“some are a bit shy, particularly in first year ... you quite often get an apology before they start, saying, ‘I don’t want to seem like I’m complaining but...’ And as long as you assure them that you’re quite used to hearing people complain - it doesn’t matter - then they’ll just carry on. I sense that there’s probably more willingness to talk about experience ... people are becoming more and more expert at narrating themselves... if I think back to when I was at university, you’d never assume that

your experience was that important... You knew your place."

Academic 1, English (Russell Group)

Growing student numbers were seen as a threat to informal relationships. Here the link between the massification of higher education and the consequent diminished opportunity for students and academics to interact in the classroom was considered:

"The biggest constraint actually is ... the permanent squeeze on staffing because you are far more likely, of course, to get a good appreciation of what your students think about you, if you know all of them by name, if you can afford to be in contact with them often enough [to] really to understand how they are learning and in that sense evaluation is simply not separable from the broader educational experience."

Head of English (Post-92)

Where student numbers were smaller, staff and students were able to have closer relationships associated with learning, which occurred outside the formal university mechanisms:

"... particularly on the smaller campuses and the smaller courses ...we know that ... students don't really use the formal mechanisms as much as we'd maybe like them to but that's because they have such great relationships. They see the staff every day. They know them really well and they feel comfortable just raising issues as and when."

Students' Union Manager (Post-92)

This implied that formal student voice mechanisms were, in part, seen as making up for lower levels of one-to-one and small group contact in a growing higher education system.

4.2.2 Facebook and social media

Facebook and other forms of social media were seen by all students, and some academics, as having the potential to provide a space for the evaluation of the university. At times this was initiated by academics who saw social media as creating a sense of community for large groups of students, at others it was entirely student-led.

Students recognised that informal discussion with peers were often evaluative.

Some of these took place face-to-face, in the classroom, following lectures, while others took place online:

“... all the time we’re talking about stuff on our course, different modules, how it’s going, what the tutors are like, are they effective, what we think of the assessment obviously comes up all the time. So from the point of view of evaluating the experience from an academic and a social standpoint at the university, that peer evaluation goes on ... all the time.”

Final year student, Business (Post-92)

Many students were members of Facebook and student groups were represented on the social media platform. At the Post-92 institution a number of degree courses maintained their own Facebook page, and at both the Post-92 and Russell Group institution student representatives had set up groups to seek feedback from peers. Facebook was widely used by students at the Russell Group institution, but pages were usually owned and organised by students rather than academics and managers:

“I do believe there is a lot of activity on Facebook. I don’t do Facebook myself but I think for that generation - for your generation - that’s how people communicate with

each other so I've no doubt whatsoever. I've ...discovered from the [student representative committee] that that's how they communicate ... so ...I think they now use Facebook to [represent constituents] and that seems to work."

Head of English (Russell Group)

At the Post-92 institution, some academic departments set up Facebook groups for students. For one Engineering department at the Post-92 University, staff used interaction with students on Facebook to generate a social community with students:

"The Facebook has been excellent because you might see someone post ... 'bit confused about this particular part of the assessment' and we can immediately as a staff say 'well it's a bit like this'... We'll put music up on there and we can comment about their work and give feedback. But also social stuff. Something interesting comes out; someone sees something funny - so it's really good. It means you get less of the structured ticking boxes in a questionnaire. What we've found is it's almost like the questionnaires have improved by a grade just because people feel like they are part of something."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

Social media was also seen, by some academics and senior management, as a risk. The Post-92 university had appointed a member of staff to monitor students' use of social media and to develop guidance for students and staff on how to use social media responsibly. At the Post-92 institution, disciplinary action had been taken against students who had expressed disagreeable views online. Two of the academics with teaching management responsibility knew of students who were currently subject to disciplinary proceedings. This was discussed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the institution. It was clear from her comments, that the institution was

concerned for its reputation and had taken disciplinary and legal action to challenge student behaviour online:

“One was a student who had graduated and so we couldn’t use internal procedures and polite letters didn’t affect any change, so we had to threaten legal action and ...on one instance we did take legal action. It’s still student voice. We’ve got a student suspended at the moment for just that kind of activity. And...there have been instances where when we’ve ...confronted a student [and] they just don’t have the concept of the audience that they’re reaching... and the future impact on them. Future employers usually Google someone now and all that stuff might come up. Not so much if it’s kept internally but certainly if it goes external and if legal action is taken it might very well come up on a Google search. And that’s the kind of message that we need to get out for the students”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

Two of the Post-92 academics interviewed had been involved in incidents in which students had used social media ‘inappropriately’. One academic described a particular incident and the questions that he felt it revealed relating to the university’s relationship with student voice through social media. For the academic, the incident raised some questions about whether social media offered a more authentic form of voice than those heard through formal student voice mechanisms:

“At the moment we have a student suspended for posting completely inappropriate comments on Facebook. ...It’s on their personal page. But something that was borderline criminal. And my feeling is that that goes on a lot more than most of us know... And in a sense that is more to do with marketing and reputation management but ...it does impinge on this idea of evaluation and capturing ...What are they really thinking? Because all of these ... formal processes of student evaluation involve ... an element of fiction or role playing... and there is this feeling ... that you have to get down to the individual granular level ...to get at what people

really think. But then [Facebook is] just another site of discourse as well. It has its own rules. It has its own assumptions about how people will behave. So it may be that they actually behave artificially worse or better on Facebook.”

Head of English (Post-92)

The tensions felt about student voice through social media and the confusion felt about how to regard it, conflicted with the notion that student voice is always seen as positive by institutions. Academics at the Post-92 institution regarded social media as having the potential to be a more authentic form of voice, and to foster community amongst students, but along with senior managers, recognised it as an area of reputational risk.

4.2.3 Protests

As was highlighted in the literature review, the significant changes in higher education and the wider economy over the last 10 years have led to a number of national and local student protests. At a national level, the NUS have played a part on the coordination of large-scale student demonstrations against student fees. Student protests have also taken place locally on university campuses such as those led by the University and College Union (UCU), and the international Occupy movement, in response to a range of concerns including local course closures, staff redundancies and other national higher education campaigns.

Most of the interview respondents; managers, academics and students, regarded the majority of students as politically apathetic. There was a sense that where students did engage on a political level this tended to be in the confines of the

theory associated with their course (particularly in the English department) rather than in a broader political sense:

“They’re not politicised... They don’t understand that their body, by walking down the street occupies a political position. Their speech. Their dialect. The clothes that they wear. The way in which they relate to old people and young people and to homeless people. They are occupying political positions... They don’t get it in the first year. They start getting it in the second year. They become politicised in the third year, but theoretically. And then we lose them.”

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

The same academic felt that the lack of the political extended to the students’ union, which she felt reflected the level of apathy across the student body:

“... not long ago there was a call for a [student] strike and the university’s students’ union didn’t take part in it. I was outraged. I mean of course taking part in the strike is disruptive to study. From an academic perspective it made my life easier that my students were not on strike but the whole point of a students’ union which is supported by the NUS is that when there’s a strike, you go on strike. On that day we had a [senior governance] meeting and the Student Union reps were there and they announced that they had decided not to take part in the strike and many of us who believe in unions were appalled.”

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

This perception of apathy was echoed by the students’ union at the Post-92 university where they had been surprised by, what they perceived as, a relatively high number of students joining the NUS London protest in 2010:

“we took about 120 students down to London for the initial big demo ... we’d said that we’d be really pleased if we took 50. So for [students’ union name] that’s pretty

massive.”

Students' Union Manager (Post-92)

Talking about the national protests in 2010, one student explained why she chose not to get involved:

“I ... knew that it wasn't going to make a difference, which is a shame because so many people did get involved...From the start I thought that they should look at it as... 'OK they are going to go up, we know that, so what are we going to do to improve our services in the university to make people want to pay that extra and to come [to university]' - to ...put a positive spin on it, which they [the NUS] are doing now but it's taken a while.”

Final year student, Education (Post-92)

At the time of the research at the Russell Group University (2012), there had been a recent protest, organised by a group of students associated with the Occupy movement. The group pitched a protest camp on the university campus and had invited students and staff to join them. One student who had been involved with the protest described how it came about. He discussed what he perceived as a tension between the theory that he engaged with on his course, and the way in which students were expected to behave at the institution, seeing the protest as an opportunity to put theory into practice:

“...we would all meet and ...discuss things completely openly. There wasn't any leader...it was just a group of people...We responded a lot to when Occupy Wall Street happened. We had ...debates about that. Obviously that then led to debates about 'what are we going to do about it?' And I think that's what's really good about the group. It's ... very political and very politically aware but it's always underpinned with ... 'well what are we going to do about that then?' which is the thing that I find most frustrating about university because you sit and talk about things. I have

Cultural Theory seminars ...and we are like 'oh yeah – we need to break the coordinates of the system' – and we're just sat there in university."

Final year student, English (Russell Group)

The group made a series of demands of the institution as part of the protest including, a guarantee that there would be no fee increases and a request for a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor:

"... they were really simple demands. One of them was 'we would like you to come down to the Camp and speak to us.' I mean, simple but we knew they were never going to be met and I think just issuing a demand that you know is never going to be met, completely shows up the establishment ...for a Vice-Chancellor not even to dare to come down to a group of students and have a conversation with them."

Final year student, English (Russell Group)

The student involved felt that the reluctance of the Vice-Chancellor to meet with the students highlighted the unwillingness of the university to engage with student voice when it was not on the institution's terms. The same student had organised a formal conference later in the same year, to engage with issues around student fees and the nature of higher education, and a number of senior managers had attended. He felt that this highlighted a tension between legitimate and illegitimate spaces for student voice. Managers were interested and willing to discuss the same issues raised through the protest, providing it was in a formal setting in which they were comfortable.

The Students' Union had not formally supported the protest. The student involved reflected on its involvement and its lack of engagement with politics:

"I think there's a lot of students that are political but ...there isn't any ... formal space for that ... You're speaking to someone who's very cynical about the [Students' Union] in that way. I love, I love the SU what they do here. They're the most amazing, hardworking, good people I've ever come across and they really believe in students, which is great. But there's no way that the Students' Union could be like 'right, we're going to attack the university because they've let go, I think it was like 38 PhD lecturers or something, and the terms of the working contract, for example, is going down and they're raising their fee level – we're going to attack the university' – they just couldn't do that."

Final year student, English (Russell Group)

Another student at the University, who had not been involved, had a very different view of the protest. He felt that it was hypocritical for students at an elite university to be protesting economic cuts. The student saw his decision not to take part as an expression of his own political stance rather than apathy:

"The [protest] was a bunch of fools playing around with tents that daddy bought them. You are at the [Russell Group institution], you cannot reasonably validate yourself as being anything other than close to 1%... The fact that you've gone to a university which is defined as one of the top universities in the country, in my opinion you lose that right to tell people that you're doing something wrong when the majority of these people will go out there, from these movements ..and become drifters or artists, or they will change their minds, put on a suit and walk into a corporate job when they realise the money that's on offer"

Third year student, Engineering (Russell Group)

The same student also suggested a concern about the impact which engagement in protest might have on his future employment options, having secured a graduate job, he was not keen to jeopardise that opportunity:

“I have an industrial placement which requires security clearance. I’m also part of the Territorial Army. I’m not interested in this kind of protest. All ... my career plans ...[go] along the route which is protested [about], which I feel a bit bad about for some people but it’s my life. I’ll do as I will.”

Third year student, Engineering (Russell Group)

In the Russell Group institution, the protests were an emotive topic amongst students. For one, the protest had provided the opportunity to engage with current issues that influenced society, for another, the protest was an illegitimate activity that threatened their individual values and future employability. The tension expressed between the two students’ accounts represented very different perceptions of the purpose of higher education. For the English student it was a space to develop a critical understanding of society and mechanisms in which he operated. For the engineering student it was to develop his personal capital in order to ensure his future position as an employee. The conflict of experiences in relation to protest is explored further in chapter 6.

4.3 Conclusion

Throughout the interviews, observations and documentary analysis it was evident that individuals participating in student voice mechanisms understood the mechanisms, their role and their positioning within the mechanisms in complex ways. This complexity is rarely explicitly acknowledged in government policy, university guidance and practice, yet it is very real to those who participate in student voice mechanisms, and informs the ways in which students, academics and managers understand their role and position in relation to others and the wider institution.

The formal mechanisms for student voice illustrated some of the most visible and articulated technologies that were experienced, and engaged with, by the respondents. Some of the technologies were formal in that they were required by government; such as the NSS, student membership on governance committees and student representation, while others were not formal but were enshrined in localised practices, such as course evaluation or regular informal meetings between students and managers.

Government and university commitments to certain types of student voice positioned senior managers, academics, students and others, in distinct ways. The imbalance of power was made particularly explicit when it came to informal student voice mechanisms. As evidenced by the two institutions' responses to students expressing negative views through social media at the Post-92, and to student protest at the Russell Group, these power relationships indicate new ways in which student voice mechanisms are shaping higher education, positioning students, academics and senior managers in particular ways. The imperatives for this and the ways in which these impact on the identities and subjectivities of those who participate, are explored further in the next chapter.

In analysing the data relating to how students, academics and senior managers describe and experience student voice mechanisms, it has been possible to identify some of the complex range of rules, regulations, guidance, signs and symbols, that shape the types of student voice activity that are valued by different groups. At times these are explicit, for example in the guidance around student representation at each institution, or the requests from senior management for improvement action

plans in response to the NSS. At others, they are more subtle, for example the framing of a certain type of education in the NSS, or institutional responses to student protest. Together they work in complex, intertwined ways as technologies of dominance, which produce, transform and constrain the ways in which individuals are able to act legitimately in higher education.

Having explored the technologies of dominance in this chapter, Chapter 5 explores the imperatives for the different student mechanisms, and the way in which these imperatives and understandings shape the identities and subjectivities of those who participate.

5 CHAPTER 5: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

In Chapter 4, I presented the analysis of documents and interview participants' descriptions of the different student voice mechanisms in which they are involved. This, first step towards answering my research question, '*does student voice in higher education in England, represent new forms of power and governance in a changing system?*' was to explore the ways in which students, academics and senior managers describe and experience student voice mechanisms. Through this analysis, I identified some of the complex ways in which participation in student voice mechanisms, produces, transforms and constrains through technologies of dominance, the experience of different participants.

In this chapter, I present the analysis relating to sub-questions 2 and 3:

2) *What are the explicit and implicit imperatives that inform student voice?*

3) *What are the coherences and contradictions between the imperatives?*

These are explored as aspects of what Foucault (1993, Martin et al., 1988) refers to as 'technologies of the self', that is, in this instance, the imperatives, ideologies, discourses and understandings through which individuals act on the self and on others to develop complex identities and subjectivities. Bragg (2007), referencing Foucault argues that discourse does "*not so much describe, as produce understandings and subject positions*" through a range of techniques that "*delimit what can be said, and how speakers conceive of themselves*" (348-349). Through the analysis of the interviews and observations a range of imperatives and ideologies that informed participants' participation in student voice were identified.

These imperatives served to shape and produce power relationships in complex and intertwined ways, between the government, institutional managers, academics and students. In this way, these technologies became arms of governmentality shaping and informing identities and subjectivities.

This chapter presents the analysis of the various imperatives and themes that were identified in the interviews and observations with students, academics and senior managers. The explicit and implicit imperatives that were identified varied for each respondent. Individuals often drew upon a number of different imperatives to understand their own practice, and that of others, in different contexts. The imperatives and ideologies are presented here in order to better understand the ways in which individuals produce, replicate and reify imperatives and ideologies.

The complexity of the range of different imperatives and self-understandings is explored at the start of the chapter with the presentation of a particular incident that occurred during an observation of a course representative meeting. This example is included in order to demonstrate the tensions and contradictions that emerge when different imperatives for voice collide.

5.1 A clash of understandings

During one observation of a student representative committee, a discussion between the careers service and students occurred which illustrated the tensions and contradictions associated with student voice. As part of a quality review of the English department, a focus group had been held to consult students about their perception of the support provided by the careers service. The focus group had

contained some members of the student representative committee along with a number of other students. At the student representative meeting following the review the careers adviser attended with her manager to discuss the focus group with the students as she felt that the outcome had been unfair:

***Careers adviser:** I think what I'm saying is that I need to know what students think. If this is what you're thinking we need to do some work on it together. Not just me - together we need to do that and I'm happy to do that but I need to know directly from you rather than through a back door where I get hauled over the coals - my manager gets hauled over the coals - it's very serious. It has an effect on my working week because, as I said, it took a whole day out to write a response that I had to write to the Academic Registrar so it's not just our bit - it was [the careers managers] boss - it has huge repercussions so I just want you to think if you are going to be in a focus group - please be sure of your facts because...*

***Careers manager:** Careless talk costs... jobs*

***Careers adviser:** ...it had a huge impact on us. So I just need to use this [student representative committee]... so I get that information ahead of time so that I can do something about it quicker for you. So let me know what it is you want. I'm happy to do it. That's what I'm here to do. That's what I'm paid for."*

English department student representative committee, Russell Group

The dynamic of the discussion was distinctly uncomfortable and the involvement of the careers adviser's manager in the meeting, which was usually attended by the careers adviser alone in order to publicise careers activity, made it clear that this was an official visit. While a couple of students said a few words during the incident, most were silent. Following the meeting, I was approached by a number of students who said how awkward it had been.

Some interesting factors are evident in the account of the careers adviser. Firstly, there is the assumption that students should have known what the careers service was offering in the department. The Careers Adviser made it clear that she felt betrayed by those who had attended workshops that she had run for the department who should have spoken up, although there was no clear way of her knowing whether the students that had attended those workshops were the same ones represented at the focus group. This suggested a perception of students as a homogenous group rather than a group of individuals who may or may not have taken part in her events.

There was also a tension between what the careers service and the students understood to be the imperative of the review. For the careers service, the review represented a high-stakes activity to which they would be held *accountable*. For the students, the review was a process owned by the institution into which they were invited to express their views. It was unlikely that students had deliberately set out to give incorrect information; a focus group enables individuals to express their opinions from their own perspective. This is likely to be a genuine perception; after all, until a student has secured a satisfactory career, he or she is likely to recognise a need for additional support.

These examples illustrate the consequence of a meeting of students and staff in which the imperatives for participation in a particular mechanism are unclear, conflicting or are assumed to be neutral. It also highlights the association between student voice mechanisms and governmentality, as mechanisms inform

management practice, accountability and the relationship between staff and students, shaping the way that university staff expect students to respond.

5.2 The complex imperatives for student voice

Throughout the interviews and observations different imperatives were recognised by those participating. All responses were analysed with a view to identifying underpinning imperatives and understandings relating to student voice. In addition, as part of the interview format, respondents were asked to consider the imperatives for student voice that had been established from the initial review of the literature. In all cases, respondents identified resonance with some, if not all, of the identified imperatives. Some imperatives were seen as more significant than others, and some were associated with particular mechanisms or circumstances. These imperatives are presented below as sub-headings in order to illustrate the complexity of the relationships in relation to student voice.

All senior managers and academics who had engaged with student voice mechanisms, contributed a significant amount to the direct questions about the imperatives. Students' responses, and those of academics that were not involved in teaching management, were more varied. Some students saw their participation in student voice mechanisms as a fairly neutral activity, while others had a more theorised approach. This may suggest that some students and academics were not in a position to make sense of the imperatives surrounding their participation in student voice, or that academics and managers are prone to theorising an area that students and academics not associated with the mechanisms see as relatively straightforward.

5.2.1 Student voice as consumerism

The idea of students as consumers was the most commonly referred to imperative for student voice. The rewording and reiteration on the subject suggested an awareness and engagement with the discourse relating to this imperative, in the media, and within institutions, that suggested that the notion of students as consumers would have a negative impact on the HE environment. It was notable that academics and senior managers were most concerned about the concept of consumerism whereas the student and students' union respondents voiced some concerns, but also suggested that the concept had some value.

While most respondents expressed discomfort with the concept of students as consumers, their language and practices suggested a level of implicit acceptance, indicating an ideological tension. For example, one senior manager rejected the concept of students as consumers earlier on in an interview, but seemed frustrated by student behaviour which did not always reflect that of a 'responsible customer':

“As a general member of the public, as a consumer, as a customer – not that I think students are customers but that’s a different issue – if something is wrong then I have a responsibility to point it out.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

There was a sense in many of the interviews at the Post-92 institution, particularly amongst academics and senior management, that students were becoming more like consumers because of the payment of tuition fees and associated opportunities for them to behave as consumers:

“There’s been more [consumer behaviour]. But that’s because we’ve been encouraging more. ...what’s been interesting is noting the changes in the comments students make, ...in open group sessions, focus groups or whatever. Also the written comments they make on surveys. We get more of those than we used to and they are more specific. They name names. And we’ve had more comments about value for money. I’m paying over £3,000 a year for this and I’m only getting x, y, z etc ...I’m expecting more of that.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

At the Russell Group University opinion was more mixed. Some respondents thought that students were becoming, or would become, more like consumers with the increase of fees, while others felt that this would not be the case:

“... within a university community there is process of adaptation and change and students do become much more independent and perhaps more independent of the kind of media ...that surrounds them. So they will pick on these things when they think they can use it to their advantage but, they will refute any suggestion that they are consumers because they will refute any suggestion of the passivity that goes with it.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Russell Group)

5.2.1.1 Customer satisfaction

Many staff respondents saw the related notion of customer satisfaction as significant. Satisfaction, a phenomenon valued in the NSS, was seen as a tension, with the reality of the process of learning in a large institution. One academic at the Russell Group institution described this tension:

“... there is commonality in that everyone wants everyone to be happy. Students want to be happy for obvious reasons, particularly when they are going to be paying higher fees. The university wants students to be happy obviously because it wants

people to be happy but also for the purposes of PR ... Everyone is working to the same goal. But within that there has to be a reality check. You don't come to university to... you know it's not a Holiday Inn. You do come to work and so on."

Head of English (Russell Group)

The notion of students being satisfied was seen as complex and, at times, at odds with what could, or should, be achieved through higher study. Academics and senior managers, through participation in the NSS and associated activity at both institutions, adopted in part, the concept of students as consumers, while recognising that higher education was a complex interaction which could not guarantee a particular outcome:

"On the one hand the sector can take heart from the fact that ...British Gas or BT would dream of having [NSS] satisfaction rates at the level higher education achieves. And when you think we're dealing with human beings not just a straight service ...that's quite commendable. ...but because we are dealing with human beings who are assessing a process which, if they just aren't clever enough isn't going to give them the result they want, ...because everybody wants to get a firstthat is part of the difficulty"

Academic Registrar (Post-92)

A student at the Post-92 University, had helped out on recent open days, and felt that prospective students were demonstrating signs of seeing themselves as consumers in the questions that they asked:

"I get involved with the Business School Open Days and speak to potential students and parents that are coming on our business school talks. And there were a couple of them very openly questioning and saying - we're going to be paying about seven and a half thousand for the course. What are we getting for our money? There's a worry that students will come in thinking this is a list of my demands - meet them."

And if you don't meet them - then I'm going to cause uproar. But I wouldn't call that student voice. I'd call that being a consumer basically."

Final year student, Business (Post-92)

These comments linked to the concepts of choice for prospective students that were discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2.1.2 Customer choice and personalisation

Choice was seen by some as an important factor for prospective students and this guided the way in which the government collected data. Senior managers, students' union representatives and some academics with teaching management responsibilities, talked about providing statistical information for Unistats and the KIS. They discussed the relationship between some types of student voice, such as the NSS, and the production of league tables. This relationship provided a strong imperative for the senior managers and academics with teaching management responsibility at both institutions:

"It's also of interest to people who have got either guidance responsibility for younger pupils who are thinking of going to university or for parents ...for comparative purposes. That's why they're putting NSS questions on to key information sets because it's ...comparetheuniversity.com. You'll be able to get the information about a particular group of universities into your basket and pull them up on a table and compare them."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

In contrast, for one students' union officer, the idea of choice for prospective students was a false notion that disguised underpinning inequalities. He saw the

emphasis on the market by government as serving to distract the public from asking more serious questions about embedded inequalities of opportunity:

"I think consumer choice is false - we don't have a market in higher education and ... if we did it would be ...a negative thing ...any consumer choice is a bit of a fallacy ...where you go [to university] is dependent upon your academic attainment and your socio-economic background rather than any kind of choice. So that doesn't really resonate."

Elected Student Officer (Russell Group)

At the departmental level, academics with teaching management responsibility at both institutions, discussed the importance of presenting students with choice. For example, in relation to curriculum design:

"...there's a bigger question ...in terms of what they study. Students always want choices in the modules they choose. And that really does engage fundamental questions about who is responsible for what and ... what can be afforded and what is sensible given the need to meet progression targets and all of those other things."

Head of English (Post-92)

In line with Hartley (2008) and Fielding's (2008) criticisms of personalisation, discussed in the literature review, the notion of choice in the interviews primarily referred to a choice from options that were set, agreed and controlled by academics. In this process, dialogue between academics and students was seen as valuable in order to guide students towards the favoured approach. A metaphor used by one academic was that of car designer and customer. Students were seen as having something to contribute to the final model, once designed by academic experts:

“... there are logistical pragmatic difficulties with inviting students at an early stage of discussing curricular change because you can’t possibly expect them to have an overview ... the danger is that if you bring students in too early in discussions like that ...they don’t have enough knowledge or experience and they might have ...a local interest or a personal interest ...we were ...designing our product ...and then ... running it by the customer ...I think it’s one of those few cases where the customer client model actually works ...you wouldn’t expect the customer to design the car. You’d expect the experts to design the car and then the customers to buy it and if they didn’t like it, they would go somewhere else.”

Head of English (Russell Group)

5.2.1.3 Managing expectations

An extension of accounts of the management of choice was the notion of the management of expectations. The imperative of ensuring student expectations are realistic, in order to avert disappointment at a later date. The example below highlights the management of expectations as a significant element of the teaching management role:

“One of the things we are constantly engaged in is - and there’s never an end to this of course - is talking to students about the consequences of an alternative arrangement. And that extends to quite small pragmatic arrangements as well. We’re very happy to listen and say ‘ok, you don’t like the look of this; the alternatives are x, y and z. Let’s explain to you the consequences of those alternatives now. And then let us know what you think.”

Head of English (Post-92)

Managing the expectations of students in the context of increasing consumerism was seen as increasingly important. Fairclough (2001: 98) suggests that the use of expressive values are ideologically significant as they seek to persuade the reader of a particular argument or viewpoint. The use of expressive terms (along with the

raised voice and hand movements that accompanied them) demonstrated those areas where respondents seemed to react to the interview questions with some passion or excitement. Negative expressive values were primarily focused around the notion of students as consumers and the real or perceived impact of this on academic relationships with students. These were particularly evident in the Post-92 institution:

“A colleague was talking to a student just before Christmas ‘OK. If you want to know about this, you need to read chapters 5 and 6 of this book’. And the guy said ‘Read? Read? I pay you to teach me, why should I read a book?’ That’s a different thing to deal with altogether.”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

Expectation management was also seen as necessary in relation to the NSS, in order to ensure that students understood the questions:

“If you don’t tell them they’re receiving feedback, they don’t think of it as feedback. So one student said to me ‘I didn’t get enough feedback this year’. I said ‘I sat with you for 4 hours in the studio and we went through your work and it’s a lot better than it was and you’ve got a much better mark because of it’. He said: ‘But that’s not feedback: feedback’s the bit of writing you put on the bottom of the page’”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

Student charters were seen as one way to formally manage the expectations of students. At the Russell Group institution, one senior manager talked about the importance of meeting student expectations while ensuring that students moved beyond being passive recipients. His comments also suggest a sense of frustration with the level of expectation management required:

“...that’s the thing with these student charters - we sign up to say ‘this is what you’ll get’. The students have to sign up and say ‘this is what we’ll do to engage with our learning as a partner’ ...So I think - yes, we need to be responsive but there is also a message to get out which is by the end of your time at university you’re going to go into a world of work or further study where people just expect you to ‘You’ve got a problem - well go figure it out. At least figure out what you need to do to start solving it. Don’t come along and sit there and say ‘Tell me what to do’ because that’s not the way the world works’.”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

5.2.1.4 Consumer rights

The respondents often linked the idea of enhancement with the notion of students’ ‘consumer rights’. One senior manager at the Russell Group University felt that the implementation of higher fees had led students to resist some of the changes that had come about as part of the massification of higher education:

“That [student voice for enhancement] certainly is strong and ...that would come under the consumer and the tuition fees thing ...teaching rooms that are fit for purpose, the resources that should be available in the library, the technologies involved in teaching - that they should be reasonably up to date...All that certainly is coming through very clearly. But contact hours is [sic] more of a priority than the latest form of teaching - so the more traditional idea of education persists strongly ... resistance to the mass university.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Russell Group)

This tallied with the majority of the issues raised through the four student representative meetings observed, where the concerns raised related to practical and resource issues rather than the curriculum. Issues ranged from cost of handouts and quality of teaching, to quality of feedback and the timings of

deadlines. An example is provided below which illustrates some of the discourse within the committee in relation to the change in fees:

***Student 1:** A couple of people talked about paying for handouts. We got one handout at the beginning of the year for one module and that was free and the second one at the start of this term we had to pay for. It wasn't very much but I think for a lot of people it was the principle - that we are paying for our fees - we just wondered why fees couldn't cover it? It was only a pound but these people were quite annoyed.*

***Academic:** So you got one free but had to pay for the second one?*

***Student 1:** Yeah. The second one was a bit bigger*

***Student 2:** I don't think it was the price of it. It was the principle of it. People are quite sensitive about fees in general at the moment anyway, so they think why can't our fees cover a handout which, it is compulsory for us to buy - it's not as though it were an optional thing. It's a core text...*

***Academic:** Well I don't know. I'm sure [name] would be happy to give them away for free but - we have to pay for this - it's not like the department gets a profit here...we [get] charged for the photocopies we make.... [some further discussion of other costs]*

***Academic 2:** Well I'll get [name] to look into the costing of it because whatever [service name] charge - it's probably less than a pound so we can see what the differential is and if it's not worth the bad feeling, we might be able to write it off. "*
Student representative committee, English, (Russell Group)

The sense of rights was also seen as having an impact on students in the classroom. Academics expressed frustration with students who felt that they should be provided with everything required in order to succeed. An academic at the

Russell Group institution, and three academics working in the Post-92 institution, identified a lack of intrinsic motivation amongst students:

“... many staff would like students to be a bit more ... proactive and independent in terms of going out and reading round subjects and putting in the time. I think they like to have it spoon-fed to ... So if you haven't said it in a lecture, then it obviously isn't something that you need to know about ... And in a sense we are playing into that as well because we tend to lecture with a PowerPoint ... and that's not the best way of doing things but it's a manageable way; it distributes what we do to students who don't attend the lectures; it's how you add value to that and that varies around the staff.... I think for me the idea of introducing clickers (handheld electronic voting devices) and what that might lead to will be a real benefit.”

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering (Russell Group)

In contrast, a Russell Group academic in English, who did not attend student representative meetings, felt that the notion of students as consumers was a concern for managers but would be unlikely to filter through to students once they arrived at the institution:

“... it will happen one day but I'd be really surprised if a student suddenly started saying 'I'm paying you to teach me to read this poem. Why can't I read this poem? I want my money back.' Partly because we're English as well. Not just English Literature as a subject but culturally the English are not... the English aren't like that. They are almost paralysed by irony and not wanting to be aggressive. So ... no I haven't registered that increase in the student voice.”

Academic 1, English (Russell Group)

5.2.1.5 Marketing and brand management

Senior managers at the Russell Group institution acknowledged that it was part of a market that, had implications for how it approached prospective students. However,

the treatment of prospective students as customers was seen as distinct from how students should behave, and would be treated, once they arrived at university:

“The Vice-Chancellor is very clear about the need for the university, ...to start thinking of their activities in terms of ‘we are in some kind of a market’ and ... we are not necessarily about volume but we are about attracting really superb students. That may not happen by us just sitting and waiting for the right applications coming to us - it may need departments to be much more proactive in terms of the way they interact with schools ...the kinds of events they run to engage with kids while they are at school; ... the open days that they run and all those kind of things so ... that does have real resonance for the university.”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

There was a suggestion from the students’ union manager that the customer model led to more of a focus on appearances rather than reality and recognised a preoccupation with increasing student happiness as the desirable outcome from student feedback, rather than improving quality or teaching practices:

“...there’s a difference in terms of reaction, so very often the university looks at student feedback and the question that they are asking themselves is ‘How do we change what students are saying?’ instead of ‘How do we change what we’re doing so students are then happier?’”

Students’ Union Manager (Post-92)

One Pro-Vice-Chancellor suggested that academics could change the way in which they spoke about courses and the university in order to manage the way students felt about provision by appearing to be positive themselves:

“You probably know [name of another institution] comes top of student satisfaction surveys year after year after year. And we’ve now got members of staff here who used to work there so I’ve talked to them and said ‘how do they do that?’ and they

say, 'basically every member of staff at [xxx] has to almost sign in blood that they will never criticise the university to students or to people outside. They will keep their complaints to internal meetings and ...tell the students how lucky they are to be there and what a great place it is.'

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

5.2.1.6 Student voice for employability

An emerging, but related theme was employability, which was seen by some respondents as linked to an increased investment in higher education by students and a concern that the end 'product' was one which would be valued by employers. This was a concern expressed by senior managers, academics and students and was particularly evident in the engineering departments at each institution:

"I think to an extent you see it in the 'consumers know best' sort of attitude. Students... some students place very high store on getting their 2:1 or their First and anything that knocks that because I got a lower mark can become a topic for debate.

But they also have perceptions about what engineering or a branch of engineering is or should be and how hands on it should be and so on and so forth which may differ from a. what we think and b. what we can resource."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering (Russell Group)

Student motivation was also seen to be focused increasingly on employability in engineering at the Post-92 institution:

"I think there is more of a buy in, more a vested interest, more of a realisation - perhaps because they're having to pay I don't know - that they're here for a reason. They're not at school anymore where it was forced upon them. They are actually here for a reason."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

One academic in English at the Russell Group institution predicted a greater demand for courses that led more directly to employment. Drawing on experience from the US, she suggested that graduates would increasingly see it as the institutions' responsibility to ensure graduates' economic success:

"...the more they feel threatened, the more they are going to speak up. Not in negative ways. They might help us shape the degree so that we get them employed more. But the economic imperative is going to become more important than anything else - that's how it is in the US. You know there are departments who publish every year on-line, how many of their students got jobs; where did they get jobs; they create an on-line forum where if someone say from biology got a job, they will employ more people from Brown or Harvard... We don't have that. I think we are going to hear a lot more from students if we don't sort out their future. I hope we do."

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

The Students' Union Manager at the Post-92 had identified a trend in students participating in voice mechanisms in order to gain experience for employment which suggested an increased awareness amongst some students, of the professional development value of participating in formal mechanisms for student voice:

"...there's a definite trend for students to want to do it because of employability reasons in the last couple of years ... that's not been the case so much previously. So when I start a [student representative] training session I ask them all to introduce themselves and say why they became a rep. And it used to be that most of them it would be 'I just wanted to', 'I was a rep at my sixth form' or whatever or 'the course tutor told me that I should or somehow made me' and now about 80% is 'I thought it would make me more employable' or 'I wanted something on my CV'"

Students' Union Manager (Post-92)

This view was echoed by many of the academics involved in student voice mechanisms when asked about why they thought students volunteered:

“You can actually do quite a lot in student politics. We’ve had members of this department who’ve been sabbatical officers in the student union in one capacity or another and you can see how good it is for that person’s individual development and that student’s personal development in terms of confidence and experience. You know - knowing how to chair a committee, knowing how to put together an agenda, write minutes, how to write a proposal, who in a large complex organisation to approach if they’ve got a particular issue, what’s appropriate for which member of senior management and so on.”

Head of English (Russell Group)

This imperative was significant. While many respondents denied that the concept of students as consumers was their motivation for involvement in student voice mechanisms, it was seen as a significant agenda that strongly influenced the ways in which students, academics and managers participated in formal mechanisms and understood the participation of others.

5.2.1.7 Resistance to the idea of the student as consumer

A number of metaphors were used, primarily by academics and senior managers, in order to describe or explain to students the relationship between students and staff.

Fairclough suggests that the analysis of metaphors can enable a deeper understanding of individuals’ interpretations of particular dynamics. The university as a gym was identified as a popular metaphor for the relationship between students and institutions:

“...one of the best analogies I heard was ... it is like buying membership of a gym and you pay for that but what you get out of it is what you put in, as well as the tuition and the equipment at the gym. And it’s that ...three-way partnership really isn’t it? Because unfortunately just paying for gym membership doesn’t make you slimmer.”

Academic Registrar (Post-92)

What is significant in the university as a gym metaphor is the place of the university as a business, where the onus is placed on the student to ‘get the most out’ of the experience. The infrastructure is provided but it is the responsibility of the student to attend and ‘work out’ to get the most from the experience.

An alternative metaphor was offered by an academic in order to represent the relationship between academics and students as that of a lawyer and client. His concern with explaining the nature of the relationship to students suggested a desire to regain the discourse around the nature of the student:

“In fact whenever a student mentions the word ‘customer’ I tend to sit them down and explain why precisely you can’t use that word in this context. And the word I encourage them to use is client by analogy with going to a solicitor. You pay for good advice from a solicitor. You don’t pay for the answer you want and they generally understand that.”

Head of English (Post-92)

Other approaches to reclaiming the discourse around the student role were evident in the interviews. One senior manager at the Post-92 institution suggested that students should be permitted to behave as consumers in relation to some elements of higher education, but that allowing the ideology to pervade more widely should be resisted:

“You could argue that if you have a class scheduled for ten o’clock and the teacher swans in at half ten, that’s bad customer service and it’s hard to argue against that but I am encouraged by the extent to which not only in this institution but across the sector I see people fighting back. ... I believe I’ve picked this up from the NUS and others too - that as a student enrolled on a university experience you are not simply a customer of education but you are a participant and I think that converse to the justifiable customer service bit is growing. And I think it’s growing for the right reasons. It’s growing because anybody who thinks about this with any depth understands that if you just have students in a customer role in the educational process it will disadvantage them. There is nothing much to be gained unless you are an active participant.”

Head of Education

However, this view was seen as problematic by the Academic Registrar at the Russell Group institution, who saw a conflict in the messages from the NUS:

“I think the NUS has a two pronged approach. One is ‘well if we are paying all this money then you’d better treat us like consumers, so you’d better listen to what we’re saying - you’d better ...put us in charge ...because we’re the customer and the customer knows best.’ Meanwhile also saying ‘That’s not right. That’s not where we want to be. We want to be in a situation where higher education is seen as a public good and ...we are not actually paying for it therefore we are not consumers’.”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

While there was an awareness that the introduction and increase of fees had changed the nature of the student, but there was also a desire to reject the notions of passivity that are inherent in the consumer approach. Further analysis of the forms of resistance to power, and new forms of governance are discussed in

Chapter 6 in relation to those approaches taken by senior managers, academics and students.

5.2.2 Student voice for accountability

Linked to the notion of students as consumers was the imperative of accountability. Most of the individuals that were interviewed regarded accountability as distinct and for some, more palatable, than consumerism. For senior management and academics, accountability to students was seen as an increasing concern. In many instances, through the NSS and students' union membership on governance committees, staff perceived that students were able to hold them to account. Some respondents were also concerned with accountability to parents and to the wider public. Some senior managers were also concerned with ensuring that academic staff were made more accountable within university structures, this aspect of the phenomenon is explored at the end of this section.

5.2.2.1 Accountability to students

The introduction of student charters that set out the rights and responsibilities and the Key Information Sets (KIS), were seen as manifestations of the imperative of accountability. The Students' Union Manager at the Post-92 institution saw these as an opportunity to ensure that students had the tools to challenge the university when expectations were not met, and saw student representation systems as having a role in ensuring that students knew how to hold the university to account. Her statement suggested that the students' union perceived their role to be supporting students to hold the university to account. This view suggests an

increased student role in monitoring and holding to account the university and academics:

“...there’s all kinds of confusion about things like student charters and the Key Information Sets and if students are given information and then they’re not happy that it’s actually being met, what recourse students will have - so ...having strong student representation systems is going to be vital on all kinds of levels with the higher fees.”

Students’ Union Manager (Post-92)

The Student Officer at the Russell Group supported the idea of the institution being accountable to students. His statement suggests a conflict between his rejection of the notion of students as consumers and his understanding of the university as an education provider:

“...I’m not averse to saying students pay money and therefore the university is accountable. I don’t buy the consumer as product but nevertheless, there is an obligation whether it is financial or contractual or moral, for the university to perform the function of education and therefore universities are accountable and student voice should hold them to account and, of course, student voice itself is accountable to the students.”

Elected Student Officer (Russell Group)

The Students’ Union Officer at the Post-92 institution saw the university putting considerable effort into protecting the university from student complaints and potential litigation. His account suggests a change in the relationship between the university and students in order to ensure accountability:

“...everything’s got to be recorded, and for the university looking at it as an institution, it’s getting more and more ...as if the student is more of a customer so

everything needs to be recorded for their own protection and that obviously takes time and manpower that could be ...spent working with students and doing more with students.”

Elected Student Officer (Post-92)

At both institutions, there was an emphasis on, and investment in, communication to students about action taken as a result of student voice. The effort put into communication with students, for example through ‘you said, we did’ feedback, showed that institutions were clearly concerned with demonstrating that they were responsive:

“Students don’t always see the communications that we come back to them with about ‘you told us this and so we’re doing this.’ And that’s partly because we haven’t had an agreed method of communicating or an agreed place that all these things will sit, so some people do it on [virtual learning environment], some people do it [online], some people do it on posters. There’s a range and we’re running a project on that this year on specific student communication. So students don’t always know what we’ve done.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

At the Post-92 institution, one academic talked about what, in his experience, was a façade of accountability to students that was revealed when academics were approached outside of the formal mechanisms. His account suggests that accountability to students is understood by academics to be an imperative in some instances, but not others:

“I’m not sure that it ever gets acted upon if it’s less formalised. Sometimes if a student comes with a specific issue then a member of staff may choose to say ‘OK, let’s go to the office together, let’s sort this out now’, bang, bang, done. They may say ‘Send me an email’ and then it gets sorted out once the facts are written down,

depends how complex and what the issue is of course. They may say 'Oh, go and see so and so'. They may just nod and smile and do nothing about it."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

A student at the Russell Group university, who felt that academics were guided more by other agendas than by accountability to students, echoed this notion of student voice structures as a façade. His comments suggested a growing antipathy between 'us and them' and an adoption of discourse around academic performance:

"The most annoying thing is that we don't get feedback at all sometimes and they take quite a long time to do it which is quite disconcerting because you put a lot of work into certain pieces of work - a certain assignment and then you expect an equal return but more often than not academics are too busy with their research and like getting [the university] high up in the league tables so they don't give you timely feedback. And so there's a feeling of annoyance."

Year 1 student, Engineering (Russell Group)

His comments link to the student representative in Chapter 4, who felt that the student voice was often not seen as enough evidence to satisfy academics that a suggestion should be taken into account. Academics clearly understood that they maintained control over which decisions were made following student feedback.

5.2.2.2 Accountability and academic development

One of the key imperatives identified in the interview data, was the use of student voice mechanisms in order to inform the professional development of academics:

"... gathering feedback from your students and being able to take that on board reflectively and learn from it, must be fundamental, so module feedback and things have got to be fundamental to those processes to our academic staff and to their

development as teachers, it seems to me.”

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Russell Group)

At the Russell Group university the student officer felt that more professional development should be provided for academics to encourage them to understand what it is like to be a student:

“I think academia is the one profession without proper on-going professional development in ... teaching pedagogy - that’s deficient ...students should have a key role in that kind of professional development, whether it’s through teaching awards or through greater contribution - just feedback.... I definitely think students should play a role [here] But... universities should [also] get better at training academics to teach. It’s a financial problem. It shouldn’t really be up to the student union to train academics to teach, it should be up to the university as a professional employer to train academics to teach properly. But of course students should play a role in it...”

Elected Student Officer (Russell Group)

One academic had undertaken a long-term project which had provided the opportunity to work with students in order to develop her teaching practice. This illustrated some resistance to formal mechanisms such as course evaluation as it allowed her to work with a small group of students to whom she was accountable, on her own terms:

“So I had a focus group of first year students that I used to bribe with cake and tea and the purpose ..was for them to audit or take modules with me or watch me teach and give me feedback. And I preferred them not to take a module so they could be honest. Over three years ...that was the best learning experience for me because they would say things like ‘there was no need for that additional hour - that student was being spoilt’. They were so perceptive. And they coached me through my

practice and they filmed me in lectures and they'd say things like 'What did you see and how could you have done it in a different way?'. "

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

5.2.2.3 Accountability to parents

Parents were recognised as playing a greater role in the decision-making and support of prospective students and undergraduates. Two of the student respondents at the Post-92 university saw parents as a significant source of support during their time at university:

"I probably speak to my parents about once or twice a week. My dad went to university - I speak to him - he did business so I speak to him about it - talk about the good and the bad - and get his opinion on it. Obviously it's very different from when he was at university but there are still some similarities. He always tries to give me direction on certain things. Sometimes I follow it. Sometimes I don't. For myself that's probably the most common ways I evaluate."

Final year student, Business (Post-92)

There was also a perception amongst students and senior managers that parents would be more interested and keen to get involved once the higher fees were in place. One student felt that parents would be likely to play a greater role in holding institutions to account. This suggests a role similar to that played by parents while children are at school, which has not previously been prevalent in adult education:

"...maybe parents might want to get more involved...- maybe not directly coming to the university but asking their children 'are you getting this?' 'is this happening?' so maybe through parents, there might be more questioning, but generally students just want to come to university, do what they've got to do and go."

Final year student, Education (Post-92)

Students at the Russell Group did not reflect the increasing involvement of parents, but there was a suggestion by the Academic Registrar that the institution acknowledged their growing role in informing student decisions. However, he saw a clear distinction between formal accountability to students, and an informal accountability to parents:

“To be honest and direct about it we probably don’t particularly feel that we are accountable to parents at the moment and we don’t operate in any way that would facilitate that kind of direct accountability to parents... we already for our Open Days you figure on three people for every applicant turning up.... So families are much more important than they were those short few years ago when I was a student when it would have been death to go with a parent to an Open Day. It just wouldn’t have happened. Now, it’s not like that at all. You know your parents are key stakeholders in the decision making process.”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

5.2.2.4 Accountability to the public

Accountability to the public was recognised by senior management at both institutions as an important area. The Academic Registrar at the Russell Group spoke about the publically funded nature of the university:

“The other thing is ...accountability for public money. Is the student voice important in that context? Well it is in so far as a significant proportion of that public money is about teaching. Even at present you could say ‘Well we get - I can’t remember the exact figure - but let’s say it’s somewhere between thirty and forty million pounds block grant from HEFCE for teaching students’. In what sense are we accountable for that? Well we are accountable in the sense that we have to recruit a certain number of students and we do that. We are accountable in the sense that if an awful lot of them leave early we’ll start losing money so we basically want them to finish the course. And that’s about it really at some kind of formulaic level but clearly

there's something about actually delivering a quality product and that's where some of these other tools and mechanisms come in like the NSS, which are not necessarily directly feeding back into the HEFCE funding mechanism but they're really important."

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

The NSS was seen as one of the key ways through which the university was held accountable by the public and, as was shown in Chapter 4, both institutions saw it as a significant student voice mechanism. As the Post-92 Pro-Vice-Chancellor said:

"The NSS is a public domain survey. It has been picked up by the media. Results are placed in league tables. From next year we are actually going to be benchmarked against similar institutions to see how well we've done against [them] rather than just against the average because we are all so different. Specific questions in the NSS are used in some newspaper's league tables as well. And now the answers to specific questions are going to be used in the forthcoming Key Information Sets. So that's all public domain and it's using evaluation of a whole 3 or 4 year's experience by people who are graduating in order to inform prospective students and applicants. That's the purpose."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

5.2.2.5 Accountability to university management

It was clear from the accounts of academics and senior managers that accountability to students and external audiences was an imperative which guided certain student voice mechanisms. As these mechanisms became increasingly high-stakes, there was an intensification of relationships between academics and managers. Senior managers at both institutions clearly saw themselves as having a significant role in developing policy to inform formal student voice activity, and elements of their responses demonstrated an official role in holding academics in

departments to account. This was particularly evident at the Post-92 institution. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor described her role in holding departments accountable following student feedback:

“I’m a member of the university directorate so if I’m aware of something that’s happening, I can do two things: One is to take it to directorate and say I’ve got evidence of this happening, I think we should do this and then we’ll all discuss it. Or, if I’m not so sure of the factual basis of what I’m being told, I can go back down to faculties and service heads and say ‘I need to check this out’...I also have the right and the authority to introduce changes of policy and procedure through the university committee structure if necessary... each faculty and relevant i.e. student facing central service draws up an action plan every year as a response to the major surveys especially the NSS and the [internal student satisfaction survey]. I hold meetings during the autumn with the deans and associate deans of each faculty and the relevant service heads to go through those action plans. Once they’re agreed they then go back into the faculty and services for implementation. Progress against those action plans comes to every student experience committee.”
(Post-92)

The Head of the English department also reflected this type of accountability, describing his role in overseeing course evaluations and monitoring the response of the academic responsible. His response suggests a level of suspicion towards the willingness or capacity of some academics to respond to student voice mechanisms:

“...it’s the course director who brings together the individual module reports that includes student evaluations. However I am a bit suspicious of what can happen if you allow those processes to run because it can mean you end up with a very very sanitised, purified version of the truth. I am sufficiently anxious about the system of module evaluations to insist on seeing all the module evaluations myself first before

they go any further so the system we have here is that staff distribute the forms, they bundle them up, they leave them for me. ... then everybody understands that I will see them and I'll make a note of issues. When I return them to the member of staff concerned, if it is evident that there are serious concerns then obviously I'll talk to them. It does occur from time to time."

(Post-92)

For academics in this context, there was a sense that there were managers who were waiting in the wings to hold academics accountable for poor performance in student voice mechanisms:

"So hopefully next year we'll get a year of great response [to the NSS] and I'll get a year of not being told off."

Interviewer: *And do you get told off? Who does the telling off?*

Yeah. Well I say told off - it comes down from Faculty - they often want to know why. It can feel a little bit like an inquisition when things don't go well. There's often a lot of suspicion when you give your reason as to why things haven't gone well but we always try and be quite open with it."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

This was mirrored at the Russell Group institution if departments were perceived not to have done well:

"Well it flags up... you know I have to write an annual report and I have to respond to what is put in the NSS survey and if scores are particularly low you get a phone call from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor telling you 'we want an action plan' and you produce an action plan"

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering (Russell Group)

These types of practices created a sense of 'us and them' between academics and senior managers. In some academic accounts, managers were seen as outsiders

with demands that bore little resemblance to the main priorities for an academic in a department. One academic described passive resistance to the demands of management amongst his colleagues:

“We do get taken to task by the [senior faculty manager]. He’ll come and have a chat about - we need to improve progression; we need to improve retention, and he’ll walk off and everyone says ‘Well, I’m sure we do, anyway I was saying’ so again it’s down to people in my position to motivate and show the way on that.”
Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

One senior manager, who had previously held a management role in a faculty that had involved monitoring the evaluations of academics, had changed his views on the importance of monitoring academic focused student voice mechanisms such as course evaluations. He felt that management involvement had the potential to encourage compliance:

“I used to see quite a lot of that material. Therein incidentally, was a problem because the fact that I would see some of it, meant that it was perceived by the academic staff discharging it as something that they had to be in a position to show me and that may have been more significant than it being a real tool for the on-going development of the courses. In other words, it was evaluation for evaluation’s sake in order that something can be seen to be done rather than evaluation ...in terms of improvement.”
Head of Education (Post-92)

Accountability to one-another, and to the public, formed a distinct imperative that underpinned formal student voice mechanisms such as national and institutional surveys, course evaluations and student representation. For those interviewed, the nature of this imperative, as requiring one group to be accountable to another,

created an antipathy of 'us and them' between different groups. A relationship which was, at times, valued as productive, and at others, created tension between different groups.

5.2.3 Student voice for democracy and equality

While discourses around students as consumers and increased accountability were understood by participants to have risen in recent years in line with policy changes, many of the formal approaches to student voice, had developed over time. The imperative of student voice for democratic purposes was a fundamental principle which underpinned mechanisms at each institution, such as departmental and students' union representation.

Both institutions operated student representative systems and had student representation on committees, yet for many of the students and academics participating in these mechanisms there was a sense of pragmatism about whether they equated to a democracy. Elections to the students' union and course representation systems were the main ways in which respondents recognised democratic principles influencing student voice in higher education. Elections in some format are usually held at the start of the year and a quota of student representatives from each course usually in place. The idea of a democracy was popular amongst academics who linked ideas of democracy with the notion of collegiality and greater equality.

One academic at the Russell Group spoke about student representation systems as a form of democracy:

“...they’re represented as you’ve seen. They have access to all sorts of members of the department from their personal tutor or their seminar tutor up to the head of department without making it sound too hierarchical but they can express themselves to a whole range of different people depending on the nature of the issue. They elect their members...if they want to be a rep they propose themselves, and then if they want to chair it... That sounds pretty democratic to me.”

Head of English (Russell Group)

However, a student from the English department did not feel that, in practice, student representation was particularly democratic:

“[Democratic] I wouldn’t say so. Because I’d say you are still reporting things to the department and then the department decide what to do with the things that are reported. So you have the power to say this is an issue but you don’t have the power to do anything about it yourself.”

Year 3 Student Representative English (Russell Group)

In practice there were a number of competing imperatives that academics felt undermined democratic practice such as the competing agendas that informed representation. For students, democracy was undermined by the differences in the power held by academics and students.

There were varying views on students’ willingness to be involved in democratic mechanisms. Comments from the business student suggested that the processes for student voice proved to be a barrier to students’ participation. He felt that improvements to the mechanism would lead to greater student involvement:

“There are huge demands for students to have a student voice but ...they [did not] feel they had the wide enough platforms to do it. ...In fact everything indicates that they want to have ...a lot more influence. I don’t believe for one second that

students aren't proactive enough. Well some aren't, but if you give them a good enough platform to [participate] and they can see that there is a result from their student voice - because ...it's well and good them coming up with the issues but they have to have a very clear mechanism so they get feedback on what has happened as a result]."

Final year student, Business (Post-92)

However, most senior managers did not share this perception. For example, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the Russell Group institution felt that many of the changes to student voice mechanisms were led by government, rather than a strong message from students. She suggested that many students saw democratic representation as out dated and had sacrificed their involvement for a slicker HE product:

"It seems to me that - and I may be quite wrong ...politically there is such a drive for single issue problems that ... we haven't for years had any - debate around, discussion of, [or] concern expressed about, ...the lack of democracy or undemocratic mechanisms or whatever. ... perhaps there is a ...sense that students ...want it to be a well-oiled machine doing what they want it to do. And that's fine. ...In a sense there is quite a lot that is happening isn't there? In terms of student representation, in terms of freedom of information. And it is happening without students even particularly - at least here - lobbying for it. All I can say is when we've talked about publishing external examiners' names - I can't say we've had students say 'Great. It's long overdue etc.'. More - it's something we go through. ...I mean there's not ever been a lobby to increase the student representation on council or Senate - not within my knowledge."

The Student Officer (Post-92) talked about student representation on university governance committees as a form of democracy. He reflected on the effectiveness of the participation of the students' union on those committees, suggesting that the inexperience of elected students can be a limiting factor:

“The university does invite the students union to sit on nearly every single committee and from the last year we’ve even chaired committees with the university staff sitting on which shouldn’t be seen as a special thing. It should be the norm but obviously sabbatical officers are only here for a certain amount of time and it’s quite difficult to do handovers with such a short turn around.”

Elected Student Officer (Post-92)

At the Russell Group institution one senior manager talked about the nature of the democracy on university committees. Using the example of the discussions which took place about the level of fees charged, he identified students, amongst others, as having democratic power, but argued that students’ views were necessarily balanced with those of other stakeholders:

“We don’t have a democratic structure in the university in which students would be in the majority ...Not that I can think of - other than the Students’ Union of course. But to be fair it’s very very rare that anything goes to a vote. Usually a consensus is reached in discussion at committees in this university and in most universities I’m sure. I’ll take as an example - discussions about fees ... For the full record, there was obviously a whole variety of factors that had to be taken into account. In the end many of those factors pointed towards us setting fees at the higher end of the ... So ...and to be fair we did a considerable amount of ...taking views ...there was a uniformity amongst academic colleagues that this was the appropriate thing to do but the students were absolutely adamant that it wasn’t and we should set fees as low as we possibly could so there was just a complete mismatch ...Those points were made repeatedly at [senior committee] and other bodies and noted. So.. there was democracy because had it been forced to a vote it would have gone to a vote and the consensus view would have been supported. ...So we do have democracy but we don’t have majority student rule.”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

One student at the Russell Group institution discussed the nature of the relationship between the students' union and the university. He felt that a democratic relationship at the top of the organisation was unrealistic due to the competing imperatives and the range of external stakeholders involved in university management. Instead, he felt that the focus should be on department level democracy, where he felt students could make more of an impact:

"Our student union is very lucky that we are represented on the [senior committee] ...I don't know how much power there actually is.... it seems absurd that a corporate shareholder, for example, will have as much say as someone who's been democratically elected by the 20,000 students that are on campus, you know? ...So even if students are given a democratic voice it would be a democratic voice amongst a whole load of other voices that have far more money behind them... The best thing you can hope for is to make it a really good learning environment and ...community on the ground level beneath the mangers ... between academics, students, post-graduates and student leaders and union representatives"

Year 3 Student Representative, English (Russell Group)

The same student went on to talk about the dangers of the students' union and university developing a relationship that was 'too close' and so eroded the unions' position as a representative body. His comments suggest concerns about the changing nature of students' unions:

"it would be the most dangerous thing in the world for the university and the students' union to think that they were equal partners ...because that's not what you want. You want the students' union saying 'No, you're not going to do this. We completely disagree with this. We're not friends on this issue.'"

The idea of a democracy was popular amongst a number of academics who linked ideas of democracy with the notion of collegiality and equality, which many believed to be an important but undervalued concept in an effective institution:

“If one thinks of the original purpose of universities which was, I suspect, sharing knowledge and experience, we have become much more hierarchical, managed and to be in a less managed world - I mean a world which some long serving academics will wistfully speak of as collegiality as though it is something which has been lost and that’s not far from democracy”

Head of Education (Post-92)

Despite the nostalgia around democracy, student and staff respondents did not feel that in practice, student representation was particularly democratic. For academics, democratic practice was undermined by the competing agendas that informed representation. For students, democracy was undermined by the differences in the power held by academics and students.

Amongst a small group of academics, ideas of equality between academics and students were more popular than those of democracy, particularly in the classroom. At the Russell Group institution, academics in English spoke about projects in which they had shared power with students, which they regarded as seeking greater equality in the way in which they engaged.

“About 7 years ago we had a government grant to [develop a] model of learning that we were experimenting with, and which we’ve now established, was based on a theatrical model that you treat a classroom like a rehearsal room and its aims are all very democratic and aspirational and idealistic. But nevertheless, part of the rhetoric about that is about uncrowning authority, about saying that the teacher is only one of many learners in the room, it’s all very sixties, nothing new under the sun. But we

have actually revived that tradition very successfully in some of our teaching in this department ...it runs counter to consumerist narrative ...which is that 'I've got something that you don't and you give me something and I'll give you something back.' So it's a very different model of learning ...and I'm much more aware of that as part of my daily life."

Academic 1, English (Russell Group)

In the Post-92 institution, a specific student voice mechanism, which employed students to work alongside academics to develop learning and teaching, was seen as developing a greater equality between students and academics. This account illustrates a changing understanding of what it means to be a 'good' academic in the institution. This marks a greater equity between some students and staff, but also a change in academic roles:

"The academics who have seized the partnership opportunities that we've been offering - are keen to work with their students, see them as partners, see them as legitimate people with legitimate views, intelligent observations, valid suggestions and it works great. On the other hand we've got some academics who are going to have to be prized off their very traditional view of [higher education] which is - I'm the expert; I'm the academic; you are the pupil; my job is to impart my wisdom. Your job is to soak it up. And to never question me. I think we've got fewer of those people now. I think we are winning the argument that students have a lot of wisdom, have a lot of interesting things to tell us, have a lot of interesting things to work with us on so I'm really hoping that that's going to be quite a sea change."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

A contradiction was apparent between the ideals of democracy and the ways in which students experienced representation in practice. Democracy, while recognised as an important ideology by many respondents, was widely dismissed beyond the organisation of representation through elections and encouraging

representatives to engage with peers. Where mechanisms were purported to be democratic, there was often some tension caused between those who saw mechanisms as democratic and those who saw democracy as an unrealistic, or undesirable, ideal. New forms of radical democracy and equality were seen as a form of resistance, through which hierarchical relationships between academics and students could be broken down. However, these new ways of working suggested new identities and subjectivities for students and academics that did not always sit comfortably with those groups.

5.2.4 Student engagement with learning and evaluation

Part of the equality and democracy discourse in the interviews related to a desire amongst some senior managers and academics for students to 'take ownership' of the learning process. This was a complex discourse, which meant different things to different participants. Views about what ownership or engagement with learning meant, differed between:

- Those who felt that ownership referred to individual students' engagement with learning and the subject; for example completing the required tasks and engaging in classroom discussion. This was tied to ideas of students as independent learners.
- Those who felt that ownership meant students taking an active role in student voice mechanisms as an aspect of wider ownership and commitment to education.

Part of the discourse for each of these perspectives appeared to be about challenging the notion of students as passive recipients of higher education.

The Academic Registrar at the Russell Group set out these values, describing the concept of the ownership of learning as an important challenge to the idea of students as consumers. His comments focus on student ownership though the evaluation of learning yet there is a notable absence of the academic subject in the account:

“... we would recognise not only that it is desirable but that it is absolutely core to the kind of students that we want to have - that they are not people who are passive consumers of something, that they are people who are actively engaged in their learning. That active engagement takes a whole variety of forms. It’s not just about ‘do I input into designing the module with some committee meetings’ or something but... ‘when I do the research project how do I engage with the team that I work with?’ If I’m doing an assignment what options should I take? What other extra-curricular volunteering opportunities do I take up? What kind of work experience do I gain? Do I bring that back into my learning and reflect on it?”

Academic Registrar (Russell Group)

In contrast, the Director of Education at the Post-92 University saw ownership as relating to all aspects of the subject discipline. He voiced an objection to academics claiming ownership of courses and the curriculum, suggesting a repositioning of the academic in relation to students:

“I was always worried that the member of academic staff responsible for that module would say ‘my module’. I’d always contradict them and say it’s not your module, it belongs to the students that are taking it and you are implicated in that. You can’t lose sight of that ...because it’s what matters isn’t it? It’s not ‘it’s my

module, they must come and do whatever I want them to'."

Head of Education (Post-92)

Students too talked about engagement with, and ownership of, learning. A student at the Russell Group institution talked about his personal experience of the transition between learning at school to becoming more independent at university, describing the development of his personal understanding of learning:

"... as you grow up you get to understand that, ok university is about independent learning, about self, by getting to know yourself better and getting to know how you should work rather than someone telling you how to do so.

...on this road you ...learn how to get feedback and how to make the most out of your academic experience. As a first year you tend to be less experienced and make complaints rather than take action to solve your problems."

Year 1 student, Engineering (Russell Group)

The Student Officer at the Post-92 institution encapsulates the challenges of instilling ownership and his perceptions of how students understand the concept:

"We should be saying in university - engaging and empowering our students - and saying this is your education; this is your 3 years or 4 years at university - how do you want to learn, what do you want to learn, and developing it with the staff here. I think we're starting to go into that direction. ... We're nowhere near it yet and there's a lot more needs to be done but it is trying to empower those students and get them out of the culture of 'you'll sit and be told what we want to tell you' and that's very difficult because you've had so much experience of that before you get to university. So building up 'what is university?' and building up that communication maybe before they get here so that when they get here they know 'we can do this' and we're not going to be told off or spoken down to because we are adults and this is our education."

Elected Student Officer (Post-92)

However, for many there was a sense that engagement in student voice mechanisms was for a few keen students rather than for all students. Academic respondents and the Students' Union Manager suggested that requiring 'ownership' of the learning experience, and involvement in its evaluation, was an unwanted responsibility for many students:

"...students come to the university expecting to turn up to their lectures and learn and maybe have good relationships with staff - they expect to be challenged, to have to think and learn and work - but I don't think they really think about what their role is in terms of shaping things themselves except in a really superficial way through module evaluations and potentially student reps...I don't know how much of an appetite there is and I don't really know if it's right that we should expect students to want to get involved or be really promoting it to them as opposed to trying to just make sure the experience is the best it can be based on the views of a few who are engaging at that level and what we know already as an institution."
Students' Union Manager (Post-92)

This linked back to concepts of student identity and the desirability of student voice beyond the classroom. The Students' Union Manager's statement raises interesting questions about the types of student for whom student voice mechanisms are designed. She suggests that, for students, the most important area for voice is within the classroom. This view was supported by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the Russell Group institution who recognised that while many students were willing to be involved in student voice mechanisms, this did not equate to a more fundamental desire for influence over what and how they learnt:

"...some of the questions you are asking are ... political in the sense that our student body is not political in that way, so ownership of learning may be

that... ideologically opposed to what sociology thinks - what we want to be reading is such and such and such and such. ...I don't know when it last happened here. That's what I meant about it being more single issues that they address than the kind of ideological approach to a discipline or anything like that. ...I mean they want to, they actively engage in the processes of learning. They want to have ownership in some cases - and do - the popularity of [student conference] that's coming up on student as researcher so it's [ownership of learning] happening if you like through acceptable channels rather than as any kind of spontaneous protest."

While many participants talked about the importance of student engagement and what many described as 'ownership of learning', this formed a rhetoric for which there was no clear definition. For senior managers and academics, ownership appeared to relate to concepts of students working independently, within the classroom and being proactive about getting involved in student voice mechanisms. The accounts of students also reflected this. However, the accounts of students suggested an awareness of the limitations of legitimate discussion within formal mechanisms. This was accepted by some students, while others, such as the student engaged in the Occupy protest and education conference, sought to provide alternative mechanisms for student voice. In contrast, staff, tended to hold the view that where students did not discuss certain matters, such as the nature of the curriculum, this was due to disinterest.

5.2.5 Student voice and identity

A theme that clearly emerged through a number of the interviews was that of student identity. There were various elements to this including ideas about student wellbeing, self-esteem and the desire for students to feel part of the university community.

5.2.5.1 Student engagement with community

Academics and senior managers talked about creating a 'sense of community' in order to enable the development of student identity. This phenomena was particularly evident at the Post-92 institution, which had several campus locations, where it was seen as acting as a counterbalance to a perceived lack of community amongst students and staff. This was not seen as an issue at the Russell Group institution:

"We are a campus university and I do sometimes wonder if student's choose to go to a campus university because there's that association with student life and student community and student environment. And therefore the right to... the opportunity to kind of experiment with the role of being a student."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Russell Group)

In contrast the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the Post-92 institution linked the lack of community to the greater number of students living at home while attending university:

"We do have some students who live at home, come in, do their classes, go back, pick up the part-time job or the Saturday job that they had ever since they were 16 back at home, and that's all they want from us. They really don't want a wider engagement. I still think they have every right to know what else is going on. They have every right to a voice. ...And I don't think we've got that right yet."

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Post-92)

There was a sense that the community element was an essential aspect of students' personal development and so should be something that departments strived to recreate if it was not naturally present amongst groups of students. The setting up of Facebook groups for students was one way in which some

departments had sought to engender this atmosphere on behalf of students. This suggests an extension of the academic role as teacher into the realm of therapist or life-coach. This academic felt that he had a role in facilitating this in his department:

"... 'student voice as part of the development of the person' is massive. And I think where we fail our students most is in the community. We're working really hard on that - to try and make this community, get this pride because you want students to go 'Those were the best 3 years of my life'. You want students to go 'amazing times' and they felt part of something. And I think to feel part of something you've got to be heard but not just from a 'Did you think this module was good? Did you think that module was good?' but just as a person to be heard."

Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 2 (Post-92)

5.2.5.2 Student voice and wellbeing

Excerpts from this section appear in Freeman (2013) "Student engagement in practice: ideologies and power dynamics in course representation systems". In Dunne, E. & Owen, D. (Eds.) Student engagement handbook: practice in higher education. Bingley, Emerald 145-162.

Developing a sense of community was, in part, linked to student wellbeing and identity. This was a theme that emerged repeatedly when talking to academics with management responsibility about the involvement in mechanisms such as student representation. Indeed, some of the student participants talked about involvement in student voice mechanisms acting as a cathartic experience. However, others recognised that only certain concerns could be aired legitimately in representative forums. For example student feedback relating to criticisms of named lecturers was seen by students and academics as 'out of bounds':

“To some extent, this thing serves to relieve some of the pressure and frustration you might feel. For instance as an individual if you have your own issues that impact upon the quality of your time here, you can’t really do much to express them if they’re personal concerns...we are not given the opportunity to express our free and unbiased ...opinion about the things that concern us personally like our welfare. Yeah they care about how the course is administrated; but they don’t really care about the person.

And I guess no university does this. It doesn’t matter how high up in the League Tables you might be, they don’t really care about how students feel. They just say ‘ok, it’s normal that not all the students do as well in the examinations’ but they don’t question whether those students that are maybe below average have reached their maximum potential and whether they are just underperforming seriously because of the nature of the degree.”

Year 1 student, Engineering (Russell Group)

The academic respondents with teaching management responsibility at the Post-92 institution and in the English department at the Russell Group, described how the development of identity and confidence were important aspects of certain types of mechanisms such as course representation systems. Academics at both institutions viewed student participation in representation as an opportunity for students to develop their self-esteem:

“And from the student point of view obviously they need to feel that they have a voice; that they can be heard; that when they do say something it’s taken seriously; if necessary it’s acted upon but also most students have no idea how stuff works.”

Head of English (Russell Group)

This was linked by one academic, to a desire to prepare students to be active members of society, a concept which linked back to the ideas around democracy and equality that are presented in this chapter:

“A buy in. Yeah. Yeah. If students have had a say and they’ve said ‘This could be better’ and we have made it better then they say ‘Thank you’ and feel that they’ve been a little bit of it rather than just subjects that we teach at. Passive learner to something more active, which is important on societal level, as well as the personal level. You’ve got to be able to make a difference in the world. Leave footprints in the sands of time as it were. That’s important in a self-esteem, self-view fashion.”
Academic with teaching management responsibility, Engineering 1 (Post-92)

During the observations of student representation committees concerns that were raised by students were occasionally related to them feeling discomfort in particular learning scenarios. Between the two departments observed there were different approaches to responding to students concerns. For example, students in one meeting felt that one academic’s political views were too strong:

“Student: there were several people that mentioned to me at the end of last year there was a particular module in which they felt uncomfortable in seminars because the political views of the tutor were pushed to a ridiculous point. It’s difficult to say this without mentioning names but they felt they weren’t able to voice their own opinion if it was contrary to that of their tutor.

Academic: I can see these can be quite sensitive issues. This would be a situation where if that was how students are feeling ...that would probably be something to bring to me as Head of Department. If it’s a module that’s taught by several teachers and it was one of the tutors who was doing this then you might go for the module convener in the first instance.”

Student Representative Committee, English (Russell Group)

Student representatives also spoke about learning situations that made them uncomfortable because they felt that they were too demanding:

***Student:** A couple of people have emailed me...I say a couple... 19 people with the same complaint about a specific module and they were just saying they were going to a lecture at I don't know what time... noon for the sake of argument... and the lecturer would say 'ok you're doing a presentation on this material at 2 o'clock today; you're doing one at 3 o'clock and you're doing one at 4 o'clock'. And they were saying this is ridiculous, we can't do this, there's not enough notice.*

***Academic:** These are at seminars?*

***Student 2:** Yes. I don't know. It's not a module I do. I don't know how accurate this information is but the sheer volume of emails I got suggested to me that people really weren't happy.*

***Academic:** OK. Well after the meeting you might let me know what the module was."*

Student Representative Committee, English (Russell Group)

These examples show the influence that the wellbeing of students in learning situations has on the decisions made at department level about approaches to teaching. In another observation there was a sense that students did not wish to be placed in learning situations in which they were assessed as part of a group. In this instance, students were encouraged to consider the personal development value of participating in forms of learning that they found challenging:

***Student:** Group work and the reliability of marks when applied to a range of different group members. Sometimes there is one person who is the weakling, or one who produces some work but the rest of the group think it needs to be done again.*

Academic: One group fed back to me that they didn't like group work because 'all they did was have meetings and write reports' my response was that engineers are problem solvers, as an engineer you'll spend: 10% of your time problem solving, 20% working on a real problem, 10-30% working out whether the problem is the right problem, 50% convincing people that it was a problem and telling them how to solve it.

Student: If you could come up with some way of measuring contribution that would be great.

Academic 2: We could think about reintroducing peer review.

Student: You could ask people to rate how they think the project went.

Academic 2: We could get groups together and ask what each person did.

Academic 1: I'm sorry to say though that your experience of group work is an introduction to the rest of your life."

Student Representative Committee, Engineering (Russell Group)

During the interviews the academics that had been observed in the student representative committees saw their responding to student concerns as part of the aforementioned approach to managing expectations. However, one academic in the English department, who was no longer involved in the student representative committee, was concerned with the growing focus on students being comfortable and felt that this was related to the lack of political engagement amongst the students that she taught. Her view is highlighted here as one of the dissonant voices in the data:

"This sense of security and stability has repercussions on a lack of apathy for politics and conflict. Even in playgrounds conflict is not allowed. That's unhealthy. It

is unhealthy. I mean little things are called bullying. They are not bullying. In the playground children should get angry, beat each other up, get revenge, learn how human beings react and then make up. There is no need for rules and regulations. We are not allowed to touch each other. We are not allowed to touch somebody. Touch each other. What's wrong with that? It's a human thing. Fight.

Also the whole thing about not shouting. You know in primary schools if students shout too loudly in the playground where they are playing, they get told off. Shout! What's wrong with shouting! And also why is it so safe? Why is everything so sanitised and safe? That creates a false sense of security and we're feeling it now because why would we go and protest unless we're seen as very radical and we're academics and quite leftist and there's something a bit strange about us."

Academic 2, English (Russell Group)

This account suggested that the evidence of students' discomfort with academics, and with learning activities that they found uncomfortable, was related to wider societal changes in the expectations of young people. These ideas will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.3 Conclusion

The data that are presented in this chapter illustrate the complex ways in which students, academics and senior managers understood the imperatives and ideologies that underpin their involvement in student voice mechanisms. In the interviews and university documentation, some of these technologies were articulated more than others. This occurred particularly when technologies were evident in government policy, such as the shift towards discourse around students as consumers with the increase in tuition fees. The imperatives were understood and experienced by the participants in complex and intertwined ways. Some, such

as students as consumers, were explicit and were engaged with actively by participants. Others were subtle and less articulated, or were evident only through observation that highlighted the theories in use (Argyris and Schon, 1996).

Participants were asked to reflect on a range of imperatives for student voice that had been identified from an initial analysis of the literature. Responses to this question varied widely; some saw all the identified imperatives as resonating with their personal experience of student voice, for good and bad; some saw different mechanisms as requiring different identities; and some saw involvement in student voice as having little personal meaning beyond the practical (e.g. for a student looking to gain experience for their CV). Different identities were also associated with different mechanisms for student voice. For example, a student completing a course evaluation understood his or her identity while participating in that activity quite differently to a student engaging in informal protest, or in an after the lecture discussion with an academic.

Each participant drew upon and shaped the imperatives that guided their understanding in complex and subjective ways. At times the range of implicit imperatives in use within different student voice mechanisms were not experienced as problematic, but at others, such as in the careers example at the start of the chapter, these caused tensions and conflict. More often there was a sense of a level of, more subtle, dissatisfaction with the nature of participation in certain activities.

These imperatives, tensions and coherences, created new identities and subjectivities for those who participated in student voice mechanisms, and, to an extent, for those who did not. The imperatives, and experiences of these, formed complex technologies of the self through which individuals came to understand their own role and that of others. The rise of new forms of student voice, such as the NSS, had led to an intensification of relationships between students, academics and staff, which extended into other spaces where students and staff members came into contact.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, Foucault sees the spaces where the technologies of dominance and the technologies of the self, meet, as the sites to explore in order to better understand how these interrelate as governance. In Chapter 6, the discussion will return to the literature, in the light of the analysis presented here, in order to explore student voice as new forms of power and governance in higher education.

6 CHAPTER 6: NEW FORMS OF POWER AND GOVERNMENTALITY

In the previous two chapters I have presented the analysis from this study as the technologies of dominance (chapter 4) and the technologies of the self (chapter 5). These data have provided answers to the first three, of my five sub-questions; presenting a detailed analysis of the ways in which 1) individuals describe and experience different mechanisms (chapter 4), 2) exploring the explicit and implicit imperatives that inform student voice, and 3) presenting some of the coherences and contradictions between these imperatives (chapter 5). In this chapter, I return to the literature, and introduce new literature where relevant, in order to further discuss these coherences and contradictions and to explore sub-question 4) how are the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and managers informed by student voice.

In relating back to Foucault's concepts of governance, I focus here on exploring the data in relation to power. In this chapter I problematise current views of student voice in relation to power and governmentality in higher education. In doing so, I have borrowed ideas from Foucault (1993, Martin et al., 1988), as well as Ball (2003, 2004, 2012, 2013), Bragg (2007) and Du Gay (1996, 1997) who have used Foucauldian concepts in their own work. In particular, I draw upon Bragg's (2007) use of Foucault in order to problematise the nature of student voice in schools, and on Ball's (2003, 2004, 2012, 2013) use of Foucault in order to consider the position of academics in higher education in the UK. I relate Bragg and Ball's arguments to the imperatives and effects of student voice in this study.

As was discussed in the literature review, a commonality between the work of Ball and Bragg is their perspective on new forms governance in education and the relationships of power, identities and subjectivities that are produced. Both Bragg (2007) and Ball (2004) are interested in the way in which forms of governance, through ethical and attitudinal frameworks “*play their part in ‘making us up’*” (Hacking, 1986: 231) by providing ‘*new modes of description*’ and ‘*new possibilities for action*’.” (Ball, 2004: 144). Using these theories, this chapter explores the way in which student voice produces new forms of social identities and subjectivities that inform what it means to be a student, academic or manager in higher education. This discussion is undertaken in order to answer the overall research question, does student voice in higher education in England represent new forms of power and governance in higher education?

The chapter will explore the data in relation to each group involved in the study; managers, students and academics, in order to develop an understanding of how student voice operates and is experienced at each level. Although not in the remit of my formal data collection, in order to supplement discussion in this chapter I have selected a number of salient examples from the higher education press, as well as from my own experience in the institutions in which I have worked and studied.

These serve to highlight where aspects of the data collected relate to wider experiences and concerns that have been identified in the sector, thereby suggesting the wider application of this research.

Across the groups included in the study, the student voice mechanisms and imperatives that informed the interviews were not always uniform across the groups

of participants. For example, for managers, there was a particular concern with student voice in relation to policy and reputation which shaped their engagement with other managers, academics and students; for students, interest in student voice was focused on those forms in which they had a direct voice, such as through student representation and through informal forms such as political protest.

Academics often had a role that involved working with both managers and students which meant that they were required to balance both groups, and to make sense of the relationship between these concerns in different contexts.

Bragg (2007) argues that senior managers often provide the most “*consciously articulated or elaborate student voice rhetoric*” (347) because they often act as a conduit between national and local policy and strategy. As such, a discussion of senior management is undertaken in the following section. This is followed by a section which explores identities and subjectivities of students, and lastly, the role and identity of academics is discussed, as those who are at the interface between policy and practice.

6.1 Senior management

The senior managers who were interviewed identified numerous reasons why student voice was important. Each manager had some involvement in student voice mechanisms in their institutions, and all had been involved in the development of these mechanisms. Many of the metaphors that were reported in the analysis, such as the university as a gym, and the university student relationship as lawyer and client (section 5.2.1.7), came from managers in order to articulate the nature of the relationship between students and the institution. Ideas from senior managers about

the purpose of student voice included; students taking an active role in student voice mechanisms, learning activities and university life in general; a desire for students to feel 'ownership' and a sense of responsibility for their learning; a desire for students to feel part of the campus community; and a concern for student wellbeing. Aside from the developmental purposes that were identified, there was also a pragmatic emphasis on mechanisms such as the NSS and institutional surveys, either as a government and reputational requirement (in the case of the NSS), or as a vehicle for providing useful management information. As the Head of Education at the Post-92 suggested, information that was seen publically had a higher status amongst management than that which was for internal use only (section 4.1.1.1). It was these concerns that primarily shaped the engagement that managers had with students and academics.

At both institutions, the preoccupation with the NSS had shaped other institutional mechanisms for student voice. For example, the annual student satisfaction survey undertaken at the Post-92 institution took a similar format to the NSS in order to provide an early indicator of potential problems. While neither of the institutions involved in the study required that departmental course or module evaluations were undertaken in a similar format, two of the academics with teaching management responsibility in the study, talked of local changes to evaluations to a similar end. Managers at each institution talked about various strategies for recognising potential problems early on, such as keeping in close contact with students' union officers. This shaped the way in which academics and students who encountered

managers understood what was valued. These perceptions will be explored further later in the chapter.

6.1.1 *Constructing accounts of student voice at the institution*

Senior managers played a key role in the way in which student voice mechanisms were structured, implemented and managed within the university. Managers who were interviewed were keenly aware of national policies on student voice and of their role in ensuring alignment. The study took place at the time of the development of the QAA Student Engagement chapter of the Quality Code in 2012, which requires institutions to “*define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance*” (4). This marks an explicit requirement for institutions to set out a range of mechanisms through which all students have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurance, formalising a trend at a number of institutions (Exeter (Wright, 2012), Bath (University of Bath, 2013) and Sheffield (Jeffries, 2013)), towards defining a ‘student engagement strategy’ which fits in with the wider values of the institution. Typically these set out the student voice mechanisms available to students (surveys, student representation, student union officers, and any approaches unique to the institution) serving to describe options for how students might want to be involved with an institution at different levels, while also clarifying what counts as an official student voice mechanism within a particular institution.

Following the introduction of the Quality Code, the QAA funded research into student engagement as defined by the Code, in order to produce a document outlining good practice that institutions can use as a guide (van der Velden et al.,

2013). This marks one of many developments, projects and research undertaken in association with student voice that have been funded within the duration of this study (2008-2013) by national bodies including the QAA, HEA and NUS. It demonstrates a trend towards the provision of guidance from a range of agencies (e.g. the NUS, HEA and QAA). This represents a subtle change in the way in which agencies of the state have increasingly come to govern through expertise, through which institutions come to know what is expected, rather than making direct demands on institutions.

This shift towards guidance and good practice has been productive for some institutions, in that recommendations are developed through consultative means, allowing for existing activity to become enshrined in policy. For some institutions, this provides an opportunity for work that has been done in order to shape or improve student voice, to be recognised at a national level, for example in the recent guidance on student engagement published by the QAA (van der Velden et al., 2013). This is empowering in that it enables work in the sector to shape policy, but it also extends guidance into areas that have previously been regarded as the domain of the institution or individual department, thereby shaping institutional values. Through the Quality Code, institutions are not directly told how to behave. Institutions are encouraged to develop their own approach, but they are also told what is expected of them as a minimum and how this might look, which in turn, frames the way in which institutions are able to respond. This may be more palatable for those concerned with institutional and academic freedom, but

nevertheless sets the boundaries for student voice activity within which institutions are required to respond.

6.1.2 Constructing the relationship between managers and students

The shift towards greater guidance and articulation of relationships in higher education has also been seen in the development of student charters. Charters, which were already in place in many institutions, have become a requirement following recommendations from the department for Business Innovation and Skills, (BIS) working group (2011a). BIS stated that *“major changes to the higher education funding system and its regulatory framework have the potential to alter the relationship between universities and students”* (4), and suggested that all institutions develop a student charter to set out *“student rights and responsibilities – so students know what to expect, what is required of them and what to do if things do not meet expected standards”* (6). This formalised the requirement for institutions to develop new or revise existing documents that set out the nature of their relationship with students. During the period of the study, senior managers at both institutions were involved in the development of a charter for their own institutions.

The content of charters typically provides a menu of services and opportunities and a set of values such as fairness and equality, and sets out the university’s and the students’ responsibilities in relation to these (see example charters from Bishop Grossteste, Bucks New, Northampton, Edge Hill in BIS, 2011). By setting out opportunities and expectations, these documents serve to frame what ‘being a student’ looks like at different institutions, constructing an official account of the

institution in relation to students. In this way, the nature of what it is reasonable for a student to expect from the institution is defined. To draw again on the work of Grant (1997), the nature of a 'good' student, for example active, reflective, independent, ethical and engaged in additional personal development opportunities, (taken from The Warwick Student Community Statement (2012)) is made explicit, articulated and enshrined in policy. In this way, student charters empower through the provision of the rules of engagement and what is expected in order for a student to succeed, setting out the terms by which a student can be judged to have been treated fairly by the institution. However, charters may also shape and restrict what is regarded as acceptable in the university, marking a further shift towards defining what it means to be a student and academic.

Student charters provide a framework in which the student is 'made up', a term used by Hacking (1986) to describe the way that processes and practices frame and structure the way that those that participate are able to 'be'. These create new subjectivities for students in higher education who experience being both "*subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self knowledge.*" (Foucault, 1982: 212). Drawing parallels with Grant's (1997) study of students in higher education, the student is subject to the regulations as set out in the charter along with other discourses around what it means to be a good student and "*work to produce themselves as good students, and powerfully, the institution rewards their efforts*" (104). This does not mean that student charters render students powerless, as Grant (ibid) argues, "*power in this sense is not repressive, negative or owned, but it is everywhere, inherently neither*

good or bad" (104). What student charters provide for institutions is *"the power to act on the action of others, to modify them"* (105). As Foucault (1986) describes:

"It incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (427)

In this way charters, through the articulation of a way of being, create a relationship of power between the university, academics and students. This formal articulation of the nature of the student was also seen in other mechanisms, such as the student representative handbooks and the design of the NSS, and shaped what was regarded by managers, academics and students, as legitimate ways of being in higher education.

6.1.3 *New relationships for students and institutions*

Alongside the rise of guidance for student voice in institutions, there has also been a trend observed in documentation from BIS and QAA for recommending that shared documents and guidance are developed at a national and institutional level through *partnership* with students and students' unions. This was seen in the data through the concerns of senior managers regarding collaboration with students, close working with the students' unions and concerns with democracy. This suggests an adoption of similar discourse that is currently used for public services in the UK. Services such as the NHS and the police are encouraged to be responsive to the views of 'service users' (NHS Improvement, 2010, Scribbins et al., 2010). Managers acknowledged the value of informal regular meetings and working

groups with students' union officers in order to shape policy and activities outside of the formal committee structures. At the Russell Group institution, managers broadened these discussions by holding suppers with other groups of students in order to hear from students directly.

There were benefits for managers working more closely with students' unions, which were reflected in a recent article in the Times Higher, in which the Registrar at the University of Nottingham describes the benefits of 'working with, not against' students' unions (Greatrix, 2012). In this study, the senior managers felt that working with students enabled them to pre-empt problems, to develop approaches to management and the provision of resources that were palatable to students, and to establish long-term relationships with students' unions that could weather the occasional disagreement (such as union campaigns against tuition fees). This approach to working suggested a colonisation of students' unions, in which they become implicated in policy development and processes of governance, and were encouraged to provide solutions to problems by working with institutions.

6.1.4 The changing role of the students' union

Those working in students' unions suggested new institutional management roles which contrasted with the challenging political and campaigning roles of students' unions in the past. In the interview with the Students' Union Officer from the Russell Group institution, he spoke about what he understood to be "insider and outsider" strategies, which were deployed in order to maintain a relationship with management, while engaging in activities that he recognised would be regarded as subversive (section 4.1.4). Insider strategies included lobbying and the presentation

of evidence in committees in a way that maintained a positive relationship with the university; while outsider strategies were those which he understood would undermine this relationship with the university, such as protest and campaigning. Outsider strategies were still recognised by the student as a potential tool but they were seen as for occasional use only, as their over-use would *“allow opponents to pigeon-hole [the] student movement and unions in general”* (section 4.1.4).

These approaches were articulated by those working in students' unions who recognised that, in order to ensure influence, the students' union was required to work in ways deemed appropriate and comfortable by the institution. For example, a number of the student officers had been anonymously involved in the organisation of the protest which took place at the Russell Group institution, and had supported it informally, but were unwilling to reveal this to senior management. The students' union played along with its colonised position in university practices, recognising the capacity for shaping change from within, while informally supporting students whose views and approaches did not fit with those of senior managers. In this way, students' union officers were required to develop hybrid identities in order to maintain a students' union that was palatable to both the institution and to students.

Of course, different students' unions have different traditions and ethos. Indeed, in some recent examples, students' union officers have challenged this approach to working with institutions, citing differences in beliefs and limited capacity for change within university committee structures (Craig, 2013). However, the responses in the study suggested a general shift towards students' unions playing a greater role in the management of higher education. This mirrors the development of the

relationship, at national level, between the NUS and government bodies such as HEFCE, the QAA and HEA. The NUS has actively promoted greater student involvement in university governance in the recent Manifesto for Partnership (NUS, 2012), which challenges ideas around students as consumers and calls on students' unions to secure greater involvement in the management of all aspects of their institutions, beyond those that have traditionally been seen as relevant to students.

The different approaches that were promoted by the NUS were felt by some of the senior managers in the study to be contradictory. The Academic Registrar at the Russell Group institution felt that the NUS took contradictory approaches, demanding rights for students as fee payers, while rejecting the positioning of students as customers and demanding a more collaborative approach to managing institutions. This apparent tension continues to be evident with the NUS recently coming out in support of the Office for Fair Trading's (tag line: 'making markets fairer for customers' (OFT, 2013)), who are currently investigating university terms and conditions for students, while continuing to promote their Manifesto for Partnership (2012). However, other changes at a national level, in which students have come to be seen as consumers and partners by organisations such as the QAA, suggest that these two approaches may not be incompatible, but rather reflect new and more complex subjectivities for students.

6.1.5 National and local partnerships with students

During the timescale of this study, the QAA have developed a number of approaches to promoting student involvement in quality. One element of this has

been the employment of student reviewers to QAA institutional review panels, placing students as integrated members of the teams reviewing institutions. This has marked an ideological change to the principle of QAA reviews of institutions, which has traditionally been to facilitate peers review. The introduction of student reviewers has implicitly marked the positioning of students alongside academics as 'peers' in the review process. Students are therefore in the powerful position of being able to come to a judgement about an institution as part of the wider peer review team.

Along with all QAA reviewers, students receive significant training in the process of review and the criteria that must inform judgements about an institution, and are expected to play the same role as others in the team. The QAA has also developed its own student advisory board, made up of current students in order to advise the QAA management board and have developed the Student Engagement Chapter of the Quality Code (QAA, 2012c), as has been discussed previously. These developments reflect the shift at a national policy level towards seeing students as part of the institutional and sector governance. Student reviewers are accommodated into the language and culture of management by being involved in the development of policies through which institutions are held to account, and through membership of the teams that make judgements about the institutions.

In terms of power and governmentality, this change places students in powerful positions in relation to institutions. Through training, mentoring and involvement in QAA events, students are produced who are capable of carrying out that role within the parameters of the QAA and institutions' expectations. Students selected to

become reviewers “possess current or very recent experience relating to managing, developing, delivering and/or assessing higher education in institutions or colleges”, ensuring that students who are selected to become reviewers are the ‘right’ sort of students for the job. The students that are selected to become reviewers are usually highly articulate in the language of university quality and due to their prior experience are able to engage in discussions, give presentations and lead debates at national conferences. However, in order to do this, students must adopt the management structures and ethos of an institution and abide by the processes and values of review. This has not proved to be a problem for the students involved, despite some initial concerns from institutions that students would not be of high enough calibre, or willing to ask the searching questions required (Attwood, 2008, Stothart, 2008). Students have successfully, to use Fielding’s (2004b) term, been *accommodated* into national systems of university governance and been made capable of performing and developing that role ‘appropriately’.

At a local level, examples were also seen of alternative models to students’ involvement in mechanisms for quality management, in addition to those required in national policy. One senior manager at the Post-92 institution had developed mechanisms for student voice that challenged the discourse of students as consumers and sought to engender a more collegiate relationship between students and staff. In the study, this was seen in one project in which students were employed to work with academics on learning and teaching development. The recent HEA Student as Partners (2013a) project has also identified a number of similar approaches that are supported by senior management and include the

implementation of peer support across the institution, recruiting student ambassadors to develop learning and teaching at a faculty level, and the employment of staff members to lead on student engagement. These approaches were felt by the senior managers and academics at the Post-92 institution to provide a counter balance to the more transactional concerns of surveys and accountability measures by encouraging collaborative working between students and staff. However, the NUS has recently challenged these approaches, suggesting that they are colonising a space that was traditionally the realm of the students' union. Rachel Wenstone NUS Vice-President education said:

"I am deeply concerned with the growing trend of student engagement professionals recruited by institutions to do the job of student engagement – a job that is most properly done by the independent students' union ... Institutions that purport to share power with students are only reinforcing that the power belongs to them to share – or to be taken away if priorities shift or projects do not deliver hoped-for outcomes." (2012)

Wenstone raises some important questions about the motives behind a shift towards the leading of student voice mechanisms by institutions rather than, or in partnership with students and students' unions. Wenstone's concerns suggest that by maintaining control, institutions may be able to shape student voice mechanisms that are less challenging for the institution.

Du Gay's (1997) work suggests that the involvement of students as partners in management, as seen in the use of student reviewers and greater students union and NUS involvement in governance, may not provide such a distinct contrast with ideas around consumers and the market in neo-liberal society. Du Gay identifies

ways in which common managerial rhetoric has sought to align individuals' identities and subjectivities with organisational cultures in order to develop more complex and emotional relationships between people and organisations. This type of alignment is particularly important for senior managers, in a context in which the level of loyalty and satisfaction with an institution is linked to league tables, with knock on effects for student recruitment and institutional finances. Student voice is linked to success in the new world of competition. Du Gay recognises this as the new discourse of enterprise in which:

“staying close to the customer’ is presented as a crucial form of enterprising conduct that every organization must endeavour to learn in order to optimise both its own potential and that of the economy and society more generally” (311)

This erodes the distinction between the notions of consumers and providers and changes the relationships between students, academics and managers in a way that may be seen in the shift towards the discourse of partnership in higher education policy. Through partnership, *“with workers and managers becoming each other’s customers, and customers being used to manage employee relations”* (311), the boundaries that traditionally separated the role of the student, academic and manager become increasingly hazy.

This type of role for students is reflected in the NUS Manifesto for Partnership (2012), which describes partnership as *“shared responsibility - for identifying the problem or opportunity for improvement, for devising a solution, and - importantly - for co-delivery of that solution.”* (8). This was an approach that the Head of Education at the Post-92 institution, who had engaged with the NUS in discussions

about partnerships, suggested that the NUS had 'matured' into a position in which they had less of a role in challenging institutions and more of a role in providing guidance for how institutions should respond to students. This approach is productive; greater collaboration or partnership between students and management can lead to greater power for students and the capacity to affect change. However, as Du Gay (1997) suggests, partnership in this form may symbolise the colonisation of students into a more sophisticated, active version of consumerism in which students become implicated in the university's success or failure. An example of this can be seen in the response of some institutions that, wanting to achieve higher scores in the NSS, have sought through advertising, to relate student feedback in the NSS to the success of the course in league tables (Newman, 2008). This will be discussed later in the chapter in relation to academics and the responsibilisation of students. The identities and subjectivities that this produces for students and academics are considered in more depth later in the chapter.

6.1.6 *Fear of the informal voice*

As has been explored above, students are increasingly being seen as associated with the management of institutions. Those managers involved in this study were often positive about student involvement in these formal ways. However, the managers interviewed were often concerned when student voice occurred in forms that were regarded as unofficial or unendorsed by the institution. Throughout the interviews, formal student voice was often talked about as intrinsically leading to enhancement. This differed when managers and academics talked about types of student voice that were fully in the control of students. Here, two examples are

offered in order to consider the tensions that these reveal about the nature of institutional rhetoric around student voice. One which was described in the interviews with the Post-92 institution in relation to student use of social media to express views, and one from the Russell Group institution in relation to a student protest which took place on campus during the period of the study.

6.1.6.1 Managing student use of social media

In the Post-92 institution, social media was viewed as problematic as an emerging unregulated space for student voice. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor and two of the academics with teaching management responsibility spoke quite candidly in the interviews about student voice as expressed informally through social media. On both the engineering and English courses there had been incidents in which a student had expressed negative views on social media, which had been followed up at an institutional level. The manager and academics recognised this as a form of informal student voice and discussed whether views expressed through social media should be regarded as more authentic than those expressed through formal mechanisms, or whether they represented something that was more extreme due to the nature of social media. The university had taken a hard line with those students who had been identified and had taken students through university disciplinary proceedings, threatened legal action, and had taken legal action against one student. These reactions suggested a fear of the power of the informal student voice when expressed in public through social media which, the Head of English suggested, was related to a desire to protect the reputation of the university. The

institution had recently appointed a social media officer in order to monitor social media and produce guidelines for students and staff about its use.

There are a number of tensions which this example highlights in managers' perspectives of student voice. Firstly, there was incoherence between the rhetoric about the value of student voice by managers, and their actions when student voice took place outside of those processes defined by the institution. Student voice was solicited on the institution's terms, but was regarded as threatening when in an unregulated form. The employment of the social media officer suggested a move to colonise student voice in this arena, setting the boundaries of students' use of social media in order to regulate it. Secondly, the example brings to the fore the concern with reputation over the voice of the student as a consumer. While the suggestion was that the students involved in these incidents expressed offensive points of view, in the world of student choice in the higher education market, the students concerned might well have felt that they had the right to express negative opinions. The students who had expressed views in this format were felt to have not understood acceptable behaviour and as such were seen to be deviant and dangerous. In this way, the institution concerned, sought to control this undesirable type of student voice for the good of the reputation of the institution, and for the good of the student and their future employability (section 6.1.5). Lastly, there was a tension between one manager, who reflected on whether student views given in an informal setting were more authentic, and another who recognised the collective student voice, as heard through formal mechanisms, as being more valid than that of the individual students (section 4.2.1). This suggested that individual students

could be positioned, by some, as illegitimate when they expressed views that were different to the wider group.

6.1.6.2 Responding to student protest

The second example focuses on the experience of students in relation to a protest at the Russell Group institution. Inspired by the Occupy movement, a group of around one hundred students pitched a protest camp in the centre of the campus and invited students and staff to join them for lectures and discussions. A number of lecturers from the institution agreed to take part in these discussions and to present elements of their research that were relevant to the protest. The students involved in the protest issued a series of demands to the Vice-Chancellor, one of which was a request that he visited the camp to speak to the protesters. The students acknowledged that they were aware that this request was unlikely to be met but felt that this highlighted the relationship between students and senior management. This view was further affirmed when, later in the year, the same student worked with the students' union to set up a conference to discuss similar issues that had been discussed at the camp. A number of senior managers attended this conference and gave presentations.

The student, who had been part of the protest, felt that his experience demonstrated that senior managers were only interested in hearing student voice on their own terms. While the senior managers interviewed spoke about wanting students to become critical and independent, and to take ownership of their learning, when this occurred outside the formal mechanisms, this caused some discomfort. Although not formally within the remit of this study, this excerpt from a

letter from the Academic Registrar to a group of students that occupied the council chamber at my own institution in 2013, illustrates this type of institutional response to protest:

"I would also like to respond to your recent email to the Vice-Chancellor and your request that University senior staff come to "debate" the various issues you refer to in your statement. The University already has a wide range of opportunities available for staff and students to engage with the leadership of the university, and elected student representatives already take a full part in a great many committees and governing bodies including amongst others the University's Council, Senate and Senate Steering Committee. I am disappointed that, rather than using these democratic and representative mechanisms, your group has chosen to engage in an unauthorised occupation without availing yourselves of the many opportunities that already exist for dialogue with and within the University."

(Protect the Public University Warwick, 2013)

This highlights questions about the space for student voice in higher education. As was seen in Chapter 5, a number of managerial and academic respondents commented on students' lack of desire to be engaged in the political, and this was supported by the accounts of the students that had chosen not to attend the national protests against fees. However, these comments suggest that where students are political there is little space for the expression of these views within the university. The university, in similar terms to those expressed in the excerpt above, was somewhat indignant about students who acted independently outside formal mechanisms and requested discussion on their own terms. In this context, it is possible to see how students with political views come to understand that these are not 'appropriate' views to express within the university. As the education student

from the Post-92 institution said, many students “*knew it wasn’t going to make a difference*” and so focused on involvement in practical measures in order to improve what was provided by the university (section 4.2.3).

These examples demonstrate quite different institutional reactions to the informal student voice seeking to control through disciplinary procedures and legal action in the case of the Post-92 institution, and through ignoring and marking activity out as illegitimate, within the Russell Group institution. Both demonstrate quite distinct approaches to the governance of students that are united in the labelling of certain types of student voice as deviant and irresponsible. These subjectivities will be explored later in the chapter in relation to the moralisation and responsibilisation of students.

This section has brought together the themes relating to senior management and the development of student voice policy and practice. In particular it has focused on the role that senior managers play in implementing, developing and interpreting the technologies of student voice from government and has problematised some of these discourses and practices using examples from the data and wider literature. As I have discussed previously, these technologies have implications for the identities and subjectivities of the students and academics operating within these. The following section considers the position of students in higher education, their relationships with senior management and academics and explores the complex identities that were present in the data.

6.2 Students

For most students, voice mechanisms are experienced in the department. Very few work directly with senior management become students' union officers or become QAA reviewers. As such, this section focuses on the experiences of students at the department level. All students involved in the study had had some involvement in official student voice mechanisms, such as institutional surveys and course evaluations. In addition to this, a small number of students, perhaps one or two per year group on each course, become student representatives. For those students who were not student representatives, student voice mechanisms were light touch and required a minimal amount of time or personal investment in processes. In contrast, student representatives at each institution were required to attend training, to sign up for carrying out a specific role, and to carry out that role in line with university policies and procedures. Students who are elected as representatives are seen as having a role in amplifying the views of their peers and, as such, analysis of the themes raised in the observations of representation committees are a way to understand some of the matters with which students are concerned. These observations also captured the meeting of academic and student perspectives on courses, providing an interesting site to consider the coherences and tensions between these. The following section considers some of these themes and perspectives in order to explore the role of students in student voice mechanisms.

6.2.1 Student voice and wellbeing

As the analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrated, many of the respondents felt that understanding and ensuring student wellbeing was an important element of student

voice mechanisms. For example, academics spoke about the role that formal student voice mechanisms had in ensuring that students felt that they had been heard, as this was seen as fundamental to the development of students' self-esteem (section 5.2.5.2). Students also spoke about their involvement in representation as, at times, a cathartic experience, which enabled them to relieve some of the pressure of being a student (section 5.2.5.2). These views have been reflected in the emphasis within institutions with 'closing the feedback loop' following surveys and course evaluations, in which students are told of changes made as a result of feedback, in order to be reassured that their views are considered and valued.

This was evidenced in the student representation meetings, where students' concerns about discomfort with particular types of learning were often regarded as implicitly legitimate. The ways in which academics responded to students who expressed discomfort varied. In some instances, such as the students who identified feeling uncomfortable with group work in the engineering department, academics sought to identify approaches that would appease students (such as introducing the opportunity for students to comment on the performance of their peers within a group in order to contribute to the allocation of the final mark), while explaining to students that the discomfort of group work was a reality with which they would have to live throughout their working lives. This approach acknowledged the feelings of students, while engaging in discussion about the rationale behind the teaching approach. However, in the English department, in which students complained about an academic who required students to put together presentations

in small groups without prior warning before the session, there was some discussion of why the academic might have designed the session in that way, but both the student representatives and academics present in the meeting agreed that this placed undue pressure on the students concerned and was unreasonable; the outcome being that the Head of English agreed to discuss this approach to teaching with the academic concerned (section 5.2.5.2).

Concerns with students' vulnerability have been seen in Carey's (2012) recent work on student representation, which has sought to reimagine the way in which students and academics relate through student voice structures. Advocating a more radical and collegiate approach to student voice, he suggests that institutions should acknowledge the structure, culture and biography of individuals who do not engage in student voice activity if they seek to ensure that they become more involved:

"Hence, perspectives on a representative's inactivity (biography) should be shaped by awareness of workload (structure) and their sense of vulnerability (culture). Thus, tackling inactivity requires initiatives that deal with the latter. Likewise, the indifference or hostility of some staff (biography) may be the outcome of traditions that place tutors above students in an unambiguous hierarchy (culture), in conjunction with systems that limit debate (structure). So, sanctioning staff to behave in a more facilitative manner can be complemented by creating opportunities for dialogue." (13)

Carey's recommended approach seeks to challenge institutions to consider the way in which relationships of power within student voice mechanisms shape involvement (ibid). However, his emphasis on students who do not engage as vulnerable, redefines the academic relationships with students into one of guardian or protector

rather than partner. These examples illustrate the extent to which, what Ecclestone and Hayes (2008a) would describe as, the ‘therapeutic’, has pervaded departmental management and teaching practices.

Ecclestone and Hayes (Ecclestone, 2014, 2008a) argue that learning in higher education has come increasingly to be recognised as an emotional business. This, they argue, moves beyond a recognition of the need for academics to be tuned into students’ feelings about learning, to a situation in which many students and staff increasingly “*openly present themselves as having emotional and social problems*”, and see the range of counselling services and emotional and social skills workshops as not only unexceptional but also necessary (86). Ecclestone and Hayes are not suggesting that students who are genuinely unwell should not be provided with help, but that within higher education, students are presented as emotionally vulnerable in a way which erodes belief in the capacity of students. They argue that student subjectivities are produced through a discourse that pathologises what would once have been acknowledged as the normal, everyday, exciting experience of being a young adult away from home, into emotional problems such as family and relationship issues, lack of confidence, worries about failing and being judged, exam stress and feelings of inadequacy (examples taken from the Heads of University Counselling Services (HUCS) website) (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008a: 88-89).

In a similar vein, Furedi has argued that these changes have also been encouraged through the increasing focus on student satisfaction which has led to models of teaching “*in which undergraduates are perceived as biologically immature pupils*

who require constant direction and guidance." (Attwood, 2007). Provision for students' emotional wellbeing does not end outside the classroom as, increasingly, educational developers work to enable academics to manage student uncertainty and develop emotional intelligence as aspects of this concern. An example of this can be seen in the work produced by the HEA (2013b), and numerous authors around assessment feedback, which acknowledges that receiving feedback is emotional and encourages practices such as the 'praise sandwich' in which students are praised, provided with some corrective but constructive comments, and then praised again in order to ensure that their self-esteem is maintained.

Citing Moritboys (2005), a proponent of emotional intelligence in the classroom, who suggests that *"I think therefore I am"* should be replaced by *"I feel therefore I am"* (142), Ecclestone and Hayes (2008a) assert that the university is the *"home of reason and that the more it embraces the emotional, the less it is a university"* (99). If these arguments are valid, these types of practices create a view of the student amongst managers, academics and students themselves, that is limiting in that it protects students from the academic rigour, the critical discussion and the hard, independent work of learning which enables their transformation into a critical being.

That student voice mechanisms were seen by some academics with teaching management responsibility as opportunities to build students' self-esteem, suggests that the wider trends towards a concern with the therapeutic in universities has extended into the evaluation sphere. Students participating were seen as having a lesser capacity to engage in meetings due to their relative lack of power and

perceived vulnerability. Student representatives were asked to express 'issues' and academics then sought to moderate and reassure. In this context some students felt that there was a preoccupation amongst staff with the identification of problems, and that academics perceived that students were only concerned with organisational, or surface matters, rather than discussions about the nature of education or the curriculum. Students understood that they had limited power in course representation committees, as academics were concerned with matters only when they affected a large cohort of students, rather than students individually. In this way ideas around student wellbeing, while driving academics to be inclusive and spend time listening to students, also had consequences for the identities and subjectivities of those engaging student voice mechanisms.

6.2.2 Student voice and the political

The political space was something that students identified, and were observed, as finding uncomfortable both within and outside the classroom. Student voice has long been seen as having a political element. The rise of student voice mechanisms in institutions can be traced through collectivism through the NUS, protests and links to wider political movements, and its eventual formalisation into university processes. However, many of the accounts of managers, academics and students in this study suggested that students no longer participated in formal student voice mechanisms based on political motivations. Active student representatives spoke of their apathy towards student protests against fees, managers recognised that policy changes, such as the publishing of external examiners reports, were driven at a national, not institutional level, and academics acknowledged student disinterest in

fundamental change to the curriculum. Within the students' union movement, nominations of NUS and students' union officers who are aligned to particular political parties, might suggest that students continue to see themselves as political, but the exclusion of any mention of these allegiances in the student manifestos that were analysed at the institutional level in this study, suggested that nominees acknowledged that making political allegiances explicit to students would be unlikely to secure their election.

A phenomenon that has developed in this context is a repositioning of students as *university* citizens with associated ideas of students as responsible. Ann Osler (2008) argues that the way in which the citizenship curriculum in schools has developed suggests a notion of the citizen as an individual that is prepared to comply rather ready to engage with more meaningful forms of democracy. In this form, the focus in universities is on students' *participation* in university-derived political processes, rather than students engaging critically with, or challenging these processes. This perception was reflected in the student representation committees in which students rarely raised any issues that could be defined as challenging or shaping the curriculum in radical ways. In the words of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the Russell Group institution, students were recognised as just "*not political in that way*" (section 5.2.4). In her view, challenges from students who disagreed with different theoretical perspectives, or wanted to discuss the set texts selected for a course, were not part of the discussions that managers and academics had with students as they had been in the past. This suggested a

lessening of engagement of students with their chosen discipline and with political discussions about the content and nature of teaching in institutions.

While staff accounts suggested that students were not engaged in thinking in a political way, two interviews with students at the Russell Group institution challenged this view. Each student had a distinct and articulated view of the purpose of higher education, and their participation in it, and saw their behaviour within the institution in a political way. The English student had not been a student representative but had been involved in the protest on campus in 2011. For him, higher education was about suggesting how the world might be better, and he emphasised a tension between the theories engaged with in the classroom and the opportunities for students to engage in discussions about how the world should be outside of that space. In striking contrast, the engineering student had been a student representative and spoke out against students who had participated in protest. For this student, higher education was about training for employment and, having already secured graduate employment with a defence company, his sights were firmly set on the world of work. He considered those who had participated in the protests with distaste, regarding participating students as not just irresponsible and unprofessional, but also hypocritical given their relatively privileged position in society as students at a Russell Group institution. For this student, these students were naïve, merely playing around before they *“put on a suit and walk into a corporate job when they realise the money that’s on offer”* (section 4.2.3). This tension, between the accounts of the two students, brings to the fore questions about the purpose of universities and suggested that far from being apathetic, the

student who had not been involved in the protest had chosen to do so due to a particular political view.

These questions about what kind of future the students in higher education are preparing for are fundamental to understanding the identities and subjectivities that higher education, and in particular engagement with student voice mechanisms, produces. To use Bragg's (2007) argument in her work relating to schools, universities:

"...are simply doing their job in preparing students to compete in a changed, neo-liberal climate; but this does also raise questions about how far this [student voice] is a middle-class project of the self" (353)

One of the criticisms that could be made of formal student voice mechanisms and of the viewing by senior managers, of unofficial student voice as a threat, is that student voice is only engaged in forms that are comfortable to the institution and reflect the wider, neo-liberal status quo. Formal student voice mechanisms prepare students for a world of graduate professions and offer students the opportunity to develop their skills and experience, but may also leave out other possibilities about ways of living and being. In this way, student voice is powerful; it expands the way in which students are 'made up', providing that they operate within the formal sphere, but can also narrow the way in which students are viewed outside these mechanisms.

6.2.3 'Making up' the student representative

While mechanisms for student voice tend to be designed at the top level of institutions, negotiated by senior managers and students' union officers, these often

play out, and are experienced by a larger number of students, at the level of the department or degree programme. As has been discussed previously in this chapter, the most prevalent of these were course representation committees. As the analysis of the guidance relating to course representation in Chapter 4 demonstrated, handbooks produced by the institution and students' union framed the format of the meetings and the types of issues that were discussed, yet the imperatives informing course representation at the management level of the institutions studied were opaque. Managers and academics with teaching management responsibility were primarily concerned with the conduct and protocols of meetings rather than the purpose of the interaction. As I have discussed previously (Freeman, 2013), this lack of a clear imperative for course representation, led to quite distinct, and at times contradictory views about the purpose of representation in the observations and interviews.

The ways in which the identities and self-understandings of students were shaped by student voice mechanisms were particularly evident in the analysis of data relating to student representation mechanisms, as students and academics took on the process and the associated role as their own. The provision of handbooks and training by the students' union and the institution, its links to institutional quality processes and the consequent potential for review by the QAA, strengthened compliance with institutional processes. Individuals and student representative committees could, of course, choose to reject their given roles, but in the interviews and observations, processes were broadly adopted at face value as the framework for what was legitimate within an institution. Guidance shaped the subjectivities of

students and academics in certain ways “*delimit[ing] what can be said, and how speakers conceive of themselves*” (Bragg, 2007). This set out a notion of what a student representative should be, thereby framing the way in which students and academics related to one another.

Academics and students were in agreement about what, in formal terms, made a ‘good’ student representative. The good student representative was seen as professional, fair, listened and provided a voice *for* and *of* their peers. Traits were mirrored in research by Carey (2012) who interviewed students and managers with regard to their perceptions of the roles of student representatives. Based on discussions with staff, Carey concluded that “*inactive representatives or antagonistic tutors were seen to undermine the impact of representational activity*” (2012: 10). In this study, interaction within student representative committees was largely informed by an understanding of the student as consumer. Students spoke about a wide range of issues that included concerns about costs for hand-outs and provision of resources, while also requesting additional development opportunities such as careers sessions, and highlighted aspects of learning and teaching that made them uncomfortable, such as working in a group. Academics responded to these concerns by suggesting changes in line with student comments or by engaging in the management of expectations, for example by providing explanations of the logistical considerations which underpinned their decisions, providing a series of options for students where change was possible, and offering reassurance. This structuring around formal procedure, together with separate responsibilities for academics and students and a focus on student concerns,

created an environment that was essentially transactional in nature. A culture of 'us and them' was also evident which, in interviews the student representatives recognised as an imbalance of power. Student representatives were aware that while they could make suggestions, academic staff were able to choose whether or not to act.

While student representatives recognised this imbalance of power, it was not something about which they were especially uncomfortable. This view was supported by two managers, one at each institution, who suggested that the majority of students did not want to move beyond a transactional engagement with the university, other than in relation to their learning.

Awareness of, and apathy towards, the imbalance of power between students and academics leads to questions about how students are positioned within representation and whether this positioning leads to the non-participation of some students. There were two aspects to this. While some academics acknowledged student representation as having its roots in democratic traditions, originally stemming from demands in the 1960-70s for greater democratic representation of students, these imperatives were regarded as somewhat out-dated by most participants and by all students. This is not to say that being a student representative was seen as a negative or oppressive experience. All students interviewed regarded being a representative as positive, providing a different perspective from their peers and a better understanding of how things worked. However, students also understood that, in order to participate they were required to play by the rules of the game, an understanding that reinforced senior managers'

and academics' perceptions of most students as apathetic and uninterested in a political student voice. The following section provides some further analysis of how student representatives, participants in one of the most widespread formal mechanisms for student voice, came to understand their role and the identities that were formed within that role.

6.2.4 The responsibilisation of the student

One aspect of coming to understand the 'rules of the game' was a focus on students being responsible for activities and processes which were defined, arguably misleadingly, in official texts and everyday discourse, as 'learning', to find solutions to institutional challenges and, as was seen earlier in the chapter in relation to the partnership model in management, for implementing those solutions. Becoming responsible was seen as part of the process of becoming a representative and behaving professionally. A number of examples of responsibilisation were evident in the ways that students behaved within committee meetings. These were reflected upon within the interviews by academics who talked about student representatives speaking as academics (section 4.1.3). This was also observed within student representative meetings in which students would distance their own views from those of their peers when raising issues that they felt might not be palatable to academic committee members (section 4.1.3). Students recognised that their role as a representative allowed them a certain power but, at times, demonstrated a reluctance to jeopardise this by expressing unpopular views; instead, they sought a way of treading the line between student and academic. This was also reflected by Carey (2013), who identified that students who became

representatives began to associate themselves as part of the ‘course team’, relaying the probable outcome of a request to peers before raising an issue with staff, and feeling embarrassed about raising particular issues, if they regarded them as trivial (81-82). Students were not uncomfortable with this role understanding it to be an intrinsic component of the role of the representative. This marks what Bragg describes as *“reorientation of bonds away from the peer group”* (351), a shift that may have consequences both for the representative, because they shape subjectivities towards a particular understanding of students, and for those students who do not participate. These tensions will be explored later in the chapter.

Du Gay (1997) has written about the ‘hybrid identities’ in which workers in service industries take on the role of both consumer and worker, though organisational practices that encourage the worker to *“produce meaning for customers”* while being *“self-regulating, self-actualising, responsible individual actors who are perpetually responsive to fluctuations in their environment”* (316). Bragg (2007) draws on du Gay’s notion in her analysis of the role of students as partners in schools:

“insofar as they were evaluating teaching and learning, student researchers were consumers of education. Yet they were also engaged in work that approximated to professional (research) practices, and gave up their free time such as lunch breaks to do so” (350)

This dual role was identified in my own and Carey’s (2013) interviews with students, a role which Carey has described as students speaking ‘for’ and ‘of’ peers. Students were required to elicit, collate and give voice ‘for’ peers as part of their role.

Students were comfortable with this as fellow consumers of the same experience as their peers. However, students were also asked to be, what Carey terms, the voice ‘of’ students, in order to justify student behaviour for example, by explaining why a low number of students had completed the NSS. In these instances, students were made responsible for explaining the actions of students (which may not have aligned with their own), and were, as was seen in the careers example in this study, asked to explain what was seen as a lack of professionalism demonstrated by students (section 5.1). Students, while usually comfortable with their role as responsible representatives, would occasionally express their discomfort when asked to speak *of* students, finding these situations, in the words of one representative following the careers incident, ‘awkward’. By working in positions of responsibility, student representatives were occasionally placed in positions in which they were held accountable for being the ‘wrong’ kind of consumers.

6.2.5 *The enterprising student*

Another relevant phenomenon, which Bragg (2007) identified in her work about school students as researchers, was the development in students of practices of “*reflexivity and self-problematization*” (352). These practices were evident in many of the interviews with student representatives as they reflected on their own practice and that of peers. For example, the first year engineering representative at the Russell Group institution described the transition of students during their time at the institution as growing up, moving from making complaints to taking action to solve problems (section 5.2.4). This demonstrated complex engagement with

technologies of the self as the student had come to see himself and others from outside the self, becoming both the object and subject of knowledge.

In relation to schools, Bragg describes this problematisation of the self as *“internal policing in which students become their own critics, rather than through a hierarchy in which students are told what to do”* (352). This may be reflected in the technologies of the self that are shaped by student voice mechanisms in the university domain. Large student numbers, increasing consumer demands, due to the raising of fees, and external economic pressures combine to mean that what students expect from a university education may not match what institutions are able to provide. In this context, student voice mechanisms that encourage students to manage their own behaviour and that of others, provides a useful approach to governing students. Students who participate in formal student voice mechanisms are able to provide a counterbalance to those students who participate in informal mechanisms such as protests or social media. Furthermore, the increasing focus on student voice in schools means that, for some students, enterprising identities are being shaped from an early age, meaning that students arrive at university with expectations of their own behaviour and that of others.

This view of students as enterprising and self-managing is also linked to the emphasis on employability that is increasingly pervasive in higher education. Many student representatives cited one of the reasons for becoming a student representative as related to their later employability. In the context of a higher education that is increasingly concerned with ensuring that students meet the needs of business, the more active student voice mechanisms provide an opportunity for

students to develop those skills identified as making them employable. These included gaining confidence, experience, chairing and administering committees, understanding organisations: as the Head of English at the Russell Group institution summarised, *“you can do a lot in student politics”* (section 5.2.1.6). This concern links to the wider context of ever-increasing opportunities for students to develop the skills for employment and the use made of rhetoric around employment for recruiting students to activities such as student representation, sports teams and societies.

Employability permeates many areas of higher education; the Careers Service is regarded as a core service within most institutions; students’ rights to careers support and advice are reified in the QAA Quality Code; academics are encouraged to embed employability in the curriculum and to make opportunities to develop skills such as team working, presentation, communication and problem-solving, explicit in learning outcomes; students are encouraged to use their holidays to gain work experience and to attend sessions on how to present that experience to employers on their return. In this way students are encouraged to become what Gordon (1987) terms, the ‘entrepreneur of the self’, in which economic and psychological theories of motivation are combined (300). As an entrepreneur, Gordon (1991) argues that, whatever circumstances an individual finds him or herself in, they remain continually engaged in *“the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one’s own human capital”* (44). By positioning workers in this way, the individual becomes responsible for his or her own personal development, advancement and care, and those who do not

participate become framed as irresponsible. This equips students to go out into the world of employment, but also marks the increasing alignment of the values of higher education with those of the work place, illustrating the role that institutions play in placing the responsibility on students to align themselves with the needs of employers.

Du Gay (1997) argues that this shift has come at a time when similar processes of pathologising have shifted elsewhere in public services, where phenomena previously regarded as structural and social, such as homelessness and unemployment, have been individualised as a moral responsibility for one's own circumstances. Du Gay argues that contemporary work is hybrid in that it "*is both an economic and a cultural phenomenon*" in which humans are perceived as enterprising and are made responsible for their own advancement and care through 'choices' (du Gay, 1997: 302). Du Gay uses examples from the public sector of the unemployed being rebranded as 'job seekers', a trend also seen in education in which pupils and students are increasingly referred to as 'learners'. In this context, power is identified as productive, since individuals are able to construct themselves through the 'information that they provide' and participate in a range of technologies in order to develop personal and professional identities.

Numerous mechanisms in higher education institutions coalesce to focus on employability, passing responsibility down to students. Employer groups claim that university courses do not provide students with the right attributes and should be investing more in ensuring students leave with the right skills, and institutions are held accountable by the annual Destinations for Leavers in Higher Education

survey, which surveys students 6-months after graduation to establish their employment status and feeds the outcomes into university data sets and subsequently league tables. As such, the implication is that institutions are responsible for students who are unable to find work following graduation. In turn, students who have been offered the range of opportunities to gain the 'skills required', are made responsible for their lack of employable attributes or insufficient planning. In each instance, the wider economic circumstances in which both universities and graduates find themselves in tend to be ignored.

In order to become employable students are required to submit to what Ball (2004) describes as the fabrication of the self. Students are encouraged to think not just about how to meet the demands of the institution, but also to fabricate themselves in a form that is attractive to employers in order to become marketable. In fabricating the self for employment *"the point is to make yourself different and, in the case of representational texts [such as CVs], to express yourself in relation to the performativity of the organisation"*, hence the focus on presentation and on skills over ethics and values (Ball, 2004: 151). In this context, formal student voice mechanisms provide a key way in which students can gain the skills relevant for employment, enhancing the students' marketability.

As has been discussed previously, in order to gain that experience, students were aware that they were playing a role, they recognised the inequalities relating to their position within committees, and were at times confused about the limits of discussion that took place, but understood these to be the rules of the game. Ball (2004) describes this playing along as creating a type of *"structural and individual*

'schizophrenia' in which *"the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness is increasingly an everyday experience for us all"* (147). Through signing up to this experience of university, as a place in which students are both managed and self-managed to become employable, students are produced who believe that in order to be employable they must play the institutional game, however inauthentic the experience feels. Yet, this context was complex. Students were positioned as responsible and enterprising but this sat alongside a growing understanding of students as emotionally vulnerable and requiring support. These tensions are explored further later in the chapter.

6.2.6 Resistance and exclusions

While most students engage in student voice mechanisms which require relatively little investment, such as national surveys and course evaluations, the more intensive experience of voice, such as becoming a student officer, representative or engaging in more collegiate student voice projects, is for the minority. Through becoming responsible and enterprising, these students participate, but by doing so were often seen to reorient themselves from their peers, not least by 'speaking like an academic'. We have also seen how some students who participate as representatives come to regard students who do not take part, or who take part in informal mechanisms, as being naïve or irresponsible. Increasingly students are being normalised as responsible citizens who are proactive, enterprising and reflexive within formal student voice mechanisms. At a time when there is an increasing emphasis on students as customers and the university as provider, there is shift *"on to individuals' responsibility to maximise opportunities, take advantage,*

become autonomous; if they do not, this may be read as personal failure” (Bragg, 2007: 353).

There are opportunities for greater power for students within student voice, but there are also subjectivities that are normalised by assumptions about students and about higher education. These are seen; in the reactions of senior managers to students who are involved in informal student voice mechanisms such as protest; in studies that have shown that some students do not see participation in student voice as desirable (Little et al., 2009, van der Velden et al., 2013), and in others that have acknowledged that certain groups of students may not so readily have access to the values that are required in order to participate in opportunities that are on offer (Bragg, 2007: 355).

This study suggests, then, that university students are operating in a complex environment in which they have become known as consumers, as vulnerable, but also as responsible and enterprising. In the world of higher fees and greater student numbers, students are becoming increasingly governed through technologies of dominance, and of the self, in the name of developing the ‘right kind’ of graduate. Yet, the nature of the graduate subjectivities that are produced within the university, are rarely discussed critically.

Through analysis of student voice mechanisms, it has been possible to explore the multiple ways in which students are ‘made up’ within higher education. These new subjectivities have come from a variety of sources, including student voice mechanisms, in the wake of increased student tuition fees and the associated

discourses of accountability and student rights. While, in many ways, this does provide students with greater power, this comes at the cost of the intensification of relationships, legislation and control in relation to students, students' unions and departments. Students, who in traditional models of higher education were encouraged to be critical and to pursue the extension of subject-based truth and knowledge, must now become responsible and enterprising with and on behalf of the institution.

6.3 Academics

Policy changes, such as the NSS, KIS data sets and the formalisation of student representation in the QAA Quality Code, have had implications for academics that teach, and those who manage teaching. The new identities and subjectivities discussed in the previous section, which these mechanisms produce for students, also have implications for the subjectivities of academics within departments. This section explores the ways in which academics experience student voice and the new identities that the resulting relationships with students and senior managers produce.

6.3.1 The influence of comparison and commodification

The interviews showed clearly that for many academics, government and institutional policies relating to formal student voice mechanisms had a significant impact on both their practice and identity. Government policies on student voice shaped the types of work that academics, particularly those with teaching management roles, were required to undertake, and their understanding of their relationship with students and with senior managers. In departments that scored

well in the NSS, considerable time was invested in securing participation in the survey but for most academics the impact of results was minimal, beyond the occasional reporting of scores and initiatives in staff meetings. For those in departments that were seen as under-performing, and those with teaching management responsibility, the work around the NSS was significant, time consuming and influential for decisions made about teaching.

In this study, the NSS was one of the most discussed technologies for student voice by academics and managers. It also was felt to be one of the most significant factors for the reputation of the institutions that took part. While there were differences observed between the Post-92 and Russell Group universities, the former tending to achieve lower scores in the NSS than the latter, the survey was a key management concern for each institution. Senior managers recognised the impact that the survey had in terms of their position in league tables, and as such, each institution had identified a Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for managing the publicity associated with the NSS, and engagement with departments following the publication of results in order to develop improvement plans. In this way, student voice through the survey had come to be seen by academics as a key measurement of departmental performance.

The link between the survey and the shift towards understanding students as consumers was acknowledged, although this was rarely seen to be a positive phenomenon. Alongside the survey's alignment with the new market values for higher education, managers and academics saw the survey as "*comparetheuniversity.com*" referring to the inclusion of the results in league tables

(Times, Guardian, Complete University Guide) and the use of outcomes by the government to inform the choices of prospective students (HEFCE, 2012) (section 5.2.1.2). Academics and managers also recognised the survey as a crucial approach for rendering institutions and departments accountable to the public and the government. Some respondents challenged the validity and value of the survey, but nevertheless, all engaged in the management, implementation, action planning, target setting and action implementation required. This took a significant amount of time and personal and financial investment for managers and academics.

As was discussed in the Sabri quote at the start of this thesis (Grove, 2013), the high-stakes nature of the survey has led to the development of techniques, tactics and games played by institutions and academics in the implementation of the survey. Interviews with managers and academics showed evidence of highly articulated approaches to securing positive responses. These included avoiding particular times of year, achieving the balance of encouraging completion of the survey without hassling students, which was seen as likely to result in negative responses, encouraging academics to always be positive about the institution, linking NSS with league tables and employer perceptions of degrees when promoting the survey, explaining the meaning of terms on the survey to students, and using Students' Unions to support the survey. High profile examples of these strategies have hit the headlines in the Times Higher Education (THE) and have included Anglia Ruskin and London Metropolitan universities, where senior managers instructed staff to ensure students were aware of how their responses would affect the reputation of their degree, and at Kingston University where an

academic was recorded telling students *"If Kingston comes bottom, the bottom line is that no one is going to want to employ you because they'll think your degree is shit"* (Newman, 2008).

Furedi has written about the considerable enterprise around the NSS in which academics are appealed to *"be on their best behaviour and do the business"* and students are assured that their *"views are really very important and that, in any case, if their name is drawn they can win a "fantastic prize!"* (2012). In this study, these strategies, and the articulated experiences of academics and managers demonstrated the high-stakes nature of the survey and highlighted its strength as a technology of governance.

6.3.2 Academic performance and student voice

Ball (2003, 2004, 2012, 2013) has written extensively about the orientation of technical mechanisms towards senior management requirements over those of academic staff. For Ball, this is an element of performativity as:

"a powerful and insidious policy technology that is now at work at all levels and in all kinds of education and public service, a technology that links effort, values, purposes and self-understandings to measures and comparisons of output." (Ball, 2012:19)

Through performativity, those aspects which are determined to be of worth by the government and by management, such as marks of good performance, come to be seen as valuable over others. For Ball, this ensures that academic production is geared *"to the requirements of national economic competition"* (Ball, 2004: 145).

Crucially, the statistics produced through surveys, reviews and documents developed for the purpose of audit, come to be valued over first-order activities such as teaching or interaction with students. New identities related to what it means to be a 'good' academic, a teacher or researcher are created, which can be empowering and enhancing for some who are able to produce the second-order evidence required. For others, they can be simultaneously threatening and riddled with inauthenticity as they strive to achieve values that are imposed elsewhere (Ball, 2004:144).

Of course student voice is just one way through which academic performance is measured in institutions in the UK; research income, REF scores, and contribution to administration are used, along with student voice, as measurements of academic performance. Through the NSS, course evaluations, and the regular submission of reports and reviews to central teaching quality departments, student voice mechanisms become rituals, that "*naturalise discourses of control*" and routines, that "*address forms of identity by treating people in terms of the identities of the discourses of performativity*" (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985 quoted by Ball, 2004: 144).

As Ball (ibid) argues, this creates an environment in which:

"academics and teachers are represented and encouraged to think about themselves as individuals who calculate about themselves, 'add value' to themselves, improve their productivity, live an existence of calculation" (153)

Ball describes this new form of management as a shift away from management through structure and being visible, to a more continuous flow of judgements, demands and expectations about performance, an interplay of technologies of the

self and dominance, which shape practice and values. To perform well, the academic must constantly ask, *“are we doing enough? Are we doing the right thing? How will we measure up?”* (153).

This type of questioning was encouraged in relation to the NSS through the production of rankings by each institution that enabled departments to see how their performance ranked in relation to other departments. These were accompanied by a series of collective events at which senior academics are encouraged to share good practice and identify areas for change. In this way the NSS, other surveys, and collections of data relating to teaching activity such as the KIS, become social and interpersonal technologies of governmentality to which academics are subject and in which they participate. In a recent publication, Sabri (2013), who conducted focus groups, interviews and analysis of the free text answers in the NSS, draws on De Santos (2009) to argue that the survey has become a ‘fact totem’, a phenomenon in which public numbers, such as those produced by the NSS, become a site of ‘intense attention’ that link to the production and consumption of identity narratives (467). As Ball (2004) suggests:

“They are folded into complex institutional, team, group and communal relations – the academic community ... We sit on peer reviews, we write the accountability reports, we assign grades to other departments, we berate our colleagues for their ‘poor’ productivity, we devise, run and feed departmental and institutional procedures for monitoring and improving output” (145)

Despite the presence of cynicism about the NSS amongst both managers and academics in this study, emotional cultures of pride and of shame were built up around the NSS which had a significant impact on the way in which departments

and academics were seen, and saw themselves. These rituals and routines required a level of emotional investment on the part of those with teaching management responsibility and informed a concern with building cultures within departments which are geared to ensuring good performance in the NSS. For example, initiatives that sought to build the sense of community amongst students and policies to regulate approaches to assessment feedback. These cultures were also reported in Sabri's (2013) study which suggested that the experiences identified in the case studies reflect those of academics within other institutions.

Academics were held accountable for the performance of their department, receiving phone calls or formal visits from senior managers if scores were low; and what one academic referred to as 'a telling off'. Academics were called upon to defend their practices and those of others to management who were seen to be suspicious of academics who sought to explain their understanding of why a department may have received a low score. Through these activities, academics participate in the reproduction of new subjectivities for themselves as responsible for departmental culture and for students as recipients, but also co-creators of those cultures. The academics who understood the survey data to be of limited value and validity, described a personal and ideological tension, as they recognised the imperative of responding to the survey in order to meet the expectations of senior management and secure the reputation of the department. Sabri (2013) argued, that for the academics in her study, this led to a sense of powerlessness amongst the academics with whom she worked.

6.3.3 Academic professionalism and identity

The impact of scoring poorly in the NSS was felt most by those academics with teaching management responsibility. In interviews, academics who taught, but were not responsible for teaching management, reported a passing concern for the NSS but talked about gaining more from course evaluations of their teaching. Usually undertaken at the end of a module, these evaluations were formal in that a senior member of the department monitored completed forms. These evaluations often fed into academic appraisals at the department level and so were regarded by academics as a localised measure of performance. All academics included in the study took part in these with varying amounts of commitment or scepticism, with some using them to check that there was nothing seriously wrong (Academic Engineering, Russell Group), while others reported feeling nervous and engaging in considerable personal reflection, following receipt of the results (Academic English, Russell Group). For many of the academics interviewed, module evaluations were seen as having an impact on their reputation with senior departmental staff.

Students were in a potential relationship of power as their responses could have consequences for academics as one of a number of performance measures related to teaching and research. In contrast to the US, where student evaluations can have a significant impact on tenure decisions, English academics were more likely to be singled out for additional training following poor evaluation responses. Yet there was also evidence of evaluations being used increasingly as an early indicator of student satisfaction. This was challenging for some of the academics interviewed as

they felt that evaluation forms did not always provide the information that they needed in order to understand students' views and experiences in a timely or informative way. This was reflected in Freeman and Dobbins (2013) discussions with academics and informed our call for more dialogical approaches to course evaluation, and academic ownership of the process in order to secure greater value from the activity for academics and students.

All of these rituals and routines create new kinds of identities and subjectivities for academics which Furedi (quoted by Attwood, 2012) argues, have eroded academic integrity more than any other approach to auditing academic life. Citing examples of lecturers who have been asked to reorganise modules in order to secure better levels of satisfaction, Furedi suggests that the imperative of satisfaction is seen first and foremost over other potential imperatives for learning, as satisfaction becomes equated with a measurement of course quality. He goes on to suggest that:

“The exhortation to raise student-satisfaction rates conveys an implicit demand to alter academic identity and behaviour. Unlike previous auditing measures, the NSS does not merely demand accountability but directly challenges the identity of a scholar.” (Attwood, 2012)

For Furedi (Attwood, 2012), the pervasiveness and high-stakes nature of the survey has led to *“the adoption of a risk-averse and defensive approach towards the provision of undergraduate courses.”* It was evident in the interviews and observations that academics were coming to see themselves in new ways in relation to the management of the survey, and that, at times, approaches to teaching were altered in order to ensure that they were aligned more explicitly with

the survey questions. This was seen in the interviews with academics with teaching management responsibility in their concern for the management of expectations.

Academics with teaching management responsibility felt they had a significant role in ensuring that students understood what it was, and was not, reasonable to expect from academics, the department and the institution. Examples of expectations that had to be managed by academics were provided in the interviews, including the timing and organisation of modules, the nature and timing of feedback on assessment, and the rationale of different types of learning activities. These types of discussion were regarded by academics as important as they were able to explain to students the rationale behind elements of the course with which students expressed dissatisfaction.

Some academics found that there was a tension between their desire to improve their course and the long-term student satisfaction, and the shorter-term, reactionary measures that they were encouraged to put in place. Academics with teaching management responsibility saw themselves as having a role in managing the interface between academic decisions about teaching, and students who challenged these approaches. This relationship was seen as high-stakes and potentially dangerous because failure to manage expectations would have significant consequences for the reputation of the department. The observations and interviews in this study, suggested that student representative committees were often seen by academics as an opportunity for academics to defend departmental practices to students. Academics' subjectivities within this context were enterprising in the name of performance and marketability to students. Their role was to act

when changes can be easily made, and to justify themselves and others if change requested by students was not practical or seen as the right thing to do.

Approaches to this differed between the student representation committees observed, with academics in the English committee seeking to meet student demands wherever possible, and the academics in engineering tending to seek to articulate the rationale in order to justify ways of working within the department. In both contexts academics sought to be 'user-friendly' in order to engender student satisfaction.

Analysis of the data in this study concurs with arguments made by Ball (2004), who describes individuals' constructions of themselves for the purposes of performance as the fabrication of the self. He argues that the problem with these versions of the self is that they are:

"versions of an organisation (or person) which does not exist – they are not 'outside the truth' but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts - they are produced purposely 'to be accountable'" (2004: 148)

For some academics this was empowering: having fully grasped the game, they are able to construct identities around student satisfaction. Indeed, those academics with teaching management responsibility were highly skilled at negotiating the demands of students and reconciling these with their own values about what the degree should be, along with their other academic concerns, such as research. However, for others, adopting practices in the name of the imperative of student satisfaction marked the erosion of their integrity and sense of self, as they were required to fabricate themselves in ways that seem alien. Ball terms this as the

madness of the requirements of performativity, leading to *“personal and social inauthenticity”*. Here he draws on Giddens (1991: 91) to suggest that academics may experience personal meaninglessness, due to a separation from the *“moral resources”*, the capacity to make decisions based on their own ethical and moral values, *“necessary to live a full and satisfying existence”*.

6.3.4 Resisting new subjectivities

Ball's (2004) concern for performativity in higher education is not just that it gets in the way of 'real academic work' but rather that *“it is a vehicle for changing what real academic work is”* (152). The NSS and other mechanisms that were used by managers to hold academics to account required a significant investment in terms of mind, body and soul. As Sabri (2013) suggests, based on her interviews with managers, the NSS *“served as a ‘lever’ to induce change in low-performing (in NSS terms) courses”* (5). In response to this, some academics passively resisted the increasing demands of performativity, seeking to be seen to meet with the requirements of performance, in order to allow them to get on with aspects of their job that they regarded as important. This approach was recognised by the Head of Education at the Post-92 institution as a culture of compliance, which he felt eroded the value of many of the processes within institutions that were designed to secure improvements. Giving the example of the use of course evaluations to inform appraisal in departments, he suggested that this use undermined their use for the improvement of teaching, as academics understood the performance management purpose of the evaluations, to take precedent over their use for course improvement. His account highlighted two of Ball's (2004) criticisms of

performativity. First, the prioritising within a culture of performativity of what is seen to be done, over what is done and, second, that producing the information required for accountability, monitoring and management, “*consumes so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvement inputs*” (Elliott, 1996: 15). In this context, resistance for some academics came to be about being seen to engage with issues arising from formal student voice mechanisms, focusing effort around improvement on areas that were seen as likely to improve future satisfaction, rather than on a wider regard for engaging students with learning and the discipline.

In contrast, some academics had sought to resist these elements of cultures of performativity by engaging in learning and teaching activities that encouraged more active student involvement and developing alternative, additional approaches to evaluating their teaching. Some academics interviewed had taken part in institutional opportunities to work with students in more collaborative ways; others had sought funding or developed their own approaches informally. For example, the Russell Group academic in the English department talked about how she had reclaimed module evaluation by inviting a group of students to attend her modules and to discuss them with her afterwards in order to improve her teaching (section 5.2.2.2). Her ownership of the approach, and the lack of the outcomes as formal measures of performance, meant that she found it a useful and empowering way to think about and develop her teaching.

One of the uniting features of the mechanisms that academics saw as resisting the more dominant formal approaches was the closer relationship that they had with the

discipline. Those academics who sought to fulfil their own values, through engagement with students, did so at the subject level. This was not always seen as safe. It was recognised that collaborative learning may be seen as more challenging by students, which could lead to an academic becoming unpopular, but working with students in relation to the discipline was what motivated some academics to develop their teaching. Despite their commitment to alternatives, there was recognition amongst academics and managers, that any localised mechanisms were undertaken to supplement, not replace formal student voice mechanisms. As such, engagement in alternative, more collaborative forms was often marginalised by the predominance of the demands relating to the NSS, course evaluations and student representation. This highlighted a tension between what academics understood as being a valuable space to engage with students, and the formal mechanisms valued by government and senior management which tended to focus on course organisation and management.

This tension was also evident in the accounts of the students interviewed, for whom course evaluations and the NSS held very little importance at all, a trend which was also noted by Sabri (2013) in her focus groups with students about the NSS.

Students were confused about the purpose of course evaluations and while a few had been involved in discussions about the outcome of the NSS with departments, the outcomes were not regarded as relevant to them beyond as a mark of reputation for the department. Indeed, a number of students talked about the NSS being irrelevant because anyone with any sense would give the department a good score in order to enhance the value of their degree. Course representation was

seen as more valuable as it was an opportunity to discuss the content and organisation of the course, but, as was previously discussed, many students understood that discussion was limited in this context. This raises the question of whether the focus on formal mechanisms for student voice has, in fact, provided students with more power, or whether the national and institutional focus on these forms undermines the relationship between students and academics that is required to enable transformational learning to take place. Increasingly, academic time is allocated to the management of learning and teaching rather than the development and engagement in teaching.

These accounts, along with those in relation to students earlier in the chapter, raise questions about whether formal student voice has, in part at least, been developed as a concession for students who, due to growing student numbers, have limited engagement with academics at the discipline level. This view was reflected by a number of managers who felt that student voice mechanisms were particularly important in departments in which students were hard to reach, or spent a considerable time off campus. For example, the students' union manager, responsible for overseeing student representation in the Post-92 institution, talked about students who worked closely with academics as part of their course, such as postgraduate research students and those in the department of art and design, not requiring the same structures for voice as students did elsewhere in the institution as they had stronger relationships with academics. This suggested that, to some extent, more structured formal voice mechanisms filled the gap where departments

had large student numbers, or teaching practices that allowed for little contact between students and academics.

In this context, opportunities for staff and students to relate to each other outside the discourse of the consumer and provider become limited, leaving little time and resource for alternative approaches to education. As we have seen with senior management in this study, this does not mean that alternative forms are not valued, but that the wider context shapes the identities and subjectivities of students and academics in such a way that relating to each other differently becomes challenging, risky and exceptional.

As Bragg has said in relation to student voice in schools, the strengthening of student voice is not a sham but *“it comes at the cost of an intensification of relations of domination – the requirement (even if not fulfilled) to assent with heart not just body, to give an inner commitment not just outer conformity”* (356). Engagement in student voice mechanisms can be empowering, and can lead to new insight and ways of relating to each other, but it can also come at the cost of formalising ways of being, that in turn, shape relationships and values. It is also worth noting that while empowering for some, student voice mechanisms, such as the NSS and course representation, had also served to marginalise students and academics whose values around higher education did not fit the dominant mechanisms. As such, those participating in the informal, through protest or social media, or whose views were simply unpalatable, came to be regarded as illegitimate or immature by those students, academics and senior managers who did participate. This was despite recognition within these groups that their own participation in student voice

mechanisms was not always authentic. This study has demonstrated that through student voice mechanisms, much is gained, but that there is also loss, and this loss has consequences for what higher education is, or can be.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which the technologies of dominance identified in Chapter 4 and the technologies of the self, identified in Chapter 5, interplay in complex ways to shape the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and senior managers, answering the fourth of my sub-questions. The study has been undertaken during a period of considerable change for the sector, which has led to changes in the way in which students and academics are 'made up' by government and by institutions. This has led to an intensification of policy, guidance and practice relating to what it means to be a student, and what it means to be an academic in higher education. These new ways of working, and of being in higher education, mark new forms of power and governmentality. These are explored further in Chapter 7, alongside some suggested implications for policy and practice.

7 CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

At the start of the thesis I set out to explore power in relation to student voice.

Recognising the dominance of quantitative large-scale measurements, I sought to explore the experiences and understandings that current mechanisms for student voice shaped for managers, academics and students and to examine the relationships of power. Using Foucault's concept of governmentality, I have explored the complexity of different relationships, identities and subjectivities that are produced, shaped and informed, by student voice and the wider context of higher education in which it operates, in iterative ways.

In Chapter 4, I explored the experiences of students, academics and managers in relation to student voice mechanisms as technologies of dominance, developing an enhanced understanding of individuals' descriptions and experiences of formal and informal mechanisms. Chapter 5 focused on the technologies of the self, the complex ways that individuals understood the imperatives for different student voice mechanisms, exploring the coherences and tensions that these brought about.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, I focused on the identities and subjectivities that were shaped, produced and responded to in complex, intertwined ways for students, academics and managers in relation to student voice.

In this chapter I will begin by synthesising the findings relating to the research sub-questions, relating them to the overall question 'does student voice in higher education in England represent new forms of power and governmentality?'. I then reflect critically on my experience of scholarship for this study, reflecting on the theoretical framework, my orientation to the research process and the methodology

and methods used. I then suggest a series of recommendations, based on the findings, for civil servants and government ministers, the QAA, NUS, institutional managers and students' unions in order to promote the wider implications of the research. Lastly, I reflect on the theoretical implications for student voice as new forms of power and governmentality in higher education.

7.1 Evaluating the research questions

The research questions were developed on the basis of the concerns outlined in Chapter 1, an initial review of the literature and my experience from working in a variety of roles relating to student voice in the sector, that student voice mechanisms were based on both an assumed ideological neutrality and an implicit expectation of enhancement, which disguised more complex relationships of governance and power. In this context I sought to problematise student voice and what participation, and non-participation means for those involved. I recognised that student voice was taking an increasingly prominent role in higher education policy and guidance and was interested in whether this emphasis related to new forms of power. This led to the overall research question "Does student voice in higher education in England represent new forms of power and governance in a changing system?".

Different groups are implicated in policy discourse and I wanted to explore the differences in experiences for these groups and the subjectivities that participation in student voice mechanisms produced. As such, the research questions were informed by a critical-interpretive theoretical framework, and were designed to develop a detailed understanding of how student voice took place in different

contexts and individuals' experience of this, and also to problematise this policy and practice using Foucault's concept of governmentality, in order to explore the complexity of power. Different sub-questions made use of the critical and interpretative approaches to research, to different extents. For example, the research relating to the following sub-questions was primarily interpretative in nature:

1. How do students, academics and senior management describe and experience student voice mechanisms?
2. What are the explicit and implicit imperatives which inform student voice?

Through interviews, individual accounts of participation in various forms of student voice were collected. These are presented in Chapter 4: Technologies of Dominance, as descriptive accounts of students, academics and senior managers' experiences of different student voice mechanisms, forming the interpretative basis for the research. These accounts were supplemented by CDA of key documents which added a critical layer to the data.

In a critical vein, other sub-questions sought to problematise some of these accounts and experiences in order to explore the identities and subjectivities that involvement in different mechanisms produced:

3. What are the coherences and contradictions between the imperatives?
4. How are the identities and subjectivities of students, academics and managers informed by student voice?

5. What are the implications for student voice policy and practice?

The use of the hybrid, critical-interpretive approach, enabled the critical analysis undertaken to be discussed in relation to the accounts and experiences of those who participated. The focus on student voice mechanisms at the macro, meso and micro levels enabled a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon in two locations as it was shaped, implemented and experienced. As with any small-scale study, the findings and conclusions presented in this chapter need further verification with a broader sample of students, academics and managers from other subject disciplines and higher education institutions. While this study suggested some broad commonality between the experiences in the Post-92 and Russell Group case studies, practices and approaches were highly localised and differed to some extent between subject-disciplines.

In response to these questions, and in order to provide some closing reflections on the process of this research:

Section one: evaluates the findings relating to how students, academics and managers experience student voice mechanisms.

Section two: evaluates the findings in relation to the different ideologies and imperatives that were identified as informing student voice mechanisms and the coherences and contradictions of these.

Section three: evaluates the findings in relation to the identities and subjectivities produced for students, academics and managers through student voice mechanisms.

Section four: critically evaluates my experience of scholarship for this study and the theoretical framework and methodology used.

Section five: makes recommendations for civil servants and government ministers, the QAA, NUS, institutional managers and students' unions.

Section six: suggests theoretical implications for student voice as a new form of power and governmentality in higher education.

7.2 Section 1: implications of the student, academic and management experience of student voice mechanisms

As was presented in the analysis in Chapter 4, student voice was experienced very differently by students, academics, and managers and by individuals within those groups. As was explored in more detail in Chapter 6, the managers, academics and students interviewed often had quite different perspectives of the types of student voice that were valuable. Certain mechanisms preoccupied different groups of respondents and acted as technologies of dominance that shaped what was regarded as legitimate voice within institutions.

These mismatched preoccupations of different groups highlight the complexity of the experiences and understandings that individuals hold in relation to student voice mechanisms. They also demonstrate how policies, which have been seen as empowering for students within the market of higher education, are shaping the way in which institutions, students and academics regard each other. The range of experiences presented in Chapter 4 illustrate how students, academics and managers participating in student voice mechanisms, have very different

understandings of forms of student voice and experience participation in mechanisms in distinct ways. This has implications for the way in which mechanisms are designed and evaluated by institutions if participation is to be meaningful for those who take part. These are explored further in the next section and recommendations for different higher education audiences, relating to these implications, are included later in the chapter.

7.3 Section 2: implications of the imperatives and ideologies, coherence and contradictions

Student voice mechanisms are not neutral; a range of different imperatives, ideologies and discourses informs them in subtle, complex and iterative ways. This study has shown how some of these imperatives are embedded in formal mechanisms at the design stage, while others are created through the implementation of mechanisms. This finding is significant as many of the formal documents studied were opaque about the values that informed their development, referring instead to catchall imperatives, such as enhancement. In this context, students and academics were able to construct their own individual imperatives when engaging in a particular mechanism. This may be seen as empowering but, in fact, often resulted in different individuals and groups who engaged in student voice mechanisms talking at cross-purposes and, at times, experiencing frustration or apathy in relation to mechanisms as a result.

Exploring the coherence and contradictions for those participating in student voice mechanisms was facilitated by a focus on technologies of dominance, the mechanisms and policies that were analysed in Chapter 4, and the imperatives,

ideologies and self-understandings that were presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Foucault's (Martin et al., 1988) concept of governmentality, and suggestion that by focusing on the points where these technologies meet it is possible to explore the dynamics of power, provided an informative framework for exploring power in these contexts.

The imperatives identified in this thesis worked in powerful ways that shaped the identities and roles that students and academics adopted when participating in mechanisms and activities, and created new subjectivities in an iterative and intertwined process. Through various mechanisms, students came to be seen by academics as passive consumers in some contexts, and as responsible and enterprising in others. Some of these identities were set out in official documents and guidance such as that provided by government or produced by universities; others were based on an implicit understanding of the 'rules of the game' gleaned from peers, training and the media and the ways in which individual institutions' management and accountability cultures translated these rules. These imperatives and practices were powerful and shaped the way in which people participated and understood their role and capacity in these contexts. They were also highly complex, implicit and tacitly internalised. The lack of recognition or discussion of values meant that students and staff at all levels of the study were often unclear about for whom a mechanism or activity was designed, and consequently, the value of engagement with it.

To engage in activity, without acknowledging explicitly the ideological purpose or imperatives of those who have designed the process or of those engaging in it, can

lead to tensions, confusion and frustrations and a lack of recognition of the types of subjectivities that are produced. Essentially, the opacity of the imperatives that informed student voice mechanisms was disempowering as it distanced individuals from the means of understanding the purpose of the mechanism in which they participated. Many of the interview respondents remarked that taking part in the study was their first opportunity to articulate to another, the methods through which they made sense of the systems in which they engaged.

Collaborative processes for defining and promoting shared ideologies, and an understanding of what student voice is about in a particular context, are important for enabling authentic participation. This should take place at the lowest structural level that is appropriate for an institution. For students and staff to share their understandings of what student voice mechanisms are, and should be, within their own individual context, a heightened awareness could be facilitated of where imperatives differ and a shared understanding developed of the purpose of a given mechanism. By articulating and exploring the range of imperatives in this thesis, I encourage individuals to consider the imperatives for different mechanisms in their own context, and to explore the nature of the subject that might be produced through particular approaches.

The trend in failing to articulate the purpose of different mechanisms for student voice at an institutional level suggests a wider movement in higher education towards management practices which fail to engage academically with the meanings and values behind policy, and to make these explicit to the wider institution. The intensification of the government gaze on the student experience

has led to the strengthening of policies and practice. In this study, there was evidence of practice driven primarily by the imperative of meeting government requirements. Implementation of policy was prioritised over concern for the meanings and subjectivities that were produced for students and academics. This type of governance contradicts the liberal, critical, academic basis of higher education and has implications for students and academics whose subjectivities are shaped within these systems. This is a challenging tension. Institutions' reputations are increasingly at stake when responding to policy imperatives, and non-participation in national student voice initiatives such as the NSS, is rarely regarded as an option. However, university managers do have a choice about the extent to which they allow policy to dominate the way in which they think about university culture and allow measurements to dictate relationships between students and staff.

7.3.1 Awareness of the unintended products of voice

Power in student voice is rarely about one group being 'given permission' to speak. Power is embedded in processes, relationships and interactions, and it is not static. For students, engagement in formal mechanisms can offer empowerment, but this requires an acceptance of particular roles and subjectivities. Student voice provides opportunities for creativity, for making a difference, for developing new ways of speaking, but it should be recognised that it does not implicitly lead to empowerment for those who participate.

Throughout the accounts given by students, academics and managers in this study, there was a sense that the higher education sector has been sleepwalking into current practice without a clear understanding of the consequences for the identities

of individuals. It is unlikely that at the outset, HEFCE and the NUS recognised that the NSS, for example, would dominate university thinking in relation to students and shape the ways in which academics were encouraged to engage with students in the ways that this study has illustrated. Indeed, at the outset of the survey, there was no mention of the NSS being used for the purposes of enhancement or management. Nevertheless, this and other research (Sabri, 2013) suggests that this shift has occurred, and the NSS has come to shape the experience and subjectivities of academics and students. This highlights one amongst many ways in which initiatives at national and institutional levels can come to take on unexpected forms. Individual student voice mechanisms form part of a big picture, and the imperatives informing some can come to dominate for certain groups over others. The high-stakes nature of the most technical, performative measures has, for senior managers and consequently for academics, led to the dominance of these over the alternatives, but this was not matched by student interest in the survey.

Related to this was the tension between the NUS and students' unions and their relationship with institutions and policy makers, as student officers sought to adopt 'insider and outsider' strategies in order to maintain legitimate relationships with university management. This tension indicated a colonisation of formal student voice mechanisms by the government and by management. These relationships provided student organisations with power, but their 'legitimate' participation also provided institutions with the capacity to label students engaging in alternatives as irresponsible, illegitimate or deviant. I am not arguing that the student officers are at

fault here, but am noting that increased engagement with the government and universities by these groups, and the corresponding extension of policy into the area of student voice, has colonised and extended governance into spaces that were previously the domain of students and academics. While intending to extend the influence of student voice, the resulting intensification of relationships may in fact have reduced the space for the creative voice, the unofficial, the discipline based and the political.

7.4 Section 3: The implications for subjectivities and identities

Accounts of academics in relation to student voice mechanisms are often obscured in research in which attention has tended to focus instead on process and the experiences of students (Little et al., 2009, van der Velden et al., 2013). This research has shown the impact that student voice has on academics and indeed, the impact that academics have on students engaging in voice. This thesis is one of the rare studies of this subtle but influential, iterative relationship which has rarely been explored in higher education. In this study, an exploration of academic experiences and subjectivities found that for academics with teaching management responsibility, there are considerable complexities around student voice. At a time when external measurements such as the NSS are increasingly high-stakes, academics are under increasing pressure to ensure a high level of student satisfaction.

Academics have been called upon in order to implement national and local student voice mechanisms that are not only designed and owned elsewhere, but also play directly to external interests or those of senior managers. These performative

interests are external to the discipline and to the day-to-day practice of teaching and have come to dominate, thereby eroding the time and enthusiasm available for academics to develop the curriculum or their own approaches to teaching. This is not always disempowering for academics: indeed, many succeed within these new priorities. Nevertheless it does mark, at a time of increasing student numbers, a further shift towards management over academics self-determined engagement with the discipline.

In this context, the subjectivities of students too have come to be increasingly defined. Within this study, students were seen as possessing a complex range of identities including the vulnerable, the disengaged, the potentially unruly, the enterprising and the responsible. Greater student voice in relation to the management of courses may come at a cost in terms of the relationships between students and academics. This might be in terms of the restrictive subjectivities that are produced, and in the time required, for the greater involvement of academics in responding to student demands and providing courses that are palatable. Student satisfaction is currently valued, in external measurements, above the wider imperatives of challenging students to become critical, and the extension of knowledge. Academics, who ultimately have the capacity to make a difference to student learning in the classroom, are being pulled in a number of different directions. For academics to challenge these, or to fail in one area, is seen by senior managers as a sign of a lack of professionalism. For students to challenge these is regarded by both senior managers and many academics as radicalism or misbehaviour.

In the light of these interpretations of my data, it is possible to argue that the intensification of guidance and techniques of dominance, such as the formalisation of student voice which require particular identities and subjectivities, suggests a loss of faith amongst policy makers in the willingness or capacity of senior managers, academics and students to engage in activities based on intrinsic motivation or personal commitment to institutions. This loss of faith can be seen in the intensification of management, reviews and action planning to which academics are subject, and the way in which students are increasingly positioned as vulnerable, disengaged, demotivated or requiring a boost to their self-esteem (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008b). While this thesis suggests that the relationship between student voice and power is more complicated than has been assumed, the data suggest that the solution is not to view students as vulnerable: indeed, the students' accounts in this study suggest that their capacity is often underestimated by government, managers and academics. Students in higher education are adults and so should not be patronised by the production of artificial environments for voice that do not reflect the reality of power relationships within institutions. Students deserve an experience of higher education that is challenging and allows the space for growth and creativity.

As such, I support the reimagining of established student voice mechanisms and student participation in these, in order to develop creative, discipline specific approaches, but ones in which power is acknowledged and recognised as reality in different forms in different settings. An aspect of this will involve university managers and policy makers rethinking what is regarded as legitimate student

voice. While some students were happy to engage in formal mechanisms, it is clear that others favour more imaginative, student-owned mechanisms. For example, recently, economics students at the University of Manchester have demanded changes to the curriculum (Inman, 2013), students at the University of Sussex have protested against staff redundancies (Gray, 2013), and there is increasing discussion of higher education online through Facebook, Twitter and the Student Rooms which suggests that students have far more to say about higher education than they are currently permitted to contribute through formal mechanisms.

These key implications lead to recommendations and conclusions that are presented in section 5. Before presenting these I will first evaluate the scholarship undertaken for the study and offer some reflections on the research approach, methods and approach to analysis and discussion.

7.5 Section 4: Evaluating scholarship

Many of the benefits and limitations of the different design choices made in researching and writing this study have previously been explored in Chapter 3, so I do not rehearse these again here. However, there were a number of elements of the study which, having finished the research and analysis, suggest areas for further study and require reflection. These are set out in this section.

7.5.1 Reflections on the theoretical framework

The work of Foucault on governmentality provided the theoretical framework for the study, providing an approach for the exploration of power within the higher education sector. Application of Foucault's concepts enabled a focus on the

mechanisms as powerful technologies of dominance and the self that produced and reproduced particular types of subject in complex ways. The use of this framework enabled links to be made between ideologies, policies and experiences and for the implications for the students, academics and managers to be explored in relation to mechanisms.

Other theories of power were explored as part of the review of the literature, but did not provide the basis for the analysis of the complex relations of power experienced in relation to student voice. The research area required a framework for exploring power that was multi-dimensional, embedded and tied up with the identities and subjectivities of those who participated. However, it is likely that there are useful elements of alternative theories of power that would enhance understanding of student voice. For example, the application of Bourdieu's (1977, 1988, 1977) ideas about capital might be one way in which questions raised in the previous chapter, about what types of voice are valued and produced through formal student voice mechanisms. Bourdieu's concept of habitus may provide an alternative approach to considering the complex environment in which student voice takes place, and the dispositions, attitudes and behaviours that students and other stakeholders bring to the various processes and mechanisms. As Bragg (2007) asks, are some students better pre-disposed to engaging in voice activity due to their social and cultural capital and do students who enter higher education from different backgrounds enter with a different habitus to those entering from, for example, a good public or private school? Further research in this area could be undertaken in order to

consider these questions and to further explore the types of inequalities that are produced and reproduced through student voice in higher education.

7.5.2 The strengths and limitations of the case studies

This study sought to develop a rich picture of the experiences, identities and subjectivities that are produced through student voice mechanisms. As such, it was not the intention of the study to be generalisable. However, during the study there were a number of developments in the sector, reports and research conducted by individuals and sector bodies, and reports in the higher education press, that suggested that some of the themes identified were also experienced elsewhere in the sector. For this reason, examples of these were used to inform the exploration of these themes in the discussion chapter. Care was taken to ensure that conclusions drawn were done so on the basis of data collected as part of this research, but the inclusion of examples from elsewhere suggests that the study may have wider applicability and enabled discussion of differences where accounts were contradictory.

To generate the depth of data required in order to understand experiences and identities associated with student voice, it was necessary to adopt an approach that would generate a rich understanding of practice and experiences in two distinct institutions. The choice of a Post-92 and a Russell Group institution ensured that experiences, if specific to particular types of institution, were captured within the study. Of course, no two higher institutions are the same; each institution had specific practices, an institutional ethos or culture (or habitus), approaches and discourses that were specific to their location and strategic priorities and values.

However, by including two contrasting institutions, I sought to capture some of this diversity in the analysis and discussion. This illuminated some useful similarities and contrasts.

There were more similarities than differences in the themes between the Russell Group and Post-92 institution. As the discussion chapter shows, students, academics and managers at each institution shared many similar concerns in relation to student voice. Other research, such as Sabri (2013) in relation to the NSS, and Carey (2012, 2013) in relation to student representation, suggest that many experiences of those at other institutions share commonalities. However, there were also some distinct differences. The comparison was important as it highlighted a number of differences between the two institutions, for example in their concern with different types of informal student voice and the different approaches of senior management to developing collaboration with students. By bringing in new research at the discussion stage it was possible to begin to make links with trends in the wider sector.

The study could, of course, be enhanced by further research in different types of institution; for example, a private institution, Oxbridge, or higher education college, may well provide another dimension to the study. However, in the time allowed, the selected institutions provided some useful insights that often chimed with that evidenced in other research into practice in the sector (Ball, 2012, Carey, 2012, 2013, Sabri, 2013). This suggests the wider applicability of the study. Similarly the subjects chosen, namely engineering as an applied degree subject existing in each institution, and English as a traditional, 'pure' subject may have shaped the types of

responses gained from students and academics in the study. There is further scope for research here, to explore whether experiences of student voice varies depending upon the type of discipline studied.

There were also differences identified between the approaches to student voice between the subject disciplines at each institution, with each department approaching formal mechanisms in different ways. One of the reasons for the selection of the two discipline areas was that they were present in both institutions, but some of the responses suggested that it would be worth exploring courses with smaller student numbers and greater subject based contact between students and academics. Further research in this area could inform an understanding of whether formal student voice has come to the fore, in part to substitute the diminishing amount of contact with academics on courses with large student numbers.

What I have failed to do, in this small-scale study, is to analyse power as it relates to groups with particular characteristics such as ethnicity, race, religion, gender, class, disability, mode of study or parental history of participation in higher education. Studying two different institutions, one with a highly local and multicultural population, the other attracting students from across the UK and with a high proportion of international students, the students that participated in the study represented a range of different backgrounds. However, the scale meant that it was rarely possible to draw broad conclusions of the experiences of participants with particular characteristics. Further research and analysis of student voice in relation to the above characteristics would strengthen understanding in the sector. An example of an area where further research would be valuable was in engineering.

The gender of participants in engineering, as majority male, may well have underrepresented the experiences of female students and academics in those departments. The underrepresentation of women in science and technology subjects is a concern in the UK, and further research into gendered engagement in student voice mechanisms could provide insight into approaches to addressing these trends. In relation to staff, a group that has not been included in this study, but which was seen in this study to have a growing role in student participation, was non-academic staff in higher education, such as careers advisers, student support representatives, counsellors and departmental administrators. The influence that these groups have on student voice mechanisms, and on students' and academics' experience of higher education in general, would further inform understanding of the imperatives, identities and subjectivities present in a modern higher education sector.

7.5.3 The process of analysis, reviewing the data

As I outlined at the start of this thesis, one of the reasons I began this research was as a student and professional working in higher education, encountering contradictions between the range of different mechanisms, imperatives and ideologies that inform student voice. As an undergraduate student moving into a students' union role, educational research and then into departmental management, I have seen how engagement in mechanisms such as student representation can be underpinned by different motivations and implications for students, academics and senior managers. I have experienced, in these roles, some of the shifts in identities, priorities and associations that have been reflected by the participants in

this study. This experience has been useful in the context of the research, as I have been able to gain access to a range of individuals working in higher education. However, it has also meant that extra care had to be taken in order to check that analysis of the data was not overly guided by my own subjectivities. As such, throughout the review and thematic analysis of the data, I presented excerpts of the raw data to my supervisor and other colleagues, alongside my analysis, in order to explore the themes that I had identified. I also sought to discuss emerging themes at conferences, both informally through discussion with fellow researchers, and formally, for example I presented a poster “Exploring power and student voice” at the Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) conference in 2013 to representatives of the NUS, QAA, academics and students. I also contributed a chapter discussing the findings in relation to student representation in the peer-reviewed, Student Engagement Handbook (Freeman, 2013) during the period of the study.

Working in higher education, there have also been opportunities to apply the research and implications in my own departmental context, and to participate in university committees, such as the Student Experience Working Group and Student Engagement Working Group, to shape university policy and practice. Most recently I have been invited by the students’ union at York St John University to participate in a project there in which they are considering the questions in the NSS and the impact on the perceptions and expectations of students.

7.6 Section 5: Recommendations

There are a number of different elements to this research that will be of interest to different audiences in higher education. Student voice, student engagement and the student experience are all terms that have seen increasing use in higher education since the introduction and increase of student tuition fees. University managers, academics and students spend considerable time planning and implementing the mechanisms that are included in this study, and the tensions and contradictions which have been presented here, suggest that many in the higher education sector could benefit from some consideration of how these experiences and subjectivities translate to their own context.

The recommendations here are based on my exploration of the empirical data collected for this thesis and the policy themes and ideological imperatives identified in Chapter 2. The recommendations are tentative and need to be researched further in different contexts. Nevertheless, the similarities drawn between the data collected and studies that have taken place at other institutions, suggest that the themes explored in this study provide the basis for some tentative recommendations for the sector.

Throughout the study, through presentations at conferences, I have sought to discuss the research with a range of audiences. A number of government bodies, including the HEA, QAA and HEFCE, have expressed an interest in the findings of the research. I have recognised when talking to representatives of these bodies, that tailoring the findings to particular audiences increases the potential impact of

elements of the research. In developing these recommendations I have sought to recognise the scope of particular groups and organisations and to reflect these.

7.6.1 *Government ministers*

- The effects of student voice policy on the organisational priorities of higher education institutions and the subjectivities of their members as identified in this thesis, should be disseminated and discussed amongst civil servants and other agencies that shape higher education policy such as HEFCE, the QAA and the HEA.
- The trend towards the dominance of second-order measurements of student voice being used to monitor institutions and inform the public should be evaluated by educational researchers in the context of the type of higher education that this produces for students and academics.
- Where student voice mechanisms are defined and requested by policy makers (such as the NSS), policy and guidance should be explicit about the ideologies, imperatives and values informing these mechanisms.
- University managers and academics should be encouraged to engage critically with the imperatives and ideologies informing policy-driven student voice mechanisms as members of a critical, higher education community.
- The outcomes of this, and other research into the identities and subjectivities that policy endorsed approaches to student voice produce, should be used to inform future developments in student voice policy, such as the redesign of the NSS and review of the QAA Quality Code.

- The link between policy and the nature of higher education for students and academics should be acknowledged and the implications of policy evaluated prior to implementation.
- Institutions should be required to be explicit about the imperatives and ideologies that inform different types of student voice in policy, and guidance disseminated to institutions, academics and students and other bodies.

7.6.2 The QAA

- The implications of extending QAA guidance into areas that govern relationships between students and academics should be researched, and the outcomes used to inform the nature of policy in relation to student voice.
- The focus by the QAA on second order activities, in areas that depend on relationships between students and academics (such as learning and teaching), should be researched and the outcomes used to inform future policy in this area.
- Student voice mechanisms at the level of the subject discipline should be recognised in guidance as a shared domain for students and academics.
- Materials that explore different motivations, imperatives and identities in higher education should be disseminated to academics and students in order to encourage institutions to explore the subjectivities produced by different mechanisms. These could include discussion prompt activities that explore approaches to student voice and associated subjectivities (for example the Students as Change Agents card sort activity could be developed to explore

the identities of students *and* academics, and the imperatives for different individuals and groups (NUS, 2013)).

7.6.3 The NUS

- The identities, subjectivities and power relations produced for students and academics, as identified in this and other research, should inform future policy and priorities in the area of student voice.
- The compatibility of support of government policy for student voice, which position the student as a consumer, should be reconsidered as part of a discussion with students' unions and students.
- The role of academics in student voice mechanisms should be better understood and consideration given to working more closely with academic representative bodies that develop approaches to student voice that enable both students and academics to work collaboratively.
- Materials should be provided to students' unions in order to enable them to explore the relationships produced through mechanisms such as student representation committees that allow for a greater understanding of power relationships in this area and exploration of different ideologies and imperatives associated with student voice (see point 4 under the QAA recommendations for example materials).
- Materials and support should be provided to students' unions to provide opportunities for the exploration of alternative student-led approaches to student voice.

- Guidance should be provided by the NUS to support students' unions to negotiate the complexities of working with institutions, while also maintaining support for student-led mechanisms.

7.6.4 Senior managers

- The trend towards the dominance of second-order measurements of student voice being used to monitor institutions and inform the public should not form the basis for internal values and measurements of student voice. This recommendation may be somewhat idealistic, but opportunities should be taken to develop bespoke internal values and measurements that acknowledge more meaningful engagement between students and staff.
- Consider opportunities for reimagining existing bureaucracies to allow space for the collective voices of students and academics to be brought together.
- Where student voice mechanisms are defined by policy makers (such as the NSS), institutional policy and guidance should be explicit about the imperatives, ideologies and values informing these mechanisms. For an example of approaches to this, see Neary (2013).
- Academics and students should be encouraged by institutions to engage critically with the imperatives and ideologies informing policy-driven student voice mechanisms (see point 4 under the QAA recommendations for example materials).
- Institutions should work with students' unions in order to be explicit about the imperatives and ideologies that inform different types of student voice in policy and guidance.

7.6.5 *Students' Unions*

- Seek opportunities to discuss the nature of student voice with senior management, including management understanding of legitimate and illegitimate mechanisms for voice.
- Provide platforms for the discussion of higher education policy as it relates to students and student identities.
- Work directly with academics as well as senior managers and students when developing official student voice mechanisms.
- Recognise student voice, at the level of the subject discipline, as a shared domain for students and academics.
- Develop student representation guidance for students and academics that encourage discussion of the values and imperatives for representation and explore relationships of power between students and academics.

These tentative recommendations provide the basis for a greater acknowledgement and basis for exploration of student voice mechanisms as new forms of power and governmentality in higher education. In the final section of this thesis, I provide some final reflections and conclusions in response to my overarching research question.

7.7 Section 6: New forms of power and governmentality in higher education

Issues of power in relation to student voice are complex. The perceptions of most groups about power relationships in student voice mechanisms were mismatched with the perceptions of others. Every group thought that another had more power. Academics felt that students had considerable power through formal mechanisms

such as the NSS, but the students in the study did not recognise this. Academics too regarded senior management as powerful, as they had the capacity to implement new procedures and monitor academic performance, but managers themselves recognised that, without the cooperation of academics, their power was limited. These experiences of power in institutions are complex, embedded, and highly contextualised.

Foucault's concept of governmentality provided the basis upon which to move away from simplistic understandings of power as handed down or as subjugation, in order to explore the complexity within the thesis. This is significant, as was seen in the literature review, as student voice mechanisms are often regarded either as power-neutral or as implicitly empowering. This thesis suggests that while student voice *can* be empowering, empowerment can by no means be assumed and, at times, the empowerment of some might lead to the disempowerment of others, as certain voices (such as those deemed to be the unique, the idiosyncratic, the political or the irresponsible described in the previous chapter) become marginalised.

The lack of acknowledgement or transparency about differences in power in student voice mechanisms served to reinforce this. These complexities were particularly clear in the interviews with students taking part in representation systems, who were distinctly aware of the difference in power between students and university staff. What resulted was often a sense of frustration amongst students who fundamentally understood that they were one of many voices and as such their ideas required the support of academics to be taken forward. Students were pragmatic about this and they understood the context and the competing,

influencing agendas, but, because this was not discussed, it remained an unspoken constraint rather than something that could be challenged.

Yet, as this study has shown, this view contrasted with academics' own understanding of the power possessed by students. These perceptions were to some extent productive, driving academics to respond to students' concerns, or to manage expectations, but they also embedded a culture of 'us and them' between students and staff, which led to uncertainty, an understanding of engagement with students as risky and, at times, fear and vulnerability (section 6.1.6). The consequence of this 'us and them' culture was seen in the interviews as students, staff and managers talked about each other as homogenous groups, with particular characteristics and the risks associated with them, rather than individuals with the capacity to contribute to institutions in different and varied ways. Perceptions of students as vulnerable or disengaged, and requiring support, served to strengthen this perception of differences between students and academics. This study argues that by acknowledging the power dynamics and identities that are constructed in institutions for students and academics, student voice mechanisms could become more productive, empowering spaces.

Fielding (2001a, 2004a, b, 2005, 2002) and Carey (2012, 2013) have suggested more radical approaches to collaboration between students and academics through the principles of radical collegiality. Many of the approaches to 'student engagement' developed by institutions such as Exeter (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011), Birmingham City University (Freeman et al., 2013), and Sheffield (University of Sheffield, 2013) have sought to develop more productive ways of students working

with academics in forms in which power is more explicit and collaboration is valued. These provide alternative ways in which students and academics can relate to each other and share ownership of learning and teaching development. However, Bragg's (2007) work suggests that the shift in subjectivities required for participating students and academics, should be acknowledged in these mechanisms, and the consequences for those who chose not to participate, explored.

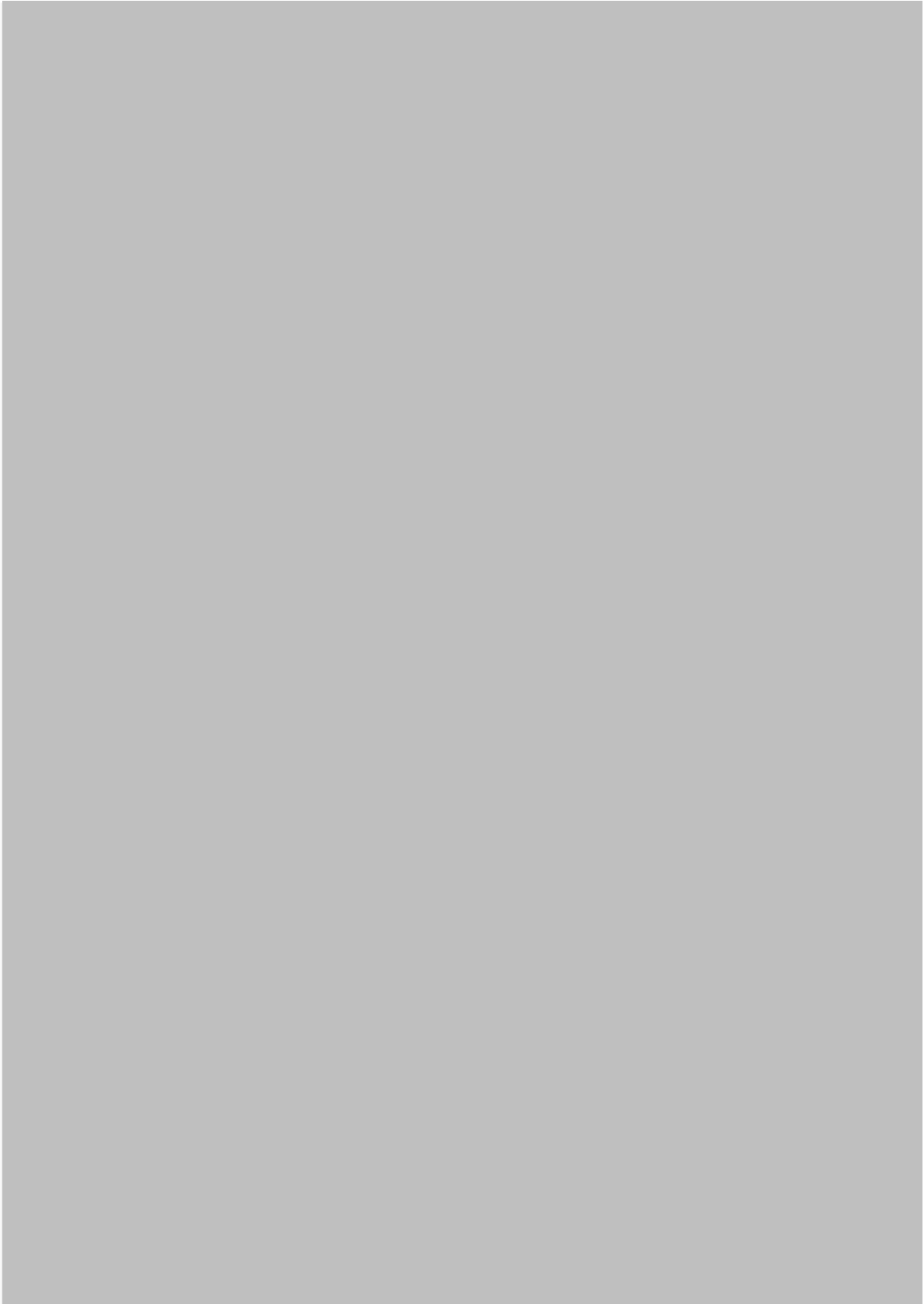
Notwithstanding these developments, my thesis shows how student voice has been increasingly colonised by policy makers and management as a new form of governance in higher education. This shift shapes the identities and subjectivities of those who participate and subtly, but significantly, shapes the way in which students and academics are able to legitimately be in higher education. Following this argument, there needs to be fewer prescriptive mechanisms for student voice and the corresponding opening up of spaces for students and academics to develop approaches that are informed by their own context. In place of these official mechanisms, professional development should support academics and students to work collaboratively in order to agree values around forms of student voice for evaluation and to be creative about the ways in which these are structured and embedded.

Finally, this study argues that students should have a voice in the evaluation of higher education. Becoming critical should not be restricted to engagement with the discipline in higher education, but academic voices must also be central to the conversation. To focus purely on either group creates tension, and obscures the reality of relationships of power in institutions. In addition, opportunities for student

voice should not be given as compensation for less time and engagement with academics in relation to the discipline; neither should they be used as an approach for managing the values of institutions or dictating what counts as good teaching. As a closing remark, I refer back to Rudduck and Flutter (2000 cited in Fielding, 2001a) and argue that whenever policy makers, institutions and unions think about student voice it should be guided by the following question:

“Are we ‘carving a new order of experience’? Or are we presiding over the future entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student voice as an additional mechanism of control?” (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000 cited in Fielding, 2001a: 100)

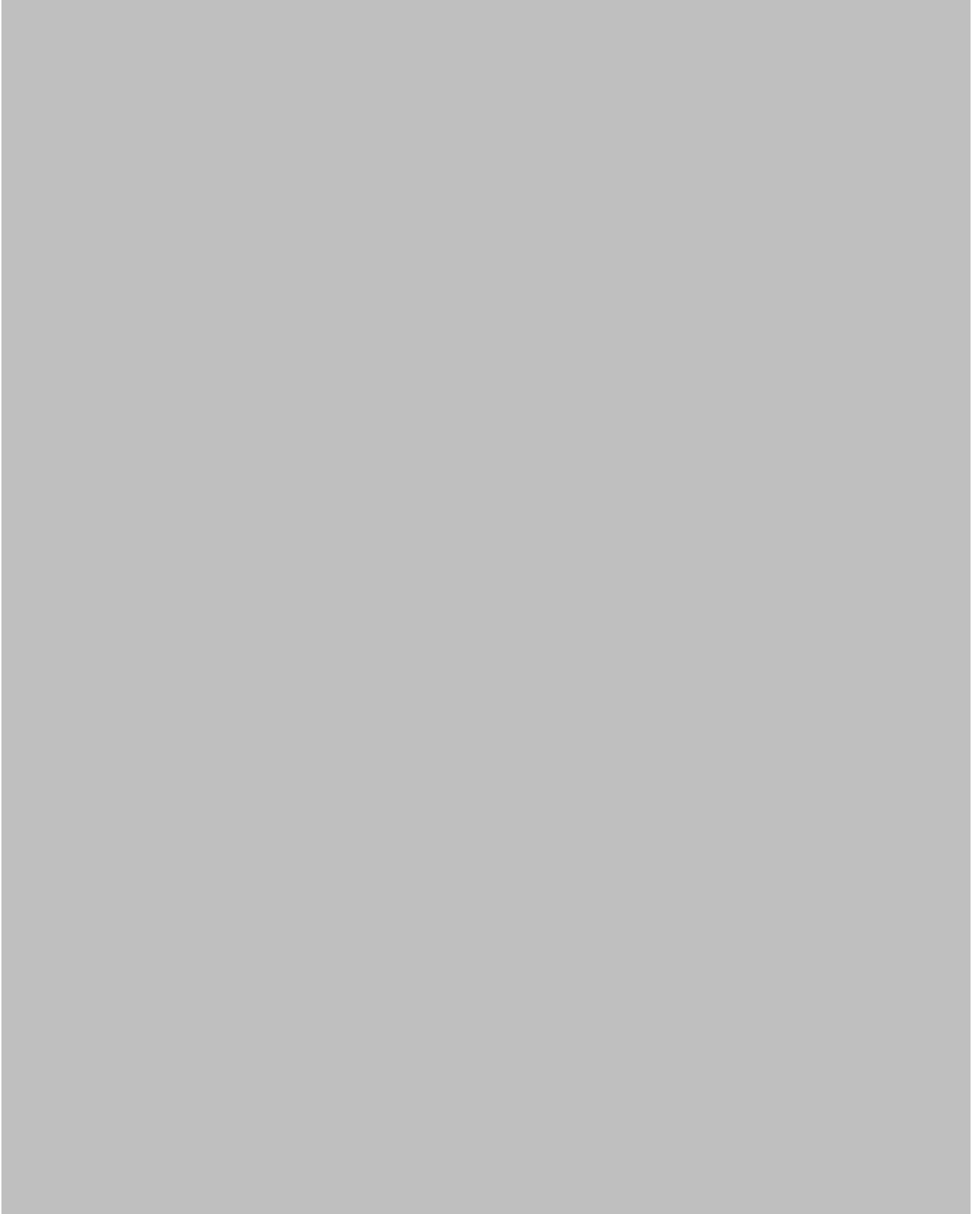
8 APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MODEL

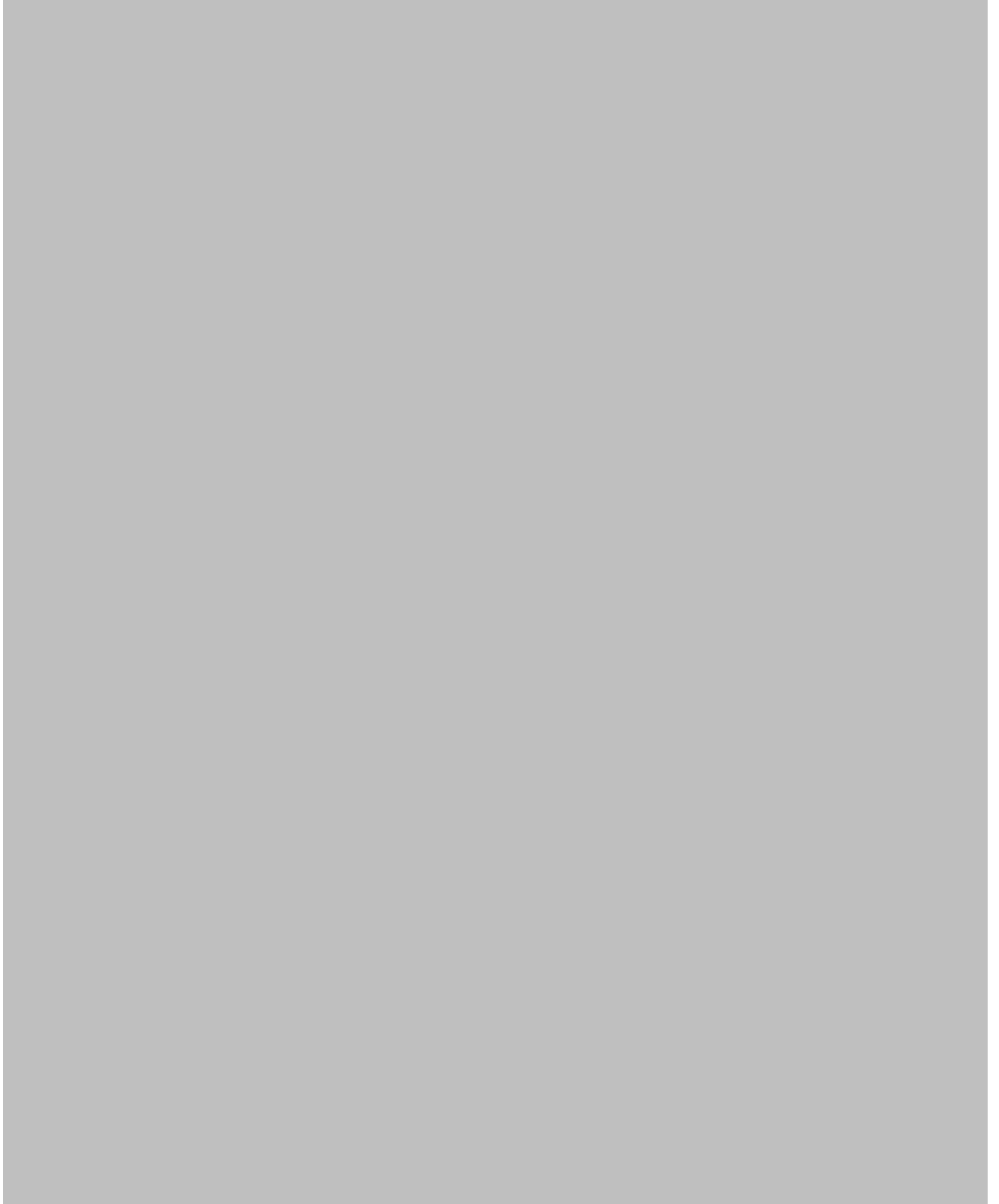


9 APPENDIX B: NSS ANALYSIS FOR SUBJECT DISCIPLINE SELECTION

Row Labels	2008		2009		2010		response rate				
	No of Res	Sample size	No of Res	Sample size	No of Res	Sample size	2008	2009	2010	Average	Rank
(08) Veterinary Sciences	469	600	576	832	508	697	78.2%	69.2%	72.9%	73.4%	1
(09) Agriculture and related subjects	1149	1531	1437	2016	706	972	74.0%	71.3%	72.6%	73.0%	2
(39) Teacher Training	182	244	373	540	272	372	74.6%	69.1%	73.1%	72.3%	3
(11) Physical Geography and Environmental Science	2637	3685	3292	4737	2403	3426	71.6%	69.5%	70.1%	70.4%	4
(42) Initial Teacher Training	6012	8360	6154	9033	3944	5605	71.9%	68.1%	70.1%	70.1%	5
(23) Human and Social Geography	2015	2815	2235	3231	1583	2275	71.6%	69.2%	69.6%	70.1%	6
(02) Medical Science and Pharmacy	3925	5724	4766	6935	3371	4630	68.6%	68.7%	72.8%	70.0%	7
(32) European Languages and Area studies	5587	7843	6088	9039	5026	7211	71.2%	67.4%	69.7%	69.4%	8
(04) Other subjects allied to Medicine	4428	6682	6526	9364	4796	6753	66.3%	69.7%	71.0%	69.0%	9
(07) Psychology	10238	14482	9592	14281	6670	9779	70.7%	67.2%	68.2%	68.7%	10
(33) Other Languages and Area studies	1549	2297	1751	2590	1745	2481	67.4%	67.6%	70.3%	68.5%	11
(01) Medicine and Dentistry	5464	7885	5795	8892	4662	6644	69.3%	65.2%	70.2%	68.2%	12
(05) Biology and related Sciences	7147	10297	7059	10698	5901	8600	69.4%	66.0%	68.6%	68.0%	13
(10) Physical Science	6061	8802	6305	9577	5391	7940	68.9%	65.8%	67.9%	67.5%	14
(06) Sports Science	4643	6619	5132	7870	3128	4678	70.1%	65.2%	66.9%	67.4%	15
(37) Performing Arts	7205	10522	7508	11570	5030	7352	68.5%	64.9%	68.4%	67.3%	16
(40) Education studies	3106	4534	3325	5137	2151	3203	68.5%	64.7%	67.2%	66.8%	17
(31) English-based studies	9847	14436	9206	14220	7003	10523	68.2%	64.7%	66.5%	66.5%	18
(36) Art and Design	11737	17410	11810	17972	6545	9926	67.4%	65.7%	65.9%	66.4%	19
(28) Tourism, Transport, Travel and others in Business and Administrative studies	1219	1762	2612	4051	1366	2098	69.2%	64.5%	65.1%	66.3%	20
(38) Other Creative Arts	3958	6000	4368	6727	2364	3560	66.0%	64.9%	66.4%	65.8%	21
(22) Social Work	3337	4962	4228	6577	2608	3975	67.3%	64.3%	65.6%	65.7%	22
(34) History and Archaeology	8921	13184	8518	13276	6901	10626	67.7%	64.2%	64.9%	65.6%	23
(14) Mechanically-based Engineering	3425	5218	4121	6462	2891	4318	65.6%	63.8%	67.0%	65.5%	24
(12) Mathematical Sciences	3810	5739	4393	6922	3416	5141	66.4%	63.5%	66.4%	65.4%	25
(30) Communications and Information studies	2192	3279	2855	4386	1340	2126	66.8%	65.1%	63.0%	65.0%	26
(16) Civil, Chemical and other Engineering	1792	2692	2517	4008	1773	2709	66.6%	62.8%	65.4%	64.9%	27
(21) Sociology, Social Policy and Anthropology	8004	11963	8039	12746	5558	8607	66.9%	63.1%	64.6%	64.9%	28
(18) Architecture, Building and Planning	3403	5188	4437	7059	2780	4229	65.6%	62.9%	65.7%	64.7%	29
(03) Nursing	1472	2384	4724	7332	3177	4689	61.7%	64.4%	67.8%	64.6%	30
(17) Technology	1373	2150	1792	2911	881	1312	63.9%	61.6%	67.1%	64.2%	31
(15) Electronic and Electrical Engineering	1933	3006	2679	4207	1699	2633	64.3%	63.7%	64.5%	64.2%	32
(35) Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies	2987	4713	3346	5174	2925	4544	63.4%	64.7%	64.1%	64.1%	33
(20) Politics	5155	7943	5112	8148	4421	6939	64.9%	62.7%	63.7%	63.8%	34
(26) Management	5754	8796	6166	9931	3968	6238	65.4%	62.1%	63.6%	63.7%	35
(29) Media studies	4515	6970	4966	8050	2702	4306	64.8%	61.7%	62.7%	63.1%	36
(24) Law	9840	15120	10128	16580	7190	11524	65.1%	61.1%	62.4%	62.9%	37
(27) Finance and Accounting	5339	8300	6159	10094	4063	6457	64.3%	61.0%	62.9%	62.8%	38
(13) Computer Science	7308	11370	7598	12403	4701	7528	64.3%	61.3%	62.4%	62.7%	39
(25) Business	11412	17586	11848	19372	7010	11436	64.9%	61.2%	61.3%	62.5%	40
(19) Economics	4740	7487	4810	7846	3901	6226	63.3%	61.3%	62.7%	62.4%	41
(41) Combined	534	896	492	776	394	627	59.6%	63.4%	62.8%	61.9%	42

10 APPENDIX C: COPY OF THE NSS SURVEY QUESTIONS





11 APPENDIX D: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual attitude survey of final year undergraduate students in the UK that is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). As a government-funded survey, it is compulsory for all universities in England to participate and it is therefore one of the largest and most influential pieces of research into the experiences of learners in higher education in the UK.

All final year students are invited to complete the NSS. Due to the nature of the survey, as the largest census of student opinion in the UK, intended and unintended audiences use the outcomes in a number of ways. An unintended, but significant, way in which the data are used is to inform national league tables of university performance. Newspapers such as the Guardian, Times and Times Higher Education use the outcomes of the survey as a measure of student satisfaction and combine the scores gained with a number of other criteria, such as entry qualifications of new students and student/staff ratios, to create tables of perceived overall quality. Thus, the status and prominence of the survey is linked to the public perception of an institution's reputation, and this places the survey high on the agenda of most UK institutions.

This analysis makes use of Fairclough's (2001: 92-116) model for critical discourse analysis to consider how language functions to change and maintain power relations in society. His approach involves the analysis of text at three distinct levels through description, interpretation and explanation, to make links between the text,

its structure and context, how the text has been produced and the ideological values behind the text. As this piece of work is intended as a pilot of Fairclough's (2001) model to assess its suitability as an approach to analysis for all data within the wider study, I have described each section of the model, supplementing it with examples from the NSS. In future it may be possible to refine the model in order to focus on those aspects of discourse that are of particular interest. The NSS main questionnaire is used for analysis. Institutions are able to select a number of supplementary NSS questions from a bank of additional questions, but these have not been included in the analysis as the questions are not experienced by all students.

What experiential values do words have?

Experiential values are a *'trace of, and a cue to, the way in which the text producers experience of the natural or social world is represented'* in terms of the contents of the text, which might indicate knowledge and beliefs (Fairclough, 2001: 93). In the NSS this may be seen as the ideologies that the text producer holds about the types of experiences that constitute higher education. Fairclough (2001: 92) identifies a number of different properties of the text, which may reveal some of these values:

What classification schemes are drawn upon?

The classification schemes drawn upon in the NSS appear to value higher education as a mechanistic process. The survey sets out a series of transactions (assessment and feedback, organisation and management, personal development), which, by nature of their inclusion in the survey, are assumed to be valued as

essential components of a 'satisfactory' student experience. Language is largely instrumental and functional rather than developmental and transformational. For example, within the '*assessment and feedback*' section of the survey the questions focus on the administration of assessment (clarity of assessment criteria, fairness of marking, promptness of feedback) rather than whether assessment and feedback has provided challenge, enabled learning and furthered students' understanding of development needs.

Are there words which are ideologically contested?

There are a number of words and phrases that do not sit comfortably in the text and which suggest an assumption on the part of the author of a shared understanding, which in fact may be ideologically located. One such example is the phrase '*intellectually stimulating*' within question 4 "*the course is intellectually stimulating*". The use of the verb 'to stimulate' sits difficultly in a question that fails to identify who or what stimulates whom. The question's location within 'the teaching on my course' section of the survey suggests an ideological assumption about the nature of the teacher –student relationship, i.e. it is the responsibility of teachers to provide intellectual stimulation for students, which points to a particular model of pedagogical practice.

Is there rewording or over wording

Fairclough (2001: 96) identifies over wording or near repetition of particular words and themes as an indicator of a preoccupation with some aspect of reality. Within the NSS there are a number of areas in which questions might be seen as asking

the same or a similar question in a slightly different way. For example, within the personal development section of the survey two out of the three questions focus on presentation; the course has helped me to present myself with confidence and my communication skills have improved. This suggests a preoccupation with higher education as a mode for developing students' communication skills over other aspects of development such as 'listening' and 'understanding'.

What relational values do words have?

Relational values within text embody the way in which text depends upon, and helps to create social relationships between participants. The verbs used within the NSS to describe the student role include 'to receive', 'to need' and 'to satisfy'. These suggest a model of education in which the students' role is largely a passive one. In contrast the verbs used in relation to the role of staff are 'to enthuse', 'explain' and 'to enable', setting the staff role up as the 'providers' of education. As such, students within the survey are positioned as relatively passive consumers of an education provided by staff.

Are there markedly formal or informal words?

The formality of the text used within the survey sets up a mechanistic relationship between the survey author and the student. The formal language of university administration is adopted rather than a more neutral, plain English tone. Terms such as; 'marking', 'criteria', 'feedback', 'library resources', and 'communication' all present a formal institutionalised vocabulary. This language may be interpreted by participants as representing a transaction between the official and the student.

An additional consequence of the formality of language may also serve to distance students from a full understanding of the 'official' definition. There has been some debate amongst academic staff (Robertson, 2004) about students' understanding of the term 'feedback' in the survey. Some students may read 'feedback' as encompassing a wide range of formative and summative activity including discussions between an academic and personal tutees, peer feedback and written feedback on assignments. Others might respond to '*detailed comments on my work*' literally, and as such respond purely on the basis of written feedback received on assignments. Consequently, the use of formal language throughout the survey may leave questions open to a multitude of interpretations by respondents.

What expressive values do words have?

Fairclough (2001: 98) suggests that the use of expressive values may be ideologically significant as they seek to persuade the reader of a particular argument or viewpoint. As a large-scale survey, the expressive values within the NSS are relatively mild, but nevertheless the choices made about the words used suggest a particular ideology. The use of adjectives such as 'smoothly' and 'stimulated' tell us a lot about the priorities of the text and the nature of their understanding of a desirable higher education experience.

What types of process and participant predominate? Are processes what they seem?

Fairclough (2001:100) suggests that the way in which a particular happening is represented as an action, an event or a state has implications in terms of how an

individual interprets the statement. There are a number of different grammatical processes visible within the survey:

- Material processes – involving physical actions and usually about what students ‘get’ from the actor, which is usually within the NSS ‘staff’ e.g. *“8. I have received detailed comments on my work”*
- Relational processes – involving how things are in terms of the institution or the course, for example *“1. Staff are good at explaining things”* requires the respondent to evaluate the statement and attribute or identify a value in ‘relation’ to something else
- Mental processes – involving those processes based on students’ feelings or intuitions, such as hearing, listening, liking, seeing and understanding such as *“22. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”*

The majority of the processes are stated as material or relational processes rather than mental processes. In this way, while the processes described in the NSS may seem like those ‘typical’ in a higher education experience, the way in which they are described and structured focuses on the role of staff and institutional process over and above the role of the student. The processes identified for focus tend to be about whether things have been provided or were available rather than on the mental processes in which students have the potential to play a more active part. This may have the overall effect of giving an impression that those processes that are valued in higher education are those actions and events that happen to students, rather than those that engage students’ feelings and perceptions.

Is agency unclear?

Fairclough suggests that “choices to highlight or background agency may be consistent, automatic and commonsensical, and therefore ideological; or they may be conscious hedging or deception” (2001: 102). There is a lack of agency in Q4 ‘the course is intellectually stimulating’ but it is located within a section of the survey in which staff are identified as the agent. This may imply that the onus is on staff to ‘make’ the course stimulating, which suggests a particular pedagogical perspective of higher education and positions the student as passive within the process. This failure to mention students as an agent, only as a subject who is acted upon, reinforces the ideology of students as consumers.

A number of questions in the NSS are stated without clarification of who is responsible for a particular action or event e.g. ‘feedback on my work has been prompt’. Following ‘the teaching on my course’ section of the survey the majority of questions refer to a series of inanimate nouns (‘the course’), and nominalisations (‘assessment’), in place of an animate agent. This creates a position in which the student must engage in a high level of interpretation of the statement on his or her own terms.

There may be a question of the validity of data if every student interprets questions in different ways. Many of the questions in the survey require a considerable amount of subjective interpretation on the part of the student.

Are nominalisations used?

There is an assumption that 'the course' has a complete identity rather than being made up of a number of different agents, actions and experiences over the period of an undergraduate course. The 'assessment' is presented as a process but it is important to consider who the participants are within the process. By nature of constructing a standard questionnaire for all students, a strong statement is made about what 'officially' is seen as the 'process' of higher education in which students are engaged. The questions are reduced in the sense that the detail of the statement is missing; there is no sense of timing, clarity of process or agency.

Are sentences active or passive?

The questions in the NSS tend to place the student as passive. Students are asked to report on what has happened to them, rather than how they have participated within these happenings. However, the grammar is often active, with teachers and other staff placed as the 'actors', for example "*10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies*" and "*16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs*". Where questions imply some active participation on the part of the student there tends to be a clause which suggests the responsibility for that action lies elsewhere, for example "*21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems*" and "*Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices*". This further positions students as customers within higher education rather than individuals responsible for engaging with and shaping their own experiences.

Are sentences positive or negative?

All of the statements are stated positively within the questionnaire e.g. “staff are good at explaining things” and “I have received detailed comments on my work”. Questions are presented as modelling a ‘good course’ or how a course should be which, as has been previously explored, is an ideologically located notion of higher education. This particular design of a questionnaire may also be seen to be flawed technically, as there is some evidence that some respondents uncritically check the same response for all scale items where questions are consistently weighted in the same way (Richardson et al., 2007: 568).

What modes (declarative, grammatical question, imperative) are used?

Fairclough (2001: 104) identifies three major modes; the declarative, grammatical question and imperative, which give information differently. The NSS questions follow the declarative structure, taking the form of a series of statements with a limited number of possible responses. These are supplemented by two ‘free text’ boxes in which students are invited to “*highlight any positive or negative aspect*” of their experiences.

Are there important features of relational modality?

Fairclough (2001: 105) identifies modality as to do with writer authority. There are two dimensions:

- Relational modality: a matter of authority of one participant in relation to others

- Expressive modality: a matter of the speaker's authority with respect to the truth or probability of a representation of reality – the modality of the writer's evaluation of the truth.

For the majority of questions the authority is not explicit within the statements but there is an implicit suggestion, through all the questions being weighted positively, that all of the statements are based on what 'should' take place. The relational modality is often unclear in terms the role of the respondent within a given situation.

Are the pronouns 'we' and 'you' used, and if so, how?

The terms 'we' and 'you' are absent from the text which serves to depersonalise the institution. Instead 'I' is used in a number of statements in the questionnaire locating the statements made as deriving from the student such as "I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed to". In the majority of statements no pronouns are used at all, e.g. "Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively". This distinction between the 'I' statements and those in which a pronoun is absent suggests a differentiation between those statements for which students are required to draw on individual, personal experience and those statements that may be experienced as a collective. There is a sense that the absence of 'I' in the majority of statements enables students to respond to a question without necessarily drawing on their personal experience.

How are (simple) sentences linked together?

The *connective* or *cohesive* features of a text which link one sentence to another. These are largely absent from the text as it is in the format of a questionnaire.

What logical connectors are used?

Fairclough (2001: 109) treats logical connectors as indicators of the ideological assumptions within a text. The use of terms such as '*as a result*' and '*therefore*' might usually provide an indication of where logical connectors have been used. The NSS as a series of statements does not contain logical connectors, but there are links implied by the grouping of questions under headings that link particular concepts e.g. assessment and feedback. Links between particular agents are also suggested, where an agent such as 'staff' is named in one statement but the following statements remain agent-less.

Are complex sentences characterised by coordination or subordination?

Complex sentences are not used in the NSS, presumably to keep the format of the questionnaire as clear as possible. Most statements in the NSS are simple, although there are some occasional statements with subordination used, for example "21. As a result of my course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems". There may be a sense that the ordering of questions in this format suggests a greater importance of some aspects of the questionnaire over others with teaching, assessment and feedback at the start of the questionnaire and the location of the space for free text comments at the end. This may send a message to students about the perceived importance of their comments in relation to the predefined questions.

What means are used for referring inside and outside the text?

The questions included in the NSS suppose a lot about the nature of higher education and students' values in relation to the components of a satisfactory experience, but there is some doubt about whose values are represented. While the survey is presented as 'independent', it is not made clear on the survey itself whether the values represented are those of students, institutions, governments or someone else. This relates to a much bigger issue about the purpose of student voice structures, who owns these structures and to whom students' voices belong.

What interactional conventions are used?

Fairclough identifies a number of naturalised conventions that appear within texts and play a part in regulating where the power is located. The NSS provides an example of turn taking as a method for managing dialogue in which the questionnaire respondent is able only to respond within the structure provided.

Through the use of the survey the topic and structure of discourse is clearly defined and controlled by the author. Participants respond to a series of closed questions and are given a format within which to respond.

The content is therefore limited and controlled by an external agent. Students are restricted to giving answers to the questions contained within the survey and those answers are themselves restricted by the real or perceived inequality of the dialogue.

What larger-scale structures does the text have?

The NSS provides only a limited scope of topics that students are permitted to evaluate. Although there is some space provided for free text at the end of the questionnaire, it is likely that these responses are largely framed by the tone, approach and ideologies that inform the questions that precede.

The NSS was framed and designed by a team of HEFCE and institutional decision makers through a hypothetical deductive or “knowledge-constitutive” method (Habermas cited in Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p134, Popper, 1968). Consequently, the survey collects data based on a definition of the ‘student experience’ derived from the understandings and experiences of policy makers rather than students themselves. What resulted was a questionnaire in which a range of areas are excluded. Through this analysis, the areas that were selected for inclusion by the author; teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, personal development and overall satisfaction, have been considered and the ideological values informing these areas revealed. It is also useful to consider those aspects of students experience that have been excluded, in order to consider those areas that are not valued or are deemed to be less important. For example the NSS includes nothing about:

- equality and diversity;
- the welfare or pastoral role of academic staff;
- the interpersonal relationships between staff and students;
- the development of the student as an independent learner or constructor of knowledge (as well as a consumer);
- university management;

- the general culture, how students feel they are positioned and whether they like this or not.

By dictating the areas on which students can evaluate their experience, their ability to reflect critically on their experience at the institution in their own terms is constrained. Although students are given the opportunity to provide 'positive' or 'negative' comments, there is no opportunity or invitation for students to make suggestions for changes or improvements to the institution. As a result, students are placed firmly as a passive consumer throughout the NSS.

Conclusions

The use of the CDA model to describe, interpret and explain the format of the NSS provides a useful approach to the analysis of ideologies that are grounded in the text. Working through the process, some stages of the model seemed more relevant than others, but those aspects which were not relevant for the analysis of the NSS (such as the use of metaphors or euphemisms) may well be relevant in the analysis of other case study data such as interviews or protest fliers. I found the model useful as it encouraged close analysis of aspects of the text and ensured that conclusions drawn were based on evidence. However, I felt that the focus on the minutiae through the process of CDA meant that I was drawn away from analysis of the impact of the NSS as a complete document. This has emphasised the importance of analysis to locate text within its wider social and political context as well as focusing on its properties through the CDA process.

12 APPENDIX E: PILOT AND MAIN STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pilot Interview Questions

What follows are a series of pilot interview questions for senior managers, academics and students. These questions are relatively generic at this stage and are likely to be refined and adapted for different purposes within the study. All interviews will be semi-structured.

Senior Managers

- What internal mechanisms exist to allow students to evaluate their experience of learning at university?
- Are there any constraints that preclude the University from providing mechanisms for feedback in alternative ways? (*practical, political or financial*)
- Do you have any feeling for the role of the NUS amongst the student body? Have you noticed any changes in the level of activity? In the type of activity?
- Are there forms of evaluation that go on outside the formal mechanisms? What are they? *Is evaluation authentic?*
- What are the purposes of the student voice structures? (*it may be desirable to break this question down to focus on individual mechanisms e.g. the NSS, course evaluation, student reps, guild, protests, complaints, informal – potential prompts*)
- What is the purpose of students having a voice? (*for senior management, academics and students*)
- What provisions are there in place for UG, PGT and PGR students?

- Do the provisions that enable students to evaluate their experiences differ significantly between levels of study (e.g.UG, PGT, PGR)? Do you think there are any trends in participation depending on level of study?
- What is the purpose of these different evaluations? Are they formal or informal?
- Are there any plans to re-evaluate the provision of feedback opportunities following the increase in tuition fees?
- Have you noticed any changes in the level of student voice activity?
- Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?

Academics

- What internal mechanisms exist to allow students to evaluate their experience of learning at university?
- Could you talk me through how these evaluation processes? How are student evaluations utilised?
- What is your role within these processes?
- Do you feel that these evaluation student voice processes are effective?
- Are there forms of evaluation that go on outside the formal mechanisms? What are they? *Is evaluation authentic?*
- What are the purposes of the student voice structures? *(it may be desirable to break this question down to focus on individual mechanisms e.g. NSS, course evaluation, student reps, guild, protests, complaints, informal – potential prompts)*

- What is the purpose of students having a voice? (*for academics, senior management and students*)
- Have you noticed any changes in the level of student voice activity?
- Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?

Students

- In what ways are you able to evaluate your experience at university? (*e.g. the NSS, course evaluation, student reps, guild, protests, complaints, informal – potential prompts*)
- What is your role in the process?
- Are there any informal ways that you evaluate your experience?
- Do you have any feeling for the role of the NUS amongst the student body?
Have you noticed any changes in the level of activity? In the type of activity?
- What is the purpose of student voice structures? (*it may be desirable to break this question down to focus on individual mechanisms e.g. the NSS, course evaluation, student reps, guild, protests, complaints, informal – potential prompts*)
- What is the purpose of students having a voice? (*for students, senior management and academics*)
- Are you happy with the opportunities for evaluation?
- Do you think your involvement in evaluation makes a difference? Can you give any examples?

- Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?
- Do you think students will want to have more of a say about their learning once they are paying higher tuition fees?

Main Study Interview Questions

What follows are the questions which underpin the semi-structured interviews undertaken with senior managers, academics and students as part of the main study. These questions are relatively generic may well be refined and adapted for different purposes within the study.

Senior Managers

1. What are the ways that students are able to evaluate their experience of learning at university and what is your role in these mechanisms?
2. Are there any constraints that preclude the University from providing mechanisms for feedback in alternative ways? (*practical, political or financial*)
3. Are there forms of evaluation that go on outside the formal mechanisms? What are they? *Is evaluation authentic?*
4. Do you have a feeling for the role of the (national) NUS amongst the student body? Have you noticed any changes in the level of (national) student voice activity? In the type of activity?

5. Do different structures serve different purposes and have different outcomes? *(for example does the NSS serve a different purpose to student protests?)*
6. Does student voice serve different purposes for different people e.g. senior management, academics and students?
7. What structures are there in place for UG, PGT and PGR students? Do you think there are any trends in participation depending on level of study?
8. Are there any trends in the participation of students in particular disciplines or subject areas within the disciplines?
9. Do you think student voice structures will change following the increase in tuition fees?
10. Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?
11. As part of my research I have been looking at some of the different purposes for student voice that appear in the literature. If I run through these purposes I wonder if you would reflect on them individually and whether they have any resonance in your context and provide examples:
 - Student voice for consumer choice
 - Student voice for accountability
 - Student voice for democracy and power sharing
 - Student voice for the development of student identity
 - Student voice for the improvement and enhancement of provision
 - Student voice for ownership of learning (buy in)

Student voice for academics professional development

Academics

1. What are the ways that students are able to evaluate their experience of learning at university and what is your role in these mechanisms? *(Prompt for further detail on NSS and course evaluations, how are these used?)*
2. Do you feel that these student voice processes are effective?
3. Are there forms of evaluation that go on outside the formal mechanisms? What are they? *Is evaluation authentic?*
4. Do you have a feeling for the role of the (national) NUS amongst the student body? Have you noticed any changes in the level of (national) student voice activity? In the type of activity?
5. Do different structures serve different purposes and have different outcomes? *(for example does the NSS serve a different purpose to student protests?)*
6. Does student voice serve different purposes for different people e.g. senior management, academics and students?
7. What structures are there in place for UG, PGT and PGR students? Do you think there are any trends in participation depending on level of study?
8. Do you think student voice structures will change following the increase in tuition fees?
9. Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?

10. As part of my research I have been looking at some of the different purposes for student voice that appear in the literature. If I run through these purposes I wonder if you would reflect on them individually and whether they have any resonance in your context and provide examples:

Student voice for consumer choice

Student voice for accountability

Student voice for democracy and power sharing

Student voice for the development of student identity

Student voice for the improvement and enhancement of provision

Student voice for ownership of learning (buy in)

Student voice for academics professional development

Students

1. What are the ways in which you are able to evaluate your experience of learning at university and what is your role in these mechanisms? What made you get involved?
2. Are there any informal ways that you evaluate your experience? What are they?
3. Do you feel that these student voice processes are effective? Do you think your involvement in evaluation makes a difference? Can you give any examples?
4. What is the role of the (national) NUS amongst the student body? Have you noticed any changes in the level of (national) student voice activity?

5. Do different structures serve different purposes and have different outcomes? (*for example does the NSS serve a different purpose to student protests?*)
6. Do you think student voice serve different purposes for different people e.g. senior management, academics and students?
7. Do you think that student voice structures will change following the increase in tuition fees?
8. Is there any appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their own learning experiences to a greater degree than they do currently?
9. As part of my research I have been looking at some of the different purposes for student voice that appear in the literature. If I run through these purposes I wonder if you would reflect on them individually and whether they have any resonance in your context and provide examples:

Student voice for consumer choice

Student voice for accountability

Student voice for democracy and power sharing

Student voice for the development of student identity

Student voice for the improvement and enhancement of provision

Student voice for ownership of learning (buy in)

Student voice for academics professional development

13 APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: Student Voice in Higher Education

Information sheet for participants

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Contact details are given below for you to ask about anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this research project is to better understand student voice in higher education from the perspective of those involved in different subject areas. Two case studies are taking place in different parts of the University involving observations and semi structured interviews with students, academics and senior managers in order to develop a picture of how people at the university experience student voice structures.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as an academic in the Department of ... which is one of the groups of interest.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. This information sheet is for you to keep, if you do decide to take part, you will also be asked to sign a further consent form. Should you agree to take part, you are still free to withdraw from the process at any time prior to May 2012 without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

Your participation will involve taking part in an interview or group observation that I, as the researcher, will conduct. The interview will last between 20 - 40 minutes, though the exact duration will be agreed beforehand to ensure it suits your own time commitments. A possible follow up interview may be desired, which would be subject to your agreement. The interviews/observations will take place on campus in a location suitable to you. The research will be scheduled to take place between July 2011 and July 2012. Interviews and observations may be voice recorded, subject to your consent, and a transcription will be sent to you for validation by July 2012. Any data given in the research process will be treated as confidential.

Will I be anonymous?

Your identity will be kept anonymous in this study and all information about you will be kept strictly confidential. Every effort will be made throughout the research

process to protect your anonymity and confidentiality. All research data gained will comply with the legal requirements set down by the Data Protection Act (1998). All project information, including interview transcripts, will be stored securely.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research project will be written up as a PhD thesis. Following papers may also be published based on this research. The thesis and ensuing papers may include segments of interview data to illustrate the findings of the study, but only as long as they do not compromise your anonymity and confidentiality. As a research participant, you will be entitled to a copy of the thesis and any following papers.

What if I change my mind?

Your participation in the research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any point up to July 2012 without giving a reason by contacting the researcher (details below).

Who has reviewed this project?

This project has been reviewed and approved through the Ethical Approval Process at the University of Birmingham.

Who can I contact for further information?

Please contact me or my supervisor if you would like any further information or clarification of any points. My contact details are:

[Redacted contact details]

14 APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project title: Student Voice in Higher Education

**Please initial
box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up until July 2012, without giving any reason and without it having a direct impact on me as a member of staff/student.

3. I agree to the audio recording of my interview

4. I understand that the anonymous information I provide may be published as a PhD thesis, journal or conference publications.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name

Date

Signature

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Researcher

Date

Signature

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15 APPENDIX H: SELECTED ANONYMISED DATA

15.1 Minutes from the Russell Group, English Department Student Representative Committee

Minutes from the [Student Representative Committee] meeting for

[REDACTED]

07/02/2012

[REDACTED]

1. Minutes from last meeting recap:
 - Good response to marking criteria in the UG handbook.
 - Mass e-mail on MLA style also had a good response.
 - Seminar work in lectures solved.
2. Update on Ball:
 - Nearly sold-out.
 - May need to extend on amount.
3. News of a tutor allowing to submit three drafts of an essay to be checked before real piece is due:
 - Need to intervene as it's unfair on other students.
 - Gently intervene.
 - Speak to [REDACTED] or the module convenor post-meeting to discuss.
4. Issue with Shakespeare lectures:

- Many students feel they don't benefit from one particular lecturer's lectures.
 - Students feel frustrated.
 - Module convenor is aware.
 - Discuss with [REDACTED] post-meeting.
5. Personal tutors unreliable:
- Not available in office hours/ via e-mail.
 - Students unable to receive term one feedback.
6. Report from [Student Representative Committee] Academic Convenors' meeting on January 20th:
- [REDACTED] discussed revamping the [Student Representative Committee] body, such as potentially changing the name.
7. Paying for handouts:
- For a particular module, handouts necessary for the term cost £1.
 - Can discuss viability, but may not be within English departmental budget to cover.
 - Look into differentials for the cost and make a decision.
8. Style of seminars:
- Seminars turning into lectures – students don't always feel they can express their opinion, and there aren't equal levels of participation between the tutor and students.
 - If specific to individual tutors: raise with [REDACTED] post-meeting.

- Also remember – students’ interjection is important, may be worth bringing this up with said seminar tutor and solving it between you.

9. Lack of coordination/ communication between seminar tutors and module convenors over holiday assessments:

- Unsure of need to e-submit or just give a hard copy to the tutor.
- Also unsure on exact dates of when it’s due.
- In general, assessed requires an e-submission and unassessed does not, but as this is assessed but does not require e-submission yet, it falls into the in-between category.
- Admin issue – just a teething problem that needs to be smoothed out.
- In general, the portfolio has had a good response; it’s just the administration of it that needs to be sorted.
- For Epic – similar issue of differing essay deadlines. But as it’s unassessed, this is less of an issue. Consistency is necessary, but still this isn’t imperative.
- May need to copy tutors into e-mails sent to students to ensure all students and tutors have the same information.

10. Humanities Cafe:

- Recycling bins a possibility? (cardboard in particular).
- Faculty matter as it’s in the arts building – can be raised in the faculty meeting on Wednesday (8th February).

11. Confusion over four-week deadline for feedback:

- Does it include Christmas/ reading week?

- Problem with consistency on when different students receive different pieces back.
- The four week deadline only covers term-time – it does include reading week, but not Christmas/ Easter break.
- Importance of getting essays back in a timely way.
- Good point for the module this was specifically addressing (US Writing): the self-evaluation form has proven to be very useful, and is possibly worth taking on across the department.

12. Careers notice:

- Lots of events and double the numbers from last year = positive.
- However, just before Christmas a copy of a report from a focus group of 10-12 English students on careers and post-grad work gave negative feedback on careers. What was reported was inaccurate, indicating a worrying lack of understanding of the Careers Service, as well as a lack of awareness of the consequences of what they were saying.
- Serious as it hasn't been raised previously – the [Student Representative Committee] hadn't addressed these issues, and it has serious implications for the careers services. If there are any issues, the [Student Representative Committee] should discuss them so that the Careers team can ensure they're rectified.

- Awareness of what careers do on the department's behalf is necessary, and the [Student Representative Committee] should translate this to the student population.
- If any issues exist they should be brought up and addressed either directly to [REDACTED], or via the careers reps or [Student Representative Committee]. These issues can then be addressed immediately.
- Specifically ask about careers for the next [Student Representative Committee] meeting.
- Specifying that the e-mail is related to careers in the subject line when e-mailed out?

If anyone has any issues, or knows of any other points that require raising in the next [Student Representative Committee] meeting, please do not hesitate to e-mail me.

[REDACTED]

15.2 Transcript of interview with Head of English, Post-92

June 2011

RF: So my first question is 'what internal mechanisms exist to allow students to evaluate their experience of learning at the university?'

Head of English: Within the School of English? (RF: Yes) OK.

I think it starts with individual module evaluations. We have a standard form that gives space for some free comment, some discursive space around key questions but also some tick boxes. Every student gets one of those for every module. We've

got a system of student representatives - two per year for the BA course and two per course for the postgraduate courses. Each of those student reps has access to a student rep Moodle site. Students can post comments to that to a news forum. And that's also used for the reps to feedback after [Student Representative Committee].

Because the [Student Representative Committee] is engaged also in regulatory things to do with the course that are not perhaps immediately related to student evaluation we've also got a slightly more kind of rapid response thing called a student forum which consists of student reps plus. That student forum is supplemented by a system of comment boxes where any student can take a card, post a comment stick it in a box and then that comment is considered at the student forum. That's evolved somewhat in its time. It started with a system of red and green - green for good/ red for a complaint. The problem with that was that - if I say that it generated lots of reds that doesn't mean to say that something was profoundly wrong it's just that where a student just wanted to make a helpful suggestion, it came out as red as well which didn't seem very satisfactory. So if you go out on the lobby out there you'll see some nice big photographs of Shakespeare productions. One student put in a red card saying 'can't we have some more posters around the place?' - it's just a good suggestion.

Now with each of those kind of institutions if you like, the Student Representative activity there is an onward journey as well so I've just written an end of year module report for my third year module on Shakespeare that includes reference to the student evaluations that's then picked up in the broader course annual monitoring report which then gets taken through the whole quality assurance system.

On top of all those kind of institutionalised arrangements I think all of us would say actually that the most important thing is still the conversations you have with students in the day to day running of things. Because English is quite an open discursive sort of subject it's not just about the one way transfer of information, people are always talking about things. Students are encouraged to tell us what they think all the time. We have a generous system of consultation hours. It's very

easy for students to come and see me if there are issues they want to discuss and the course directors and the year tutors. Generally they do.

Over the past year we've had a sort of extra layer which has been a person called the assistant course director which is paid for from the student experience fund. That was a proper job that we advertised and a couple of third year students got it. Their role really was to provide a sort of direct line of communication between the course director and the student body as a whole so they would do things like come round to classes and talk to students about the National Student Survey - that kind of thing. At that stage it starts to get quite difficult to separate the idea of formal student representation from all of the other systems of student support. So you can see in the corridor that we have a system of student mentoring as well, as well as all of the centre for academic success as it is now called and the help that we offer students through tutorials on their work.

We've also got a system where the senior students, third years, will sit for an hour in the social room at the end of the corridor there and talk to juniors about their experience. There are going to be times when that turns into a sort of evaluative encounter but I figure that's the advantage of having student representation done in a quite distributed model. You are bound to get some grey areas, fuzzy lines between functions but the message we try to get across to all students is there are a number of ways by which you can communicate what you think. Use these. That doesn't mean to say that we don't sometimes get frustrated with the fact that they don't. Not all students complete module evaluations. They should. Not all students engage with student representative presence on [virtual learning environment]. They should. Not all students use the comment boxes. We wish they would. There are some students who use Facebook obviously and all of those other social networking sites to post comments about us.

It will probably be interesting for your research for you to know that at the moment we have a student suspended for posting completely inappropriate comments on Facebook. It might be a really interesting area of your research actually. (RF: Yes, on their personal page?) It's on their personal page. (RF: OK) But something that

was borderline criminal (RF: Gosh). And my feeling is that that goes on a lot more than most of us know actually. And in a sense that is more to do with marketing and reputation management but in a sense it does impinge on this idea of evaluation and capturing - because this is the point of it isn't it? - it's trying to capture what students really think. What are they really thinking? Because all of these - to wind up on the formal processes - all of the formal institutions, all of the formal processes of student evaluation involve to some extent an element of fiction or role playing. That's particularly true of [Student Representative Committee] where the representatives who come are very conscious that there's a particular way you behave in committees which is why I have always thought that that is a very imperfect way of capturing student ideas about things and there is this feeling I suppose that you have to get down to the individual granular level with something like Facebook to get at what people really think but then that's just another site of discourse as well. It has its own rules. It has its own assumptions about how people will behave. So it may be that they actually behave artificially worse or better on Facebook.

RF: Yes that's really. That's one of the things I'm looking at. I'm looking at the formal structures but also the informal structures and the way students evaluate it outside that is interesting in terms of authenticity

Head of English: Its capacity too to create a dialogue between inside and outside. There's the alarming thing of course about the incident we've seen where a student had 350 friends on Facebook. We don't know how many of those are at the university so what do you do? Well the university's disciplinary code is sufficient to deal with it. That's fine but there's a bigger issue. Capturing what students think. It's interesting. Interesting one.

RF: I think you've told me a bit about it but what's your role within the various processes?

Head of English: My role personally is Head of School. It is an area that I delegate quite a lot to course directors who have the immediate job of overseeing

the student forum. That ones for year tutors as well and the [Student Representative Committee]. And of course it's the course director who brings together the individual module reports that includes student evaluations. However I am a bit suspicious of what can happen if you allow those processes to run because it can mean you end up with a very very sanitised, purified version of the truth. I am sufficiently anxious about the system of module evaluations to insist on seeing all the module evaluations myself first before they go any further so the system we have here is that staff distribute the forms, they bundle them up, they leave them for me. Sometimes they'll leave them for the course director who then leaves them for me. But then everybody understands that I will see them and I'll make a note of issues. When I return them to the member of staff concerned, if it is evident that there are serious concerns then obviously I'll talk to them. It does occur from time to time. You get a sort of ground swell of opinion against - it's usually not something in the sense of a course or an issue - it can be quite personal because of something somebody said so I will talk that through as soon as I know about it with the member of staff concerned and depending on the nature of the issue with the students as well. I'll give you an example of that in a moment. The reason that I do that is that it is fatally easy for people to bury things in reports. Not really because they are being dishonest. It's just human nature actually to want to give the best possible view of what's happened.

I remember talking about this at Learning and Teaching Committee and some people were sort of saying gosh that's frightfully authoritarian but I think as long as you do it in the right way and you explain to colleagues why it's being done - it's being done so if there are issues they can be addressed quickly and properly and not just left to simmer sort of through a series of reporting processes. Because if there is a problem it's much better if I get to know about it sooner rather than six months later as a result of reading an annual monitoring report. So I think that works.

The example I was going to give you was a module last academic year where a lecturer had made to me what seemed to me a perfectly defensible sort of well not

really a joke but an off the cuff comment. And a small group of students had really taken against it in a quite a strong way and that had kind of coloured their view of what the lecturer was doing and what the course was all about in a bizarre way. Now it was very very good to be able to look at the modular evaluations and say straight away hang on this is something that's run completely unproblematically for the last 6 or 7 years. Why are people suddenly so upset about it? By knowing about it straight away allowed me to talk to the students concerned and to establish with them what the nature of the problem really was. And actually to reassure the member of staff that this wasn't a big issue. That is was something that could simply be talked out. It also gave me the opportunity to talk to other students on the module who were able to give me a rather different view of things. So I suppose in that sense if my experience of talking about this at L&T is any guide I guess I'm probably a bit more interventionist than other Heads of School but maybe I can afford to be because it's a slightly smaller school and do we have a different ethos of teaching. I don't know but I think it pays dividends.

RF: Are there any constraints that preclude the school from providing particular mechanisms so other like practical constraints or political or financial?

Head of English: That's interesting. I've never really thought about that. I thought when I arrived that the [Student Representative Committee]' system was hopeless as a means of garnering opinion and that's why we welcome the student forum model because that really does cut to the quick and that's quite a recent innovation really. So I would have said until a few years ago well actually [Student Representative Committee] - they just have too much business to be effective as a student consultation group but I think we've solved that problem now and all of the other things that we've done like comment boxes that serve the student forum, [virtual learning environment] as well. I think all of those loops are closed.

The biggest constraint actually is a more fundamental one to do with pedagogical arrangements which is the permanent squeeze on staffing because you are far more likely of course to get the good appreciation of what your students think about you if you know all of them by name, if you can afford to be in contact with them

often enough really to understand how they are learning and in that sense evaluation is simply not separable from the broader educational experience. And if you are in a situation where you have to have more students in a class and more personal tutees in a personal tutor group and where you have to think about reducing the number of contact hours per week of course you are going to get a slightly less clear view of student evaluation. And I suspect you are going to attract more negative evaluations anyway for all of the obvious reasons.

RF: So do you think that the evaluation processes - I suppose the formal ones - are effective? I know you've talked a bit about it.

Head of English: You've got to have an all-round system in order for it to work at least in the environment we operate in. I do think it's got to be multi-faceted - a blend of formal and informal and as a process it's never got to be so pleased with itself that it thinks it's supplanted the really really informal stuff which is simply bumping into people and talking to them because that's actually the only way you generate the trust that means you're probably going to get better evaluations anyway.

RF: I suppose the big question is what is the purposes of student voice structures so do you think they have the same purpose or do you think they are different purposes for different activities? So thinking about taking something like the National Student Survey versus something like the student forum. Do you think they are the same?

Head of English: Actually I tend to think of the different fora as just different ways of getting at the same set of problems because they will produce slightly different answers and they will attract a slightly different constituency as well. Students do get weary of evaluation of course though. It is calculated that by the end of a full time three year course our students will probably have completed anywhere between 20 and 30 evaluations of what we do. So with the centralised fora, with the student forum and the [Student Representative Committee] I think it is absolutely fine if some students submit something to one and not the other. They

will just capture different kinds of feedback probably. And they will have the same range of significant things and trivial things if you like.

We discuss the National Student Survey in all sorts of other ways. We talk to students about it during induction and higher-level year inductions. We do discuss the results at the [Student Representative Committee] as well and we've also got briefing arrangements through the assistant to course directors for students. Because of the legal and procedural niceties of doing it we tend to leave it to the student reps and student course assistants to do the explaining because I actually don't want any of us to get anywhere near that problem of sort of trying to sell the place through the student survey although we do all of the work associated with that - explaining to students what they said last time; what we've done this time but in my view we are permanently addressing the question of student satisfaction in the context of having to uphold and apply demanding academic standards. And there is an irreconcilable tension sometimes between those two things. If a student says - and I get this all the time - they need to get a 2-1 and you are absolutely certain that their abilities or their commitment to work will mean that they will only ever get a 57 or a 58 they're not going to be happy - course they're not. And quite a lot of time is spent explaining that. That satisfaction is not necessarily about thinking that you've got the degree that you think you deserve when nobody else does. In the nicest possibly way - of course.

RF: So I suppose leading from that do you think there are different purposes to students having a voice for students, academics and senior managers? Do you think they have different roles?

Head of English: I am sure that we conceptualise the student voice in different ways. The student voice as a whole - when we have discussions about common issues at the student forum or [Student Representative Committee], student voice as a whole always has a point. When it gets to that stage I've never actually heard students say something that was irrelevant or mistaken. So in that sense I think the student voice is always very sensible, spot on - to be listened to more often than not it is something that we know about anyway. Student voices

individually can be completely off the wall and misunderstand either the purpose of representation or the resource constraints or the nature of study you know from the level of effort and time it takes to the nature of assessment - what it means to be assessed against a set of standards as opposed to thinking what you should get because your mum thinks your great and all of those things. So yes that's the sort of reverse of Jonathan Swift's famous maxim that he loves people individually but hates mankind. The collective voice is good - it's always great. Individuals hmmm - can go off the rails quite a lot for obvious reasons - because people are under pressure, lots of our students have outside work commitments, lots of them have difficult family backgrounds. Sometimes to tell those students well ultimately what you do here is about your degree as well and that does involve discipline and sacrifice and there are times when you have to give quite tough messages to people but that's part of education as well.

RF: And have you noticed any changes in the level of student voice activity?

Head of English: I think the role of reps has become more professionalised. Student Unions obviously put a great deal of useful work and effort into training reps and the result is whereas 10 years ago the [Student Representative Committee] used to be bombarded with all sorts of things that we couldn't possibly control like car parking. We don't get that anymore actually. And I mean they're so well trained strangely that it is very common now for reps to speak at [Student Representative Committee] as if they are academics. It's almost as if they have crossed the divide. They've so fully understood the nature of the business and this is an interesting one. Is this a criticism of where this has led? They've so fully understood the nature of the business that they've almost stopped speaking directly for the students if you like. They've mediated student opinion so thoroughly and made it so if you like sophisticated in relation to the institution that they don't sound like students somehow. But that's a really interesting area to consider as well. My memory is that 10 years ago there always used to be one rep like that, one who sort of completely got it and they were usually people who'd go on and do further study or who were really committed to the subject and really

interested in it. They were the sort of the proto-academic style reps but now far more of them are like that. Well I guess that's a good thing but then you just don't know what the rest of the students think. I don't think we've a formal system whereby students evaluate their own reps. We do. We evaluate the effectiveness of reps and if they don't turn up to meetings they're not reps anymore. But it would be interesting to see wouldn't it - what a system of student evaluation of representation would look like. I don't know. Have you come across that anywhere?

RF: There are some studies that have looked at how effective reps are and occasionally some of the internal student's satisfaction surveys ask a question about the effectiveness of reps.

Head of English: But I think it is representation rather than focused on individual performance. Because I think if you are really going to do this in the round you need to do it in the same way we do modular evaluations you know where the individual performance of the tutor is a key component. Since they've been voted in - they've been elected - there ought to be an element of accountability if you like. [RF: That would be interesting] Maybe we will think about that next year and pilot it and see how it would work because it might then have the very beneficial effect of making more students think about what the channels of communication really are. We invest quite a lot of time in telling people about the systems. You can see posters up and down the corridor with stuff about this but I'm convinced that quite a significant percentage of students still if you stopped them in the corridor and said 'ok you've got an issue, how do you communicate that to a student rep?' I think they'd probably look puzzled and shrug their shoulders so getting more of the broader student body engaged in the business - that's an interesting challenge.

RF: Do you think there is an appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their learning experiences to a greater degree?

Head of English: Well there's a bigger question there in terms of what they study. Students always want choices in the modules they choose. And that really does engage fundamental questions about who is responsible for what and

fundamental questions about what can be afforded and what is sensible given the need to meet progression targets and all of those other things.

We have this year had our first occurrence of a completely mandatory first year. In the previous 5 year cycle for the BA course we had a first year which was terribly innovative in a way. We had a common first semester and then on the basis of the first semester we asked students to choose modules including some cores according to what they thought their eventual specialism would be. That was a brilliant marketing tool because it was something people loved to hear at Open Days. Goody. But it was a nightmare to administer because it meant that if students failed options that they'd taken they were prevented from going on to study their chosen pathway and all sorts of fiddly concerns so rather heart in mouth this year - because I know what it is like when you deprive students of choice - they don't like it - we've gone for a fixed first year for everyone but with lots and lots of diversity within it and with the capacity for students to negotiate assignments and give them really quite open ended briefs so to some extent they determine the direction of their studies. I think overall that's worked pretty well and in that sense we've come to that decision partly for resourcing and partly for pedagogic reasons. Of course we consulted students about the design of the course and there were mixed feelings about it honestly but we felt in the circumstances it was the only thing we could do. We are now faced with that problem you are going to get whereby one of the four strands that runs through the year has a significantly lower pass mark and significantly lower completion rates than the others so we need to think about what to do with that.

And higher up in the BA course for the same reasons we've got more mandatory modules but we've retained some optionality. We've grouped things into big 30 credit modules so students only do 4 of those a year in years 2 and 3. That doesn't. That produces some grief in the sense that obviously it constrains student choice. If you've only got 4 things to choose and one of those is mandatory and then because of the timetable you can only take one of them at a certain time you are going to upset people but the payoff - and this has very very clearly happened this year - is

that the more you allow them to focus their efforts on a smaller number of bigger things the better their results will be.

So to come back to the question of the student voice. One of the things we are constantly engaged in is - and there's never an end to this of course - is talking to students about the consequences of an alternative arrangement. And that extends to quite small pragmatic arrangements as well. We're very happy to listen and say ok you don't like the look of this; the alternatives are x, y and z. Let's explain to you the consequences of those alternatives now. And then let us know what you think. Another classic example of this was a unilateral decision that we felt we had to take in the interests of timely student feedback to say that we'll have a common hand in date for all assessments throughout the year so there are only 4 points in the year when students hand in work. So there is no confusion at all about hand in dates. And not only that we try and structure our academic year so that we guarantee that students coming back in semester 2 get their semester 1 marks on the day they come back for semester 2. The corollary of that is that we have to say you hand that work in the day after the New Year holiday because then we've got a window of 2 weeks in which we can mark and moderate it. Now lots of students groan because it means they've got to make a special trip - I allowed exemptions for electronic submission where people really couldn't come so there was quite a lot of grief about that - why does it have to be then? - so we explained - do you want your feedback fairly quickly? Yes. So we need time to mark the work. If you are a very very industrious member of staff you will get a dozen to fifteen 2-3,000 word essays marked in a whole working day. We've got 162 on average to mark of these. How long do you think that is going to take? People respond very well to that. It's a kind of simple calculation. The other factor there was well ok we could bring the deadline forward to before Christmas but then you'll have less time to do the work. You want to produce your best work. It needs more time. So I suppose rather than saying the student voice a lot of what we do here is simply dialogic. I think it would be a terrible position if we thought that the student voice was somehow one thing that was immune to being influenced by what we make of it because it changes as a result of

those conversations all the time. And of course it never keeps everybody happy. And not everybody always gets the point.

RF: I suppose leading on from that. One of the things that I've done as part of my PhD is I've done a literature review of different journal articles or things that people have written about the idea of the student voice and looked at the ideologies behind that. What's come out of that is several different ideas of the purpose of student voice so there's student voice for accountability - holding people to account; student voice for democracy so students having a right to be involved in things; the idea of students as customers - accountability but also about the development of quality and there's also some other stuff that's about the student voice for student wellbeing so it's good for them to be able to get things of their chest. Is there one of those that you think the department would be most closely aligned to or do you think it is little bits of all of them or something completely different?

Head of English: Little bits of all of them. I think I'd say I was very keen on it as a Head for reason number 1 accountability. Colleagues in English I think because English is an interactive participative discipline, colleagues will naturally feel drawn to 2 - the idea of a democratic imperative which sort of runs into, those two into 4 as well don't they. The one we all absolutely draw the line at and say 'no, no, no' is number 3. That's not why we do it at all. In fact whenever a student mentions the word customer I tend to sit them down and explain why precisely you can't use that word in this context. And the word I encourage them to use is client by analogy with going to a solicitor. You pay for good advice from a solicitor. You don't pay for the answer you want and they generally understand that. And the other thing is by analogy with schooling actually. I know this is a slightly unpopular controversial thing to say but if you are a parent who forks out hefty school fees for your child you have to fail to understand the nature of education if you think you are going to get what you and your child want in that narrow sense. What you are paying for is a structure that's going to give your child a better chance in life in the future and that involves some deprivations as well as advantages. But of course you still want things to run properly, you want it to be efficient, you want the

teaching to be of the highest possible standard and so on and so on. But you've got to see the experience as a whole and one that involves real challenges that you might naturally feel inclined to shy away from.

So no there isn't one that I would say is more important but there is one that I would rule out.

RF: OK. That's really useful. Thank you. I'm just going to have a quick look and check to see if there's anything I've missed out but I think that might be it.

RF: Are there any big differences between undergraduate and postgraduate student voice?

Head of English: It's just scale really. With the postgraduates we don't have that worry about representation because the courses are smaller so we know that when a student rep says something that that is genuinely a representation of the whole student body. With undergrads, with much larger numbers you do tend to get a silent majority factor. It's quite difficult to plug into it and of course there are some people who are just very accepting of what they are given anyway. They just don't want to get engaged with it particularly and for those people the over-assessment thing, the twenty to thirty evaluations over their three years might be an act of nuisance. There are students who say 'stop asking me what I think, are you worried, are you paranoid about this?' and I tend to say yes actually we are a bit paranoid.

I compare this with what we had when I was an undergraduate at an elite university and there was one very brave soul in our year group who insisted on having a kind of show down meeting with the course tutor which just felt awful. The rest of us were all embarrassed. In fact that was just one unhappy person. But then when I look back on what I did as an undergraduate and what we do for our students now, I have no hesitation in saying for 80% of the time when I was an undergraduate I was badly taught by the standards of what we do. Badly resourced. I had lovely people to talk to. I probably did most of my learning from the people I just talked to whether they were tutors or fellow students. But in terms of the actual content or contact time

it wasn't very good so things have moved on a lot and there was no concept of student representation actually when I graduated.

RF: It is a more recent thing, isn't it?

Head of English: It was sort of politicised at the level of the union but there was no culture of it at course level really.

RF: And do you think... one last question. Are there any plans to re-evaluate the provision of student evaluation opportunities following the increase in tuition fees?

Head of English: I think we need to spend more time clarifying and publicising what we already do because we've got quite a developed range of mechanisms and the important thing will be to get more students engaging with those. But then it depends on what they ask for. Most student problems. Most problems that arise from the exercise of the student voice collectively are fixable. If en masse they start saying we want weekly individual tutorials or seminar groups of no more than eight, we've got a problem but I think as long as the infrastructure remains solid and as long as we convey a common understanding but firm message about what education is it will be ok.

I don't know if this is for the interview but my biggest concern is about the infrastructure to do with failings in [virtual learning environment], the rather undeveloped state of the record system at the moment. Those are really fundamental things for the student experience but that we as a school have got absolutely no control over. So an example of this is when we break our backs to return provisional marks to students from semester 2 work so that those marks can be published on [virtual learning environment] day after the main bank holiday, we get all the marks in. It's all done. Colleagues have done fantastically well to meet the 12 working day deadline. [virtual learning environment] crashes. Students don't get what they want. Who do they complain to? Us of course. All we can say is well this is terrible. It's a [virtual learning environment] issue so I actually think that will be... the challenge is for central services actually to really improve their act and make it clear what the systems for student representation, the exercise of the

student voice are there. Because we're still the front end. When it comes to the NSS we're the ones who get judged when a student's asked a question about the organisation of the course. We can be brilliantly well organised. If [virtual learning environment] crashes we're badly organised.

RF: Could you take me through the process. If you had student complaints either through the [Student Representative Committee] or the student forum I suppose there's two different thoughts... student comments, student comments that were things that were in your control. What would be the process of you dealing with those and then what would be the process for ones that aren't in your control?

Head of English: It would depend on the problem. If it comes to me it's more often than not likely to be something that can be fixed by talking with a colleague. That might be to do with the way a [virtual learning environment] site is set up in the first place. It might be to do with somebody who is struggling and has an issue with something. It might very very rarely be something to do with timetabling but that is extremely rare. If it's something to do with central services I'll just go straight to our named contact and say what's the answer. Normally if it comes from me then I get the answers quite quickly. The frustrating thing is the unresponsiveness if it comes from almost anyone else so that's a difficult one.

RF: Brilliant. That's all my questions. Thank you.

15.3 Transcript of interview with Head of English, Russell Group

May 2012

RF: So just to start off with. What are the ways that students are able to evaluate their experience of learning at the university and what's your role in those mechanisms? So I suppose the [Student Representative Committee]'s are an obvious one to start with.

Head of English: Well yes, students are asked to evaluate and report on their experience in all sorts of different ways. I mean the most sort of routine way is in

course questions, module questionnaires so at the end of every sort of... the teaching part of every year... every single module tutor gives evaluation forms out. They're all done anonymously - students have the option of putting their name down but they don't have to. Some modules actually have tailored their own evaluation forms. Most of the time there's a sort of standard pro forma we've been using for several years. But in some cases you know module conveners will tailor it particularly to their own module if there's something special about it... I don't know... it has lots of workshops or whatever... but they're quite comprehensive these forms so that students are invited to comment on all sorts of things - the quality of the lectures, seminars. In each of those headings, they're broken down into... you know... were you invited to contribute in the seminar? was it well structured? was it well led? and so on and so forth. I can show you an evaluation form.

But they're also asked importantly to evaluate how much preparation they personally have done for the seminar so they are not just passive vessels; [RF: that's interesting] they are also invited to be honest and to say how much prep they've done, have they done the reading and so on. And they are very honest. Sometimes they say 'I haven't' or they say that it was too much or not enough or whatever and they are also invited to talk about things that are not actually in the departmental control but are still important to the whole learning experience. Basically that's the Library and there are usually complaints about the Library. Not enough books or it's too hot - lots of complaints about how hot it is in the Library - so anyway that's the grass roots level - the nitty gritty opportunity - and there's also space - and certainly for us as tutors it's the most useful bit of the forms because most of it's just sort of ticking on a range of 5 - 1 how satisfied they are with various aspects, for us the most useful part is the discursive bit where they are able to put at the end any comments, anything they want to say about the module. And that's where if they've got worries or concerns or complaints they'll put them there but similarly which I'm pleased to say is mostly the case where they've really enjoyed a module or been really stimulated or they want to recommend it to their friends or

they love their seminar tutor or they love the lecturers or whatever, that's where they say that.

So that's how they express their voice.

RF: Do they go to you?

Head of English: They go... initially they go... obviously this is a very large department with lots of staff and quite a lot of sessional staff too because obviously one of the ways we train up our PhD students is by giving them teaching duty in the first year so we have a sort of pyramid system where initially the forms are - the students do them when the tutor is not in the room and they're collected and put in an envelope anonymously so that there's always an opportunity for a student who wants to say something that they feel a bit awkward about to do it completely anonymously so no one would ever know who said that.

Then they are given back to the seminar tutor having been done anonymously, gathered anonymously, they are returned to him or her. He or she will then evaluate them you know both numerically so they will do a sort of tot up - 5 is the highest - so how many 5's or 4's they got for seminar satisfaction or whatever and they basically do a sort of single summary sheet of their 20 or 30 students. So on a large module you might have 20 tutors. Say on one of the first year modules you might have 10 or 20 different tutors so each of them will do a sort of summary of their own student cohort. Then those summary forms will go to the module convener who then does a kind of summary of the summaries and then that's what I see. So - and of course if there's some sort of major problem - some riot? - there never is but the system is designed that if there were to be some sort of complete catastrophe then obviously there are mechanisms for picking that up at any stage along the way. But most of the time it works pretty well. The reports are pretty positive. Where not, the comments are usually quite constructive and the same things come round every year like not enough books in the Library. It's interesting, sometimes they actually want more work. Sometimes students want more written work, more formative work in the course of their studies.

So I think that's you know ... everyone can do it ... they can fill out the form as fully or as minimally as they wish. We find it useful; they find it useful. So that's just routine. That's always happened.

The second thing again is. It's not really run by the department but it's very useful is the National Student Survey. So I think we hit about 70% or 60% this year which is pretty much the same as it always is. We do pretty well in the NSS. We were top for overall satisfaction last year I think.

RF: That's good.

Head of English: We're always in the top ten. We're pretty satisfied and again certain things come through every year. Very often they are things that are actually beyond the department's control like Library or the price of beer or the accommodation or whatever. So again that's obviously a national forum; it's all... the questions are presumably designed by the National Union of Students and so on. And the university takes that very seriously for all sorts of obvious PR reasons.

Then the third thing yes would be [Student Representative Committee]. So you've seen that in action. So here it's quite a large department so it's quite a large [Student Representative Committee] so various parts of the undergraduate body are represented so joint degrees, each of the first, second and third years. I think it's always the case that some members of the group will be more proactive than others. Obviously the first year reps have less experience although this year they've been quite proactive actually. But by the time they get into their second and third year, they know a bit more about what happens, how things work but that seems to work pretty well. As you've seen sometimes quite sensitive issues come up which have to be dealt with directly with me rather than in the full glare of the committee and a lot of the stuff is routine questions you know turnaround times, the usual things. I think if there is an issue - I think it's been better this year than in previous years - but if there is an issue it's sometimes the degree to which the [Student Representative Committee] reps actually represent their constituents. That's obviously nothing to do with me - that's to do with how they - whether it's just word

of mouth or whether the undergraduates realise that there is this [Student Representative Committee] and if they have issues - if they have certain kinds of issues and that's the appropriate forum for them - they should take them to their [Student Representative Committee] reps.

So I think sometimes - I think about a year ago there was - I think the people who were on the [Student Representative Committee] at that time possible didn't communicate as well as they could have done what their role was. I think it's much better now. And you know things come up as you've seen.

RF: OK. I think you've answered the next question which is about how effective those processes are. Do you think they are effective? Do you feel they're...

Head of English: Yeah. I think it's important to have a clear structure. A clear transparent structure. I mean in practice questions come up all the time so not everything is channelled through those structures because sometimes there's ... I don't know maybe a student is unhappy about a particular issue or they want to appeal or something... so on a regular basis I or the Director of Undergraduate Studies or whoever - personal tutor or whoever it is will be fielding the student voice in one way or another so it's not that is their only line of communication. Some things need to be sorted out immediately. If there's some personal crisis or whatever it needs to be dealt with immediately - you can't wait for the next committee meeting.

But on the whole I think it works pretty well so going back to the module evaluation forms for example, they're looked by...at some level, they're looked at by at least three different people. They're looked at initially by the actual seminar tutor who has taught those students and knows them by that stage really well; they're looked at by the course convener if that's a different person who has an overview of that whole module and might see that well that new tutor is still finding their feet, they haven't really got the hang of it yet - put them on a training course or something or they might think 'oh that's really nice, that tutor is doing really well.' Or this person's seminars are going well but their lectures aren't quite so popular or whatever it is.

So there's sort of real engaged evaluation on the part of the person who runs that module, who runs the lecture list for that module. And then ultimately there's either myself or the Director of Undergraduate Studies who would have the overview of the whole - all the modules that we run. By the way, all this applies to Postgraduate taught as well.

RF: OK.

Head of English: I should have said that. So MA students similarly will do module evaluation forms. They're not so much tick boxes. Obviously there are not lectures on the MA courses so things on the lectures non applicable. So the MA evaluation forms are basically almost entirely discursive and the students are invited to comment on the amount of reading they have to do - was it too much, too little, just right? Did the module fulfil its aims and objectives? We put the course module aims and objectives on so they can remind us what they were. Again I can show you a blank form. Those are also very full. Students are able to write quite a lot about how they... because obviously there's a lot fewer than undergraduate at any one time and engaging with it more intensely. So they will write quite full evaluations on how a module's gone on and again for the most part they are very positive and where there are things they think could be improved they are generally put constructively.

PG [Student Representative Committee] again is the graduate equivalent of the undergraduate one so everything I've said about the undergraduate applies to the postgraduate taught as well. So in terms of 'is it effective?' Yes. These forms don't just go into the void. They are actually looked at. Issues do come up. But every year - certainly speaking for the modules I've been involved with - real concrete changes have been made in the modules design structure, the texts, the lectures, who gives the lectures, when the essay deadlines are set - all those sorts of things are on an annual basis looked at and if necessary changed in response to student questionnaire.

Obviously not in response to something that one disgruntled person but if there's a kind of general shift that something would be better done this way then obviously we listen to that. So yeah and with the NSS I have to write a whole response every year to the NSS and that all gets fed back to the teaching and learning committee - the universities teaching and learning committee so yes.

RF: OK. And then are there any informal mechanisms that you are aware of things that go on that are outside the structures that are ways that students evaluate. One example would be something like Facebook or even student protests sometimes as well - that kind of thing.

Head of English: Yeah. I do believe there is a lot of activity on Facebook. I don't do Facebook myself but I think for that generation - for your generation - that's how people communicate with each other so I've no doubt whatsoever. I've actually discovered from the [Student Representative Committee] that that's how they communicate in fact so the point I was making earlier about the Reps actually representing their constituents, I think they now use Facebook to do that and that seems to work. I don't know whether they have noticeboards. I don't know how they do it but they don't seem to have any problem with communicating with each other.

Protests? Well I don't know. I hear noisy protests underneath my window now and again. Not as many actually as you'd expect. I know a couple of English students were involved in the fees protest. Not the violent ones in London but there were a few sit-ins in the [university] and I think a couple of English students were involved with that. But they're just exercising their democratic right.

RF: OK. So do you feel that different structures have different purposes and outcomes? So I guess as an example does the National Student Survey serve a different purpose to the module level ones or?

Head of English: Yes. Er... so the National Student Survey is aimed only at finalists and it's obviously asking them to evaluate their entire university experience so it covers you know everything so that gives a sort of litmus test of general happiness and satisfaction so it's always good to score well in the NSS but

there are a lot of things that are said that are nothing to do with the department in that. You know like Library resources or accommodation and things like that which come up year after year. So it's a useful overview but it's a distinct cohort and it's not all about the department.

The module evaluations on the other hand have an immediate relevance because they're actually about what we're doing; what we're giving them; how they're responding to what we're giving them; whether they like it or not; whether they like aspects of it or not; whether they want more of it or less of it or whatever. So I would say... you know... in immediate concrete terms that is probably the most useful and [Student Representative Committee] too although that tends to be more strategic issues. Obviously [Student Representative Committee] wouldn't be an appropriate place for students to talk about a particular tutor or a particular module and as you've seen when they do I generally talk to them outside of that forum.

RF: OK. And do you think that student voice serves different purposes for different people involved so for senior management; for academics and for students? Do you think they get different things out of it?

Head of English: Who?

RF: They engage for different reasons? So for say a senior manager at the university level do you think they are engaging for the same sorts of reasons that a student might engage? Or do you think they might have quite different perspectives on it?

Head of English: So who are we talking about here?

RF: With the student voice activity and structures.

Head of English: Yes. Sorry I'm not quite clear what you're getting at.

RF: So you've got these different structures in the university and a lot of them students are involved in them but also academics are involved in them say something like the [Student Representative Committee] or engaging with the course

evaluations, academics and then you've got the senior management of the university also engaging in a sense with things like the National Student Survey, I suppose it's about their motives for being engaged in that, do you think they have some commonality or do you think they're different depending on which perspective?

Head of English: Well, that's an interesting question. I mean I think there's commonality in that everyone wants everyone to be happy. Students want to be happy for obvious reasons particularly when they are going to be paying higher fees. The university wants students to be happy obviously because it wants people to be happy but also for the purposes of PR and so on so there's a common interest. Everyone is working to the same goal. But within that there has to be a reality check. You don't come to university to... you know it's not a Holiday Inn. You do come to work and so on.

So I think there probably are differences so at university level so the PVC for university level [name removed] she looks at the NSS results for every department; she looks at every department's response to the NSS or whoever is in her position and obviously the NSS is published in the national newspapers and so on so it's in the university's interest as a business to advertise its product as a good product that satisfies its customers so the university has I would say... I'm sort of generalising, simplifying... but I would say that's the university's stake in it.

As a Head of Department obviously, you know internally it's very good, it's very gratifying that are department does well comparatively to others. Most arts departments do pretty well probably because they're... maybe because they are smaller than some of the big science ones I don't know. But anyway... we're better. So internally within the university that's gratifying. Internally to the department it's nice to feel that our... you know we work pretty hard so... it's nice to feel that our students are responding positively in the main.

And in a way it's like a temperature... you know taking the temperature... so it's a sort of a well woman... no... well student check. Do you know what I mean? It's a

sort of routine body check to make sure that everything's basically ok. You know there might be the odd upset or there might be the odd cry of joy but on the whole basically everything is fine.

And from the student point of view obviously they need to feel that they have a voice; that they can be heard; that when they do say something it's taken seriously; if necessary it's acted upon but also most students have no idea how stuff works. No idea at all how universities operate this extremely complicated organisation and I think sometimes students... this is probably true even of postgraduate taught as well.

Sometimes it's difficult for them to evaluate how large or small actually the issue is. It might be massively important to them if they only got 63 for an essay - actually in the scheme of things it's not important at all - it's not important at all. Or something really quite serious might have come up - I don't know, I can't think what that might be but something quite serious comes up - and I don't know they might not realise - say some disciplinary matter or whatever - there are serious issues - or plagiarism or something like that - there are things that the university takes extremely seriously, there are regulations about it and structures and procedures and so on - I wouldn't expect students to know all that - they'd have to read the university regulations - I'd much rather they read you know Beowulf or something. So I think that's probably where - I talked about a reality check - I think that's something where something like [Student Representative Committee] or the kind of third - something like triage - so first are tutors, Directors of Studies, seminar tutors, [Student Representative Committee]. Quite a lot of what I do with students is kind of triage - they'll come with some sort of issue which actually turns out to be - you need to deal with it with this person or that isn't really an issue or well you know what I mean. So it's important for any human being to feel that if they have something to say they can say it and they will be heard but the person who's doing the hearing will be in a better position usually to evaluate whether it needs to be acted upon or whether it needs to be acted upon in a certain way - in an official formal way or an unofficial way. Quite often I'll deal with student issues if it's

appropriate - which it often is - in quite an informal way so I'll just have a chat with them or have a word with the staff they're not happy with or whatever it is and 99% of the time that sorts itself out.

RF: OK. Do you think there's an appetite for students to be more involved in shaping their learning experience so things like curriculum and that kind of thing do you think there's any increased desire or desire for students to get involved in that kind of level of student voice?

Head of English: Well that's a good question too. We completely reorganised our undergraduate curriculum for English Literature which is our largest degree so we have 100, 110 students a year so it's basically the bulk of our students taking that degree and we didn't change the modules but we reorganised the structure so the metaphor I kept using was that the books on the shelves were the same books but we will reorganise the shelf structure. So the curriculum now has basically been completely freed up to make for amazing optionality. Not a complete free for all so the optionality is structured through these four different pathways.

Now that took an immense amount of work actually to work out how to do that and the department had been talking about changing the curriculum ever since I'd been here - twenty years virtually. Because we were sort of going back to the drawing board really because we'd had so many failed attempts to change the curriculum before that had come to nothing so initially when we were working out how we might approach the question we didn't actually involve the students at that stage because it was still very kind of fluid in our minds.

And then as it began to emerge that we wanted these pathways and how would they work and what would there, would there be certain pathway requirements and what would they be and would they be the same for each pathway and all the real nitty gritty of it. We had a special small working group that was working on the curriculum and then when we got to that level we involved the whole department so

we didn't really bring the students in until quite late in the day by which stage the new curriculum had more or less been shaped.

And that was partly because we felt that it was our product that we were offering the students and therefore we were, as the people who were designing the modules and teaching them, we were probably best placed to work out what we would want and what we thought would be a better product for the students.

Then we did that - we rolled it out - and of course the students loved it - and there was a transitional year where one year obviously had to operate with the old curriculum but the new year could operate with the new one - in fact that was last year where we had these two - the third years were doing the old and the second years were doing the new - and the third years are a bit miffed that the second years had all this lovely choice that they didn't have.

I think there are logistical pragmatic difficulties with inviting students at an early stage of discussing curricular change because you can't possibly expect them to have an overview - or indeed a knowledge of the departmental history because they are only here for a few years - a history of how the curriculum has changed over the years, staffing patterns, or leaves. All of a sudden, those modules that used to be core there's no one to teach them any more so they die away. There are huge intellectual shifts - many of them have been led by people in this department in the discipline which means there's a movement [RF: towards a particular thing] - yeah towards world literature or whatever it might be so the danger is that if you bring students in too early in discussions like that they'll kind of - they don't have enough knowledge or experience and they might have - I don't know - have a local interest or a personal interest but they don't necessarily have that kind of overview so we felt it was - you know we were as it were designing our product, improving our product we thought and then kind of running it by the customer - I mean I hate the metaphor but just for the sake of argument - to see if it met with their approval which it did and of course like anything it's not set in stone. In fact it's so flexible now there are more opportunities than they're used to be to adapt it, change it; you

know the Pathways have changed again. The pathways haven't changed but the requirements have changed this year making it even more attractive.

So yeah I think it's one of those few cases where the customer client model actually works so you wouldn't expect the customer to design the car. You'd expect the experts to design the car and then the customers to buy it and if they didn't like it, they would go somewhere else. So I would say that's probably one of the few places where that metaphor actually applies.

RF: OK. So on that topic... one of the things that I've been looking at is the ideologies that underpin student voice and looking at the ones that people talk about in the literature around it and that are quite common in the way the government talks about it or the way the university talks about it. So I've got several different ideologies or reasons that are purposes for student voice I suppose. I wondered if I ran through some of them whether you could say they had any resonance for you, whether you had any examples or whether you totally disagree.

So the first one is student voice for consumer choice, customer, that kind of consumer relationship.

Head of English: Well you know they don't have to come to [University name]. They don't have to come to university at all so they are free to exercise that choice at any stage along the way and no doubt the new fee regime will exercise potential students' minds in a way, possibly more than before - they'll be evaluating their choices and so on. Therefore it's more beholden to universities and departments to sell themselves, to make themselves attractive so all these KIS statistics - every department's going to have to evaluate contact hours - all that kind of stuff. That's all part of the information that's going out.

I'm not sure whether that is exactly the student voice but that's the student assessing the information, judging for themselves but it's so difficult to quantify this stuff. Things like contact hours and everything everyone's very exercised about how contact hours have got to go up - we should be talking about quality not quantity. If I were a student I'd rather have 8 excellent quality contact hours a week than 20

rubbish ones. And personally I've made this point before. I don't think that more means more or more means better necessarily. But that's a contentious issue and that's at the whole national level of universities competing with one another and so on. I'm not sure if that answers your question?

RF: Yeah, a lot of these might have resonance in particular areas but not as a general... so perhaps not in the classroom when you're sitting there with a group of students but on that kind of level.

RF: The second one is student voice for accountability. And that might be in terms of the whole university to the government, to the public or it might be the department to the university or it could be lecturers to the head of department - that kind of monitoring role of student voice. Whether that has any resonance?

Head of English: Err. Again I'm not sure of the question... so they're accountable?

RF: So one of the purposes of student voice as far as the government might be concerned so something like the National Student Survey might be seen as universities being accountable so they get all this public money - are they doing it well?

Head of English: So the students are reporting as it were...

RF: So that kind of - that allowing somebody to have a monitoring role over an institution or a department.

Head of English: Well that goes back to the previous question doesn't it? The whole kind of customer model but I can't think of a single instance in business where the customers are the only voice, the controlling voice - not even the shareholders are the controlling voice so they can kind of express their opinions, they can exercise their choice by not buying that car but buying that one but if they want a car you know they're going to have to buy a car - buy the one that's best for them. So I don't think we're ever looking at a scenario where this is completely

customer led because nothing is. Not even Amazon or IKEA - the great business successes are completely customer led although they are customer friendly.

So there's always going to be a balance isn't there? Of course there've been famous instances haven't there where universities have been sort of caught short or found out because they were - I don't know - not teaching properly or whatever it is so there are checks and measures aren't there internally and externally for broad - you know that's what QAA is for so there are all sorts of checks and measures to make sure we're not just selling degrees over the counter or teaching complete rubbish.

RF: So it's one aspect rather than...

Head of English: Yeah.

RF: It's not the only thing though.

Head of English: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. It's an aspect and an important aspect and an increasingly important aspect as fees go up but not the only one.

RF: It doesn't feel like it's guiding everything?

Head of English: No not unless you're [PVC] - she seems to think that student satisfaction is everything but that's her portfolio obviously. The student experience. So that's fair enough.

RF: Yeah.

RF: Another one is student voice for democracy so students being part of the democratic structure in the department and sharing some power maybe or having that role.

Head of English: Well they're represented as you've seen. They have access to all sorts of members of the department from their personal tutor or their seminar tutor up to the head of department without making it sound too hierarchical but they can express themselves to a whole range of different people depending on

the nature of the issue. They elect their members. They stand for - if they want to be a rep they propose themselves and then if they want to chair it and the committee elects its own members - that sort of thing. That sounds pretty democratic to me.

RF: OK.

Head of English: It's up to them how they organise themselves and represent themselves.

RF: Another one is student voice for the development of student identity and sort of well being so there's some suggestion that it gives students an opportunity to express themselves and to feel part of something - that kind of thing.

Head of English: I think that's really important. I think that's really important and the students who do end up on the [Student Representative Committee] are always you know - they've been head girl or head boy or something often. They're very often a very public spirited type. They often go on to become sabbatical officers in the Student's Union or many of them do and then they go on to become a Labour Leader or whatever.

RF: Yes.

Head of English: So I think that's really important, I think that sense of engagement, responsibility. Obviously it doesn't appeal to every single student and not every student is of the right sort of type or mind but the fact that that opportunity is there - the student politics is there. You can actually do quite a lot in student politics. We've had members of this department who've been sabbatical officers in the student union in one capacity or another and you can see how good it is for that person's individual development and that student's personal development in terms of confidence and experience. You know - knowing how to chair a committee, knowing how to put together an agenda, write minutes, how to write a proposal, who in a large complex organisation to approach if they've got a particular issue, what's appropriate for which member of senior management and so on. And universities are like little worlds. They are - because they are large complex organisations, they

are - most universities I'm sure structure themselves in a very similar way to most large businesses, most large corporations, most large organisations whatever they are. So I said earlier, most students have no idea how stuff works. You begin to get a glimpse by being on an [Student Representative Committee] or being the welfare officer for the student union or whatever or the student - you know head of the student union. And that can be a great shoe into jobs. But as in any representative system only a few can represent the rest so I do think that's very important that they feel that they have a stake.

RF: And then there's student voice for improvement and enhancement of provision. I think you spoke about that earlier.

Head of English: Yeah I mean where there are specific things that we can do that will meet reasonable requests for change, we do. Where it's not within our remit because it's the Library then - you now tell the Library about it or Accommodation or whatever it is. So yeah.

RF: Student voice for ownership of learning, buying in so I suppose by feeling that they're part of it they feel more they feel that they own their learning and their course a little bit more.

Head of English: Well that's our new curriculum. I was over there on Saturday and I made the same speech that I will always make at Open Days and on our Interview Days and so on which is the new curriculum development was deliberately led by me, spearheaded by me because I've been here so long and I've seen the curriculum - you know...

RF: develop

Head of English: Yeah. Come to nothing and felt very frustrated by it. And thought as Head of Department I thought it was the first thing I would try and tackle and at the far end of it or underlying the whole project was my idea of the student, you know a kind of vision for the student that I wanted to produce at the far end of this process. And that was not the kind of student that I was actually. My generation

was you went to university, you were taught what they told you they would teach you, there was no choice in the matter, you were just as it were the empty vessel. They taught you that stuff and you got your degree.

Whereas my vision of the student is of somebody who - it's all about knowing what they want and being able to choose what they want to do. So obviously everybody comes from school and most people don't necessarily know to begin with what they want. They need to find out what they want - what they're interested in and so on. But my vision, aim is to develop people, for the most part they are young people, although you know we're not allowed to say that, but they're young adults on the whole and to develop a kind of level of responsibility and agency so that they choose and structure what they study because they are interested in it. Or they might not know anything about a topic but they want to find out about it so they choose that.

So with the new curriculum the chances are that every single student will be doing a slightly different degree, that the combination of modules that they've chosen will be unique to them, tailored by them, styled by them, fashioned by them to suit their own interests and requirements and the flexibility allows for that. So you could - one student might be a real specialist. They might feel a real passion for - I don't know - American Literature and for the most part study that. Or there might be a student who's a generalist who wants to try a lot of everything. They can do that. Or there might be somebody who has a primary but then also a secondary interest. They might be interested in Post-Colonial Literature but they might also be interested in Women's Writing. They could do that. So the outcome of this. We're not just producing highly educated, articulate, literate individuals but much more than that we're producing... the idea is that we're producing people who've taken an active stand right from day one. To think about who they are. Their temperament. Their nature. Their passions. Their interests. Things they hate and detest. And to shape their learning round that. And of course their learning will also shape them so it's a sort of two way process. But it's to do with responsabilising them and not treating them as baby birds that we just shovel information into their mouths.

And that's sort of in a way my philosophy, my ideology. The other side of that is our staff that want to teach what they want to teach. So students want to do what they want to do. Staff do what they want to do. Everyone's happy. That's the aim.

And it's always possible if a student realises they've made a mistake, gone down the wrong pathway and they want to change or they've suddenly developed this new interest that's fine too. No one's going to hold them to something against their will.

So in a way that's looking at it from the other side which is that what this department has been trying to do very actively is actually to nurture the student voice, encourage and create and give confidence to - well I wouldn't just call it the student voice - but the student body. The student as a whole person so their experience of university life is a holistic experience. You know - it's about them as an individual and a unique individual rather than just another...

RF: just another person with an English degree...

Head of English: person passing through and coming out with an English degree the same as everyone else.

RF: Yeah.

Head of English: So it's on occasions like this where I kind of say it out loud that I articulate it, that I realise it is actually a coherent philosophy. Maybe I should say it more often because it's certainly implicit in everything that we've done with the curriculum and maybe it just needs to be said on a regular basis because it wasn't just 'oh well they're a bit sick of this curriculum, let's change it', there was a philosophy behind it... explaining why we did it in that way.

RF: That's really interesting.

And then there's also, the last one is student voice for academics' professional development so for academics to improve and reflect on what they are doing. I think you said that module evaluations are very much used like that.

Head of English: Yeah. That's so practical. Often it's about the students really loved novel X and hated novel y. OK so you don't do novel y in future or you do do novel y but you...look at why they hated it or whatever. So in terms of actual, practical impact and change and so on, that's the sort of chalk face if you like. Yeah, and as I said, we'll always pay attention to that. Most of the time these evaluations are glowing so you think we must be doing something right. But also the will for change comes from both ends so students might prefer one text to another or want to spend more time on one text or less time on another or whatever but also the staff who are devising and running these modules will also have things - you know new things - they might have read a new novel that they want to introduce or some new theoretical perspective that's going to kind of re-angle so it's always in a state of change. I mean nothing ever stays the same. And there are all sorts of opportunities at every level to improve a module so sometimes you'll just for a change run some different texts or update the bibliography - that's just routine - but you can also - this requires more formal authorisation - but you can also change the assessment patterns. On the Shakespeare module for example students can now - instead of - if they wish instead of being assessed in the format of a traditional 5000 word essay they can submit a piece of costume or a stage play or a radio drama or something. So creative forms of assessment those can be introduced as well. So it's a very sort of happening thing and so the student voice is a part of that because that gives us an indication of where things are achieving student satisfaction and where they're not but we have our own satisfaction as well. We might find it more satisfying to teach this way than that way or bring in this change.

RF: OK. Thank you. That's all of my questions.

Head of English: Good.

RF: Very interesting.

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