The Role of the Programme Team in the Implementation of Policy at Institutional Level – a Case Study in the UHI Millennium Institute

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Abstract

This thesis reports an insider case study conducted by an active participant in the setting which is the UHI Millennium Institute. UHI is a federal, collegial partnership of 13 academic partner colleges. This partnership is made up of Further Education Colleges and smaller and specialised institutions. The case study focuses on one programme team, the BA Social Sciences team and at its role in the implementation of the institutional learning and teaching policy and its related strategies. The case study uses literature on policy implementation and of Further/Higher Education links. It makes use of social practice theory and the notion of the teaching and learning regime to analyse the cultural characteristics of the team and a typology of responses to change, to review the response of the team to policy objectives. In doing so the case study is a response to calls for more 'close-up' research at the meso-level of analysis. The study reviews the response of the team over a 10-year trajectory from the initial validation of the programme to 2009. The study takes an interpretive, participant-observation based approach to examine the cultural characteristics and response of the programme team. The methods used to gather data include examination of comprehensive documentation relating to the programme over this time frame and semi-structured interviews with team members. The findings are that the cultural character of the team is dominated by its origins in Further Education and by the social relationships involved in a team which spans three colleges and deals with three sets of college managers, and UHI. The response of the team to institutional policy is to embrace its objectives but also to reconstruct policy in ways possible within constraints. The team can make certain choices but is also constrained by policy from 'the top'. The study discusses implications for the notion of the teaching and learning regime and for the typology of responses used and proposes ways in which these might be modified. Proposals for further research in this field are made, particularly involving the implications for policy making of the relationship between college management and UHI.

Contents

Abbreviations

BA1	BA First Year
BA4	BA Fourth Year
BASS	BA Social Sciences
COLEG	Colleges Open Learning Exchange Group
EO	Executive Office
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
LTAS	Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
PPC	Personal and Professional Capability
OUVS	Open University Validation Service
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SPT	Social Practice Theory
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
TLR	Teaching and Learning Regime
UHI	UHI Millennium Institute
UHIp	University of the Highlands and Islands project

Chapter One - Introduction

This research project will take the form of a case study. The case is within the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI). The mission of UHI is to create a University of the Highlands and Islands. In June 2008 UHI was awarded taught degree awarding powers and applied to the Privy Council for University Title in 2010. UHI comprises a 'collegiate, federal' institution of 13 academic partner colleges and research centres scattered over a very wide area in the north and west of Scotland. The main student centres are large further education colleges. UHI is distinctive in the sense that it is a large partnership committed to achieving university status but without an existing university or Higher Education Institution being a partner. The delivery of Higher Education in Further Education colleges, the use of online technology to deliver the curriculum, the regional commitment, are major features of UHI but not unique. The uniqueness stems from the size of the partnership and the lack of an HE partner. This creates particular pressures for the programme teams located across several academic partner institutions responsible for delivering courses where the staff are employed by FE colleges on FE terms and conditions of employment. The workgroup in UHI is the programme team which is made up of academic staff from several partner colleges, is led by a programme leader who is based in one of the colleges which is the 'responsible partner' and which delivers a particular degree programme. This study will examine one particular programme team, the BA Social Sciences team. I led this team from 1998-2009.

The research study will be an insider case study conducted by an active participant. It is a 'practitioner-as-researcher' approach. It is a case study in an ongoing educational project which has major regional and national significance. The study is qualitative in nature, seeking to gain insights into the operation of a programme team, working at the meso-level of analysis, as it implements an institutional teaching and learning policy and strategy. This is conducted through an interpretive approach supported by evidence in a variety of forms. The qualitative approach is influenced by the work of Paul Trowler and his colleagues. The approach is essentially interpretative – seeking to illuminate and explain from the point of view of academic staff 'on the ground'.

Trowler (1998) uses the term 'observant participation' and that probably best describes my own position. The term has value because it recognises proximity and sensitivity to situations and I can achieve these because of my position as a participant. I have been a

programme leader and am now a subject network leader in UHI. This makes possible access to 'back-stage' views and opinion which would be difficult for a more distant researcher to achieve.

There are risks in 'close-up' observation too – judgement can be 'contaminated' by experiences or biases, conventional wisdom and prevailing views. A commitment to triangulation of methods and 'confirmability' should minimise this risk.

The case study can be generalised to other large scale collaborative projects in the FE and HE sectors, though there are few insider accounts providing close-up analysis of key issues and consequences. As a case study it can perhaps more importantly be generalised in theoretical terms. The study uses the work of Yin (1993, 2003) who provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology issues arising out of this kind of research. This is valuable because it assists the researcher to achieve both internal and external credibility. The former is based on accuracy of the account and recognition of different points of view; and the latter from the level of effort involved in the study. A further influence is Geertz's (1973) concept of 'thick description' based on the researcher's immersion in the field.

The study has been influenced by qualitative and interpretive writings. Particularly useful are studies by Trowler (1997, 1998, 2005, 2008, 2009) , Trowler and Knight (2002) , Fullan (1993) and Senge (1989). It might be seen as a 'trajectory study' (Maguire and Bell 1994).

The analysis will be informed by literature in the fields of
- Policy implementation
- The cultural features of educational institutions

And to a lesser extent in
- Collaboration and partnership
- FE/HE links
- Professionalism in FE and HE

Data sources are based on two main elements, informed by a third:
1. semi-structured interviews with members of the programme team

2. analysis of documentation concerning the operation of the team over time
3. the above two points being informed by my own role as a participant-researcher as the basis of my own questions, access to and interpretation of data

The overall aim is to develop an understanding of the ways in which programme teams have operated and responded to the demands placed on them by the UHI Millennium Institute, the purpose of which is to create the University of the Highlands and Islands. The particular policy in this case study is the learning and teaching policy. UHI introduced a learning and teaching policy in 1999. It was the kind of "wide ranging general policy document" identified by Newton (2003:430) in his case study of the implementation of such a policy. The UHI policy consisted of a set of principles, procedures and monitoring arrangements. My interest in this particular area was stimulated by a UHI Learning and Teaching Strategy event held in Inverness on 29 October 2003 and led by Professor Graeme Gibbs. The recent growth of such strategies in the HE sector and the need for institutional policies to align to a 'key-stone' learning and teaching strategy was emphasised. Gibbs indicated at that event that a strategy is about having an implementation plan and an operational plan to achieve the kind of policy UHI had had since 1999. This 2003 event noted that the 1999 policy was aspirational and vague, it lacked a profile in the UHI network, and had implementation problems deriving from the various academic partner colleges having their own priorities. As a programme leader I had the involvement of a practitioner working in this context and noted the reflections of Gibbs that UHI had a whole series of issues and that completing a strategy would be a challenge. Following this event UHI went through a collegial exercise culminating in the writing of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) in 2004. This was reviewed and re-written in 2007 and again in 2010. My study will review the response of the BA Social Sciences programme team in responding to this context between its first course validation in 1998 and 2009.

Research Questions

1. Using the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime', what are the cultural characteristics of a programme team which has delivered an undergraduate degree in the UHI Millennium Institute?
2. how has this programme team responded to the UHI teaching and learning policy?

3. what are the implications of this case study for Trowler's sociocultural theory as elaborated by social practice theory and the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime?

The study is based on the work of Trowler and his colleagues as indicated above. A lengthy but useful introductory statement on this was given by Taylor (1999:57-8):

'Trowler (1997) provides a very useful example of how external changes are being experienced, and responded to, at institutional level. He suggests that the model of academics presented in the literature is one of passive and unwilling participation in events largely outside their control. He contrasts this with the view of teachers in the compulsory sector, where they are said to be actively negotiating and changing policy…(he)…disagrees with the implied uniformity in academics' responses. In commenting on the response of academics in contesting the interpretation and implementation of a national 'credit framework' he characterises those responses in terms of four broad strategies – sinking; using coping strategies; policy reconstruction; and swimming. He suggests that the literature tends to paint an overly uniform picture consistent with the passive 'sinking' response. His argument is that this literature relies too much on the 'essentialist positions' particularly epistemological positions adopted by other researchers including Becher. He suggests that other factors are important in allowing for a greater range of responses. Those factors include educational ideology; organisational, professional, gender and other cultural "traffic" found in the unique configuration of the site; the 'profitability of the change' for the academics; and the extent and nature of other aspects of the "framing" of a discipline. His work points to the openness of the process of change, and the rejection of suggestions that academics' responses can be predicted on the basis of the nature of the change itself, or any single pre-existing aspect of their academic identity".

In this study, chapter 2 will outline the essential features of UHI. Chapter 3 will provide some commentary on the general context within which this case study has significance and will note national and regional factors as well as contextual literature on the FE/HE link and the professional status and identity of FE staff working in HE. Chapter 4 will consider in more detail the work of Trowler and other literature on the theme of policy implementation. The case study will focus on teaching and learning policy. Chapter 5 will outline research methods issues relating to a qualitative case study and will set out the design of this

particular project. Chapter 6 sets out the findings produced from an analysis of the interview data and chapter 7 the findings of the documentation. The main discussion relating to the findings to the research questions takes place in chapter 8. There is a short conclusion in chapter 9.

For the purposes of anonymity the three UHI academic partner colleges involved in the case study programme have been allocated other names, randomly chosen from Highland clans, hence Grant College, Chisholm College and Ferguson College. Interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. Interviewees have therefore been allocated codes such as A1 and B2. The external examiners whose reports are quoted in the documentary findings chapter have been allocated codes from EEA to EEG.

Chapter Two - The UHI Background

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the nature of UHI, to set out the issues and challenges that face UHI and to place these in a wider context which provides the basis of the later research.

2.2   The UHI Millennium Institute

UHI Millennium Institute is a company limited by guarantee made up of 13 academic partners comprising some of Scotland's colleges of further and higher education, research institutes and specialist colleges. It is a collegial federal partnership which was designated as a Higher Education Institution in 2001 and gained teaching degree awarding powers in 2008. In 2010 UHI has applied to the Privy Council for University Title.

The full name of this institution is the UHI Millennium Institute but this is conventionally shortened to UHI. The initials 'UHI' in a legal sense do not stand for anything however the initials come from UHIp – the University of the Highlands and Islands project which was established in 1992 following a movement led by community and public agencies in the highlands and islands who convened a conference in the Isle of Skye in 1992, the Barail Conference.

UHI has contractual arrangements with its academic partners by which they deliver teaching and research to UHI's students and by which they sit on the Board of Governors, Academic Council and Executive Board of the institution. The structure of UHI is designed to meet the mission, geography and history of the region.

2.3   Origins and Aspirations

Very little published material is available on the origins of the University of the Highlands and Islands project (UHIp) although in 2004 a book was published containing the reflections of two of the early participants. Hills and Lingard (2004) have provided a narrative account based on personal views and reflections. It seeks to give a commentary on the problems involved in seeking to innovate in the British higher education system. They reveal that the basic idea of a regional university with

locations throughout the highlands and islands and organised into a federal, collegiate structure came from John Robertson of the Shetland Island Council Research and Development Department in a 1991 paper (Ibid: 25). Highland Council, the three Island Councils, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise subsequently supported the Barail Conference in Skye to which Professor Graham Hills was invited as an academic adviser.

A key feature of the UHI project is its contribution to regional development. The rationale of a university for the region is fundamentally about the belief that this is crucial to the long term development of the region in economic, social and cultural terms. The idea of UHI as a source of economic renaissance in the region was a point frequently made (*West Highland Free Press* 22/11/96). Lingard (1995:1) made the point, "we are striving for something unambiguously *of* the region, not just *in* it". Even the *Economist* (4/5/96) recognised its role within a wider highland attempt to use technology to "attract jobs despite its reputation as an economic backwater". Duffield (1997) estimated that UHI would bring exactly £69 million and 1007 jobs to the region. For Highlands and Islands Enterprise "there is no more important initiative for the long-term future than UHI" (HIE 2001:7). HIE clearly wanted a university *of* and not just *in* the region such as an established university operating within Inverness. This perhaps indicates that the proponents of UHI were regional-development people rather than university people and might explain the serious under-estimation of the scale of the task involved.

Michael Forsyth announced his support for the UHI project at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Inverness in February 1996. It appears that this took everyone including his own officials by surprise. His statement read,

> *My vision is of a university of the highlands and islands delivering courses through the 'information superhighway' to the towns, villages and homes of the area, providing new 'second chance' opportunities to the highest standards. From this must flow economic, social and cultural benefits significant enough to kindle a new highlands enlightenment…such a university will be widely dispersed and consequently with exceptionally deep roots in the community.*

For those of us involved in the academic association between Grant College and a Scottish University at the time, UHI appeared to be a Public Relations campaign more than anything else. Whilst staff development, curriculum design and delivery of degree programmes were going on apace, UHI published newsletters and held conferences. Although an Advisory Group had existed since 1991 "the Scottish Office were known to be sceptical" (Newlands and Parker 1997). Two events however changed the direction of Higher Education policy in the highlands in 1996; the direct support of the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, and a successful application for funding to the Millennium Commission

The fact that 1996 was the 250th anniversary of the battle of Culloden caught the imagination of journalists. The UHI was compared to the monks of St Columba laying the basis of a new era and as a way of making up for Culloden! (*Herald* 24/6/95) while the idea had a "powerfully patriotic appeal" (*Scotsman* 1/10/96). The *Herald* reported:

> *A highland university – this is a good idea – one of the best. A university for the highlands, in the highlands and tailored to the needs and desires of the highlands, is one of the great unfulfilled adventures facing this country.*

The support of Mr Forsyth and the Millennium Commission breakthrough led to a great deal of media attention around 1995-97, much of which possibly generated the hype that UHI was later to be criticised for. An example was the *Scotsman* (2/4/95):

> *It has a campus that stretches from the Mull of Kintyre to Muckle Flugga, there is no hub, live teachers do not teach, students can mark their own work, and literary studies ranks with plumbing – welcome to the UHI.*

The support of Forsyth transformed the situation and was the key to securing £33.6 million of funding from the Millennium Commission in September 1996 (Newlands and Parker 1997). Hills and Lingard (2004:152) describe waiting by the fax machine

to get the Millennium Commission decision which they describe as "the big breakthrough". The major factor in success was the linkage between the project and the communities of the region. The intervention of Mr Forsyth also helps to explain the theme of the Hills and Lingard book which is that the future of a regional university project will be determined by political rather than by academic judgement (Ibid: 133).

On the wider educational context of UHI we should note the relationship between FE and HE. What makes UHI interesting as a subject of research is the fact that the project is about creating a university out of a collection of FE colleges with no 'parent' university involved.

There is no doubt that UHI has continued to enjoy political favour. In post-devolution Scotland the First Minister, Jack McConnell, has "voiced strong support for a UHI…it is a priority for the region" (*UHI News* Spring 2002). He also showed his support by opening the new UHI Executive Office building in Inverness (Sept 2005). Alister MacFarlane, acting Chief Executive in 2001 and a former Vice Chancellor at Heriot-Watt University referred to UHI in a staff meeting as "the most complex project" he had seen. The UHI Chief Executive, Bob Cormack in an interview with me in 2003 said that UHI had been "driven by politicians and restricted by civil servants" all the way along. He also talked about "wild optimism all the way through". The thinking behind UHI is revealed by Newlands and Parker (1997:85) who spoke about "the creation, growth and innovation of business…with social and cultural benefits…it might also act as symbol and form of pride and self-belief for the people of the highlands and islands", although it may be argued that the existing FE colleges already do this to some extent.

2.4   UHI in its wider context

UHI has developed in the midst of related policy contexts. The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (the first Act since 1944 that specifically concerned FE), created Incorporation and set colleges on a course of competition and marketisation. UHI came along about the same time talking about collaboration and partnership. This policy contradiction was ameliorated somewhat after 1997 but has not been completely resolved and has been a source of difficulty within UHI all along. The

academic partner colleges collaborate in UHI yet in some respects compete in the FE part of their work.

UHI anticipated and also benefited from the creation of a Scottish Parliament. Crawford (1999) saw this as "a momentous event, providing a unique opportunity to reflect on the nature of Scottish society and the place of education within it". He anticipates a blurring of the FE/HE divide, greater access to educational opportunity, and more inter-institutional partnerships. All of these fit the UHI scenario. A wider and longer term contextual factor is the development of a mass higher education system which fits in to the wider Scottish tradition according to Bane (1999:633) who argues that a mass system suits what already existed in Scotland and also their, "…civic importance has been an unquestioned fact since at least the 18th century" (Ibid: 627).

The development of UHI resonates with a number of general HE policies. "Post-compulsory education is being driven by a number of inter-connected agendas…" (Murphy 2001:12). A number of policy assumptions came through in the UHI project, for example that

- seamless progression from FE to HE absorbing different institutional cultures and identities could be achieved
- adequate funding would come through
- horizontal and vertical relationship complexities could be sorted out
- HE could be delivered by FE staff and colleges who tended initially to see UHI as an imposition
- UHI colleges could collaborate when Incorporation encouraged competition

2.5   The UHI Model: Issues and Challenges

Webster (2003:57) outlines the main features of UHI. It is a major top-down initiative involving thirteen institutions, most of them with roots in Further Education, within a 'federal, collegiate' partnership. It is a 'loosely coupled' collegiate venture, very much located within its region in the north and west of Scotland and with an economic development rationale. Webster (2003:26) researched the nature of this partnership and on the way that strategic policy changed

through the process of implementing what was a highly complex project; "The linkage between the partners was relatively weak, with few incentives or sanctions to encourage cooperation or penalise disruption and delay".

Webster outlined the major issues confronting UHI c.2000 after having decided to seek university status through the QAA route as distinct from the more 'political' route urged by influential early advisers particularly Professor Sir Graham Hills. These issues included; the relationship between the academic partners and the centre; the move towards more centralisation; the nature of the federal union; equality of status among partners some of which were large FE colleges and some small specialist providers; the route to university status; the relationship with the various communities around the region; what to do about 'dissident' partners; the lack of resources particularly for teaching and research; and the role of Graham Hills. The detail of the historical development of UHI between 1991 and 2003 is set out in the Hills and Lingard (2004) narrative text noted above.

Hills and Lingard (2004:27) argue that there were three possible models for the development of university provision in the region; the 'colonising model' as per the existing arrangements in some partner colleges, the 'custom-built model' as per the Robbins Universities in the 1960s; and the 'evolutionary model', the collegiate, federal model that UHI adopted. Evolution implies a very long time and it may be said that the proponents of 'growing' a university within the region underestimated how long it would take to do this.

The basic model for UHI was put forward in the Hills report (1992). The basic ideas were; to develop a university as a catalyst of economic development in the region, to develop a new kind of university using information technology and embracing both further and higher education, and to develop a distinctive curriculum embracing a new learning paradigm. Hills wanted to emphasise a new approach to learning using the tradition of the broad Scottish Ordinary degree whilst also recognising the importance of place (Hills and Lingard 2004:36). He recognised two key issues (Ibid: 39) namely the relationship between the existing colleges who were to be the basis of the university and the university itself, and the nature of interface between further education (FE) and higher education (HE).   He wanted a "seamless robe of

progression" and warned of the dangers of academic drift. He also recognised a fundamental question which was

"*..of what kind of academics would best serve the new kind of university*"

<div align="center">(Ibid: 49)</div>

The basic problem however in the early days, 1991-96) was finance without which the whole project was "mission impossible"

<div align="center">(Ibid: 63)</div>

It is not surprising therefore that words like 'grandiose' were used to describe the UHI concept (Tugend 1997). Internal documents from one of the Scottish Universities dating back to 1992 suggested scepticism about the numbers that might be attracted and the nature of what would be provided. Even locally based consultants predicted a "flop" and a "third rate education" (*Press and Journal* 19/5/96). It was noted that "crucial to attract anyone from home or away, the UHI planners will have to target the quality of the education they offer…this is the only way to build quality" (*Scotsman* 1/10/96). Newlands and Parker (1997:89) also noted the quality issues arising from online teaching. Meanwhile anecdotal information about scepticism and opposition from Scottish Office officials and university chiefs was passed liberally around the UHI network.

The period after 1996 saw the UHI project advancing somewhat more slowly than had been desired. Hills and Lingard (2004:199) note a senior official referring to UHI as "that ramshackle outfit." They also regretted the path to university status taken by UHI which they regarded as apparently more secretive and more based on a quality assurance route. They regretted the "disappointment" of the Dearing report during this period and although the Scottish-based Garrick report was regarded as more forward-looking it also became a "missed opportunity" (Ibid: 163). Nevertheless the UHI project received HE designation in April 2001 and became the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI).

The issues facing UHI have been set out in a series of external audits. The QAA institutional audit of Dec. 1999 required nine issues to be addressed:

1. the accuracy of published material – the hype issue
2. maintenance of the stability of the network – the problem of 'hostility' from academic partners
3. setting clear and realistic goals
4. monitoring and reflecting on QA outcomes
5. development of an interaction between teaching and research
6. monitoring the faculty structures set up in 1999
7. strategic considerations of external examiner comments
8. effectiveness of partner institutional reviews
9. involvement of all staff in appraisals

(QAA 1999)

A subsequent OUVS institutional review in March 2001 identified five issues:

1. the academic leadership of the network
2. horizontal and faculty structures and the development of an academic ethos
3. QA systems
4. strategies for resources and development
5. student facilities and academic community

It is interesting to compare these with the list of 'big issues' identified by Hills and Lingard (2004:192) reflecting on the period around 2000. They identified:

1. complex and cumbersome decision-making structures – the problem of vanishing initiatives
2. an absence of open debate and discussion which they thought reflected an FE management culture
3. tensions between the Executive Office and the colleges
4. neglect of relations with the wider highlands and islands communities
5. internal Executive Office relationships.

The unresolved issues Hills and Lingard identified at their time of writing (2003) were:

1. the possibility of implementing a 'mode 2' learning paradigm in practice

2. the relationship between IT and costs, can the former reduce the latter?

3. is it desirable and possible to create a seamless robe between FE and HE?

4. can a federal collegiate institution work effectively as a single institution?

In terms of general issues, UHI lends itself as a research site to a number of core themes:

1. collaboration and partnership

2. autonomy issues – colleges have perhaps lost autonomy and yet individual members of staff have perhaps gained? Hellawell and Hancock (2001) note here the prevalence of the 'compliance culture'.

3. the new professionalism – the UHI provides an opportunity for staff to achieve an 'up-skilling' as indicated by Lawn (1996), Langley (1999) and Nixon (1997) as distinct from the more 'de-skilling' ideas of Ozga (1995).

4. the FE/HE culture clash.

Throughout the history of the UHI project writers have identified particular difficulties. Caldwell (2001:69) points out that UHI is not a greenfield site and has had to absorb various existing scenarios, that is the curriculum and 'college culture' of the academic partners:

> *It will be some years however before the highlands and islands get their university…the project continues to enjoy government support but this support does not extend to allowing any shortcuts…(UHI) signals…a significant movement on the HE/FE interface, that development and change can take place not just within sectors but across them and that sector boundaries are not absolute.*

Nevertheless, in 2008 UHI gained teaching degree awarding powers although again a number of key issues for development were noted. These included quality monitoring and enhancement processes including data management, staff development, and research and scholarship development.

A further problem for UHI is attracting the numbers of students required. The whole question of the cost of UHI has probably had much less attention than it deserves.

Daniel (1996) argues that the world needs more higher education but at less cost. The early assumption of UHI was that it would develop out of the FE colleges but there was no appreciation of their financial difficulties. Three of the four Scottish colleges that failed to produce audited accounts in 2001 were UHI partners. Out of 12 Scottish colleges in financial difficulties in 2000, four were in the UHI network. (SHEFC 2000).

A further issue for UHI is to achieve equivalence of student experience and staff practice across the institution. In the interview with me in 2003 the UHI Chief Executive noted that some policies have limited penetration. "…we sat down to look at policy to find some policy documents already existed, but are buried; they did not connect". This observation is also made by Leslie (1996) who notes that "change in colleges and universities comes when it happens in the trenches; what faculty and students do is what the institution becomes".

2.6   The Network Challenge

UHI has a number of features which are not unique. It is an example of a regional university project. It is a partnership between FE colleges. It uses online technology to deliver courses. All these points are to be found elsewhere. What does make it unique is the way it expects FE staff to deliver an HE product on a network basis without a 'parent' university. This study will go on to examine the response of these staff to the implementation of policy, specifically the UHI teaching and learning policy.

Some of the realities have been 'known' by practitioners in the colleges, but revealed more openly for the first time by Hills and Lingard (2004) who indicated the complexities of the concept. Hills and Lingard talk of the "fragile partnership…(in which) underlying attitudes sometimes spoke more of competition than of co-operation…it might be all very well for the Principals to make grand joint declarations but staff implementing the project often felt they had their own futures to protect" (Ibid: 120). They also recognise (Ibid: 127) that a weak point in the Millennium Commission bid was the lack of detail on how they were going to deliver the curriculum to the region. It was recognised in the colleges at the beginning that a

challenge was to establish degree courses and to develop or get the staff with the necessary capability.

Despite the collaboration rhetoric, UHI has generally been perceived within the colleges as a top-down imposition. Despite Hills claim (1995) that it "…has got to be bottom-up…it has got to be rooted in the colleges", it has in fact frequently had problems with this. This is not that unusual though, conflicting pressures between vertical management and horizontal collegiate approaches, by-passing of collegial structures and managers feeling undermined by 'potent underground forces' are not new and have been recognised in other fields (Hellawell and Hancock 2001).

A key issue for networks is where identity lies – does the staff member work for a college or for UHI? The colleges of course retain their own identity and remit. The colleges "…were still primarily concerned with their own day-to-day affairs on which the UHI project barely impinged" (Hills and Lingard 2004:99). A further aspect of the network is the variable size of the colleges. One of Hills' fears around 1994 was the dominance of the larger colleges. This helps to explain the state of the UHI network as a "fragile partnership" in the middle 1990s (Ibid.). A further aspect of this is the various demands on staff time. Hills (Ibid: 171) recognised that "…the Executive Office team had to rely heavily on the largely voluntary efforts of busy staff in the colleges, especially for the steady development towards a university curriculum". He also recognised that "the colleges had little practical incentive to set up new courses on a networked basis" (Ibid: 171). A key issue for the success of UHI is therefore the operation of course teams in this kind of institutional context where academic partners appear to have little or no incentives.

UHI itself recognised that the project whilst feasible was "difficult and challenging…dependent on whether the colleges can operate effectively as a network…a new form of college governance will need to be legally constituted" (*UHI News* June/July 1995). Acting Chief Executive, Alister MacFarlane, developed a similar point in an internal document in which he revealed what he saw as an essential problem – that staff are employed on a vertical line-management basis within a college but that UHI requires effective horizontal relationships with no

formal line management relations constituting a very complex matrix (UHI ADMG 2001).

2.7   The FE Challenge

An issue which was frequently raised in the early days and which still comes up particularly in relation to the teaching-research-scholarship relationship is the capacity and ability of the FE staff charged with making the UHI work. Lingard (1995) recognized in the early days that UHI could not develop a curriculum entirely from within its own resources. "We have an incomplete range of skills and expertise needed to deliver HE…we need the help of existing universities to develop our staff, refine our systems and fill gaps in our credibility". Of course UHI had to develop without this kind of relationship. One of the few journal articles on UHI picked up this point, "the limited experience of HE among the staff of FE colleges…is perhaps a concern…it is not clear what mechanisms to ensure quality of teaching and learning will be…some doubts must persist as to the overall learning experience of UHI students" (Newlands and Parker 1997). Similar fears were strongly expressed by Connolly (1999:601) who feared "a 2nd rate university with 2nd rate teachers". He went on to say that whilst UHI was the most controversial project of the time in FE, largely because of the heavy dependence on FE staff, it should be remembered that Polytechnics, the OU and research in the new universities had also faced credibility fears. Although much newspaper coverage was almost too enthusiastic in the early days, there was also scepticism. There was "disquiet over the lack of university-level experience among the network of FE colleges" (*Scotsman* 1/10/96).

The wider practice of HE being delivered in FE colleges is already well established despite the image of FE as the 'Cinderella service'. Johnston (1999:571) points out that 21% of Scottish full-time HE students, and 51% of part-time were in FE colleges. Johnston (Ibid: 574) noted that UHI is "…an interesting model of development, a university to be created by the combined activity of a consortium of institutions, mainly colleges".

The increasing role of FE in HE is noted by Paterson (1997:44) and Connolly (1999:601).

The fact that the UHI is to be based on existing FE colleges is a pointer here; the UHI project would never have been started unless there had been a commitment that the cultural benefits were to be felt throughout the region, and only the FE colleges were in a position to offer that.

(Paterson 1998:107)

UHI is part of this wider FE/HE theme. UHI course leaders and subject network leaders are at the cutting edge (or the "bleeding edge" (Cormack interview 2003) of a project which is promoting cultural change within the colleges. UHI has led to an intensification of work and a set of demands in a resource-poor environment when staff may perceive that their own college management is not necessarily on board and yet where HE has been successfully developed and delivered. Course leaders require a whole series of skills noted by Langley (2000:39) – group leadership, negotiation, facilitating, diplomacy, innovation, appreciation of perspectives and difficulties, strategic thinking and a 'thick skin'! They have to keep students and the course at the centre of things and be willing to compromise. Hills (1992) recognized the need to get the "enthusiastic support" of staff and a key part of this is the operation of teams. Foster (1992:207) looked at the operation of course teams within the Open University. Teamwork causes work to become a public rather than a private affair in terms of the generation, production and management of the curriculum. The team "opens up a potentially rich source of enhancement and introduces a measure of criticism and questioning which otherwise would be completely lacking". Teamwork therefore leads to improved quality, enhanced professionalism, increased legitimacy and the enrichment of academic life.

The issue of staff capability and opportunity to develop is a key one for UHI. Hills and Lingard (2004:236) admitted that "…the first-order characteristic of the new university has to be the quality of the teaching staff who can see themselves as the dons of the future…the success of the UHI as a university depends on them and on nothing else." The UHI Chief Executive also admitted to this in his interview with me, "…our main weakness is not having many staff who are the equal of university staff".

Summary

The basic point of this chapter is to introduce UHI as a case study worth studying – it is important in the context of FE/HE policy in Scotland; it is important to regional development so it inevitably has political, social and economic orientations; it is important to note its nature as a collegiate, federal body with an FE base and a network structure; to note that there are particular challenges and issues and to explain what these are; to note that these include existing colleges and multiple cultures; to note that success depends on the staff being able to operate on the basis of network teams. Therefore we need to look at the ways these teams operate. This study offers one way to address this particular issue. At this point we can say that getting FE staff to work in teams across a voluntary partnership is a critical factor. My own professional practice has been in this context. So we want to understand the nature of professional practice in this particular case.

Chapter Three - The Context: Literature

3.1   Introduction

Cuthbert (1996:20) notes that literature on the nature of academic work is scarce arguing that we need to know more about working in higher education. He, most unusually, calls for some humour and fun to appear in the literature on higher education. I have to say that I have not found that although elements of humour do come through in the interview and documentary findings outlined later.

The general literature on Higher Education has inspired mixed views. McNay (2000:29) describes higher education studies as being a "paradigmal mess". In his later work Trowler argues that much of the literature is top-down, that the rational management model which was once paradigmatic has now given way though "leaving the study of HE in a theoretical dead-end" (Trowler 1998:95). Scott (2000:24) complains about the literature on higher education as being "quite indigestible".

Looney (2001) argues for a more philosophical approach to curriculum policy. Fullan (1993) argues that the failure to include this approach is at the root of failed reform. Knight and Trowler (2002) identify five major perspectives on change theories as the basic context of their work. These are: bureaucratic, conflict and bargaining, social practice, collegial, and technical-rational theories. The social practice perspective is linked to communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and based in turn on phenomenological approaches with an emphasis on how groupings of staff interact, are engaged in problem solving, and make decisions in a professional context. Wenger (1998:95) notes that key processes in learning in practice involve evolving forms of mutual engagement, and the development of repertoire, styles and discourses.

3.2   The Regional Factor

There has been a growth of literature on what McNay (2000:126) calls "regional learning infrastructures". He argues that one of the big shifts in the policy environment is the emergence of the region "as the critical space for the engagement between universities and their communities" (Ibid: 13).

UHI has a strong regional rationale and of course is not unique in this respect. It has also been recognised as a locational and regional project alongside other contemporary developments such as the University of Cumbria (Gray 1999:150). Like UHI other HE institutions have had a functional relevance to their regions. The 'civics' were set up by "local civic initiative and aspiration" (Homes 2001:30). Duke (2002:30) notes that the "idea of regional partnerships and the development of learning regions have quite suddenly become familiar if not fashionable", also noting that universities can lose esteem by going regional. Duke points out (Ibid: 79) that,

> *nowhere is clarity and institutional self-confidence more needed than in relation to 'the region'. A regional university badge is worn with reluctance and even shame…despite the accumulating body of experience of its importance and success.*

This however has not been the UHI experience where the regional rationale is a key part of the whole project. Perhaps helpfully for UHI, Bargh et al (2000:29) noted that;

> *in the past new university foundations had often had to survive decades of precarious life before they had been able to overcome their marginality.*

In terms of the wider Scottish context it has been argued (Taylor 2002:41) that the Scottish Enlightenment created a linkage between Scottish universities and their communities. The idea of the 'educated public' is established as part of the Scottish higher education tradition and UHI may be seen as a late example.

3.3 The HE Context

It is interesting that the 'twin peaks' of 20th century British higher education were Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) but only the latter had a Scottish committee (Garrick). One thing that Garrick emphasised was the role of FE in higher education. This was also recognised in the other major policy initiatives in Scotland. Leech (1999) identifies here the 1991 White Paper, *Access and Opportunity* which led to the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, and other Scottish Office papers

such as *Mission and Vision (*Sept 1992) and *Quality and Efficiency* (1992). Watson (2000:10) points out that the recurring themes in Garrick (NCIHE 1997) and also in Kennedy (1997) are access, widening participation, social inclusion, economic advantage, collaboration and lifelong learning. Although all of these terms can be contested – Edwards (2001) shows how the term 'lifelong learning' has been adapted to justify several definitions of the learning society such as self-realisation, citizenship and market principles – they are constantly used. The UHI project was able to justify its own development by reference to such documents. UHI justified three-year general degrees by reference to Dearing (though Paterson (1998) criticised Garrick for not offering more support to three-year general degrees in Scotland).

The development of UHI coincides with a period of change and challenge in British Higher Education generally. UHI developed within a context of a changing Higher Education sector and this is reflected in a wide literature. Tight (2003) considers that one of the key writers on HE in the last two to three decades is Becher (1989) who set out the "landscapes" of HE with its 'tribal territories and academic cultures'. Much of this focuses on the impact of change on academic staff and on teaching and learning. Young (2006) provides a very useful contextual review by identifying the debates about the possibility and implications of FE/HE evolution into a single system. The concepts of 'further' and 'higher' education are explored along with the idea of a 'seamless' system that blurs distinctions as part of the historical 'massification' of education. Gallagher (2009) also applied the 'blurring' concept to FE and HE in Scotland.

Gallagher (2007) provides a recent and fairly comprehensive review of the development of HE in Scotland focusing on three themes, namely sectoral differentiation, the implications of massification, and the uncertain consequences of greater national coordination of post-school education. Knight and Trowler (2000:71) complained that a "bundle of changes" have "militated against" improving teaching and learning. These changes include intensification of work, hard managerialism, "contrived collegiality", loss of collegiality, and "greedy institutions". Knight (2002) indentifies isolation, casualisation, career stagnation and stress as modern features of staff experience. However Knight and Trowler's basic argument is that a "significant residue of autonomy, work enrichment and

development" remains, that there is still human agency and choice about how to respond. This study is concerned to examine this very point.

Financial pressures play a large part in most of the sector. Daniel (1996:32) in his discussion of 'mega-universities' talks about their "double breakthrough" of getting recruitment up and costs down. He invites us to consider the core production processes that define and constrain the delivery of the curriculum. This is why UHI's teaching and learning strategy is essential to its success, being a future university unbounded by campuses (Mingle 1995). Daniels warns that the biggest danger with online technology is that poor quality will return to the low-status days of early open learning. The big question (Daniels 1996: xviii) is whether online teaching will lower costs and increase student engagement or increase costs and cause confusion. Taylor (2002:79) complains that "rather than a radically changed and mass system, we have in practice a crowded traditional system". These points are relevant to the UHI experience.

Duke (2002:81) points out that there is a lot of literature on collaboration, partnership and strategic alliances with a "a little of it trickling down into the world of HE", though they argue that not much of it penetrates down to operational consciousness. There is a question as to whether academic research affects the consciousness of a course team on the ground.

It should be noted when concerns are raised about the quality of FE colleges delivering HE that as recently as 1960 there were only 24 universities in the UK (Scott 1995). The dominant paradigm of how mass HE systems develop assumes a linear progress from elite to mass systems however this process has been neither linear nor regular. Scott argues (1995:13) in a statement that is noteworthy to UHI people that "despite their novelty, the shift to mass HE means that both systems and institutions have to be reconceptualised and reconfigured". He argues that FE colleges have been engaged in a "long revolution" (Ibid: 52) moving from technical school origins to comprehensive community college. He expects them to be characterised by "flat hierarchies and loosely coupled networks" (Ibid: 70).

A theme that runs through the literature is that staff are generally seen as being overloaded with demands. Universities are "over-extended, under-focused, over-stressed, and under-funded" (Clark 1987:42). He predicts a move in the future to devolved collegiate structures. Another example of the pessimistic view is Jermier et al (1994) using Braverman and Marxist perspectives emphasises deskilling, intensification of labour and management control. This theme of the university in crisis coming through in much of the literature is emphasised by Cornfold and Pollock (2003:4). These authors argues that the HE literature comes in two main strands, on the one hand big picture perspectives which they accuse of being lacking because of the use of assumption rather than evidence and of being mainly normative (Johnston 1999, Bane 1999 and Crawford 1999 are examples); and on the other more focused and empirically grounded studies of particular applications in particular institutions, such as that of Trowler (1997, 1998).

Clegg (1994) however would argue that Jermier et al (1994) underplays the role of agency and creativity. Martin (1999:4) also takes a fairly negative view noting the feeling of academic staff of being undervalued especially as teachers. Academic work is seen as joyless where once it was "prestigious and confident…not troubled by administrivia" (Ibid: 7). Martin goes on to note "as long as it is documented, no one really cares what happens" (ibid: 18) and "despite occasional pockets of optimism, academic staff appear overwhelmed with the enormity of the challenges" (Ibid: 25). To Martin the main challenges are to do with recognition and reward. The tensions are to do with balancing leaders' vision with staff reality; individualism with collaboration; accountability with reward; valuing the past with preparing for the future. Staff use "defensive routines" to blame and to block. (Ibid: 88). Duke (2002:15) however warns about 'apocalyptic studies' on the crisis of the university noting the prevalence of "scornful hostility" to academic managers.

3.4   The Scottish Context

Scottish Executive policy has certainly moved in the direction of bringing Further Education and Higher Education together. The two funding councils, for FE and HE in Scotland, were amalgamated in October 2005. Both recognised that a single sector "that will operate seamlessly between further and higher education" will be the result (SFEFC 2002:20). Further Education "has been one of the main concerns of a

wide range of policy documents" (Murphy 2001:2) and has become one of the "major access routes" (Ibid: 6) into HE. Underlying all of this is the Scottish Executive commitment to lifelong learning. The White Paper *Shaping our Future* (SE 2002:15) also makes the case for FE and HE to be closely linked. But a big problem here is the future shape of FE. SFEFC (2002) noted

> *the data shows that the FE sector is generally in bad shape and is poorly prepared to respond to policy expectations…there is recurrent and capital under-funding*.

This paper goes on to recommend that efficiencies could be "better tackled by groups of colleges" (Ibid: 6). All this resonates in the UHI case.

Paterson (1998) argues that three major debates came together in the late 1990s; the creation of a Scottish Parliament, the expansion of mass higher education, and the development of a learning society. He argues that the idea of a learning society is to do with social capital. Higher education can create social and cultural conditions for further and higher education to flourish (Ibid: 102) although;

> *the really difficult questions will be about the institutions, something which Dearing and Garrick barely address.*

Paterson goes on (Ibid: 107) to argue optimistically that UHI was led by local government. He argues for autonomous institutions characterised by internal democracy, suggesting that UHI, perhaps as one of these institutions, has at least the potential to be a template for the future of Scottish HE policy and offering support to the view that UHI is an important subject for research.

3.5 The UHI Network Issue

A particular set of challenges faces those charged with network leadership roles. Senge (1999:17) specifies network leaders as "seed-carriers" who carry support and stories around the network, a tangible role but one that is difficult to specify. "Paradoxically their lack of hierarchical authority makes them effective". Only those who are interested turn up for meetings. These views are supported by Scott (2003)

who argued that "the primary allegiance of academics is to their disciplines. Universities are merely holding companies for subject-based businesses". In this situation networks are a key device and indeed "higher education badly needs more examples of institutional networking". UHI is certainly an example though whether it succeeds as a good one is another question. Indeed throughout the UHI network one hears staff referring to 'UHI' as something completely separate from themselves. There is a problem of professional identity; are staff part of a department, a college, a discipline, an occupational group, or UHI, or some combination?

UHI is an example of a network development. Most of the examples of FE colleges entering into relationships to develop HE take the form of franchising (Woodrow 1993, Trim 2001, Abramson 1996) or regional partnerships involving a parent university (Doyle 2000 and 2001). Trim (2001) refers to the 'loose coupling' that constitutes a franchise though there are various types of partnership. Doyle's example is based on the University of Salford and the region round about. He notes the tendency of the 'smaller partners' to be deferential – he refers here to the idea of "collaborative capability" in partnerships. Meryll (2000:74) argues that partnerships are easy to prescribe but difficult to achieve whilst calling for more research in the field. Most literature about partnerships involves a parent university which UHI does not have so it is in a way a more complex case. The importance of networks is more widely recognised as seen in the popular notion of the 'network society' (Castells 2000).

The UHI is based on a multi-campus model which is common in the United States. Gaither (1999:21) notes the 'creative tension' between the whole and its parts. The big priority for such systems in the USA is quality. A "constant conversation" is required between the partners. A major problem noted here is that senior staff have little control but complete accountability. The notion of the community of practice may be of value in this context although the concept has been criticised (Trowler 2008) as being overly optimistic about consensual relationships and lacks a perspective on power.

> *Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a*
> *set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their*

> *knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing*
> *basis*
>
> (Wenger et al 2002:4).

Wenger goes on to argue that the key factor in the success of a community of practice is the vitality of its leadership. The key tasks for a network leader are to foster horizontal relationships, connecting people, brokering, fostering links and enhancing informal links. Wenger et al (Ibid: 150) notes the problem of overlapping communities where there can be problems of knowledge becoming 'sticky' (no one else understands it) and 'leaky' (you can't control where it goes).

3.6   Cultural factors

One of Trowler's key arguments and a matter important to professional status is the notion of the impact of culture. Middlehurst (1993:39) noted that;

> *clues to culture can be unearthed in the metaphors embedded in the*
> *language of the institutional community, in the ways in which status*
> *is conferred and through analysing the nature, scope and strength of*
> *the university operation and networks*

And further;

> *cultural perspectives on the university have opened a rich vein of*
> *scholarship, extending the forms from global analyses of the*
> *institution to micro-analysis of various aspects of institutional*
> *functioning…micro-perspectives provide a more useful practical*
> *tool for policy analysis and implementation*
>
> (Middlehurst 1993:65)

In a neo-liberal culture we have gone from a profession-centred to a client-centred concept of professionalism. The pressure to collaborate and the increasing number of FE/HE partnerships leads to Webb and Vulliamy's (2001:315) view that "inter agency co-operation is recognised as a problematic with clashes between professional cultures, competition and low morale". This could make seamless

FE/HE roles harder to make and is a serious issue for UHI given its FE network base. These authors also recognise the problem of achieving genuine buy-in from senior managers who may be,

> *supportive of project rhetoric but through the life of the project gradually become disengaged from it…due to factors like hierarchical distance, lack of strategy at intermediate level and tensions within various strands of government policy.*
>
> (Ibid: 315)

The concept of collegiality still attracts support and is seen as crucial to both a learning organisation and to creativity (Nixon 1996, Hellawell and Hancock 2001). UHI always refers to itself as a 'collegial, federal, organisation. Becher (1989) talks about the cultures of academic disciplines and the pursuit of reputation rather than wealth or power. Though there is also the view that collegiality is in retreat in British HE as presented by Tapper (1998).

Partnership cases involve the combined operation of institutional cultures. Harrison (1994:123) talks about "deeply sedimented historical attitudes" found in educational institutions. Bridges (1992) points out that there are benefits in a collaborative approach but still the problem of individual institutional activity versus partnership activity remains. Any partnership however to succeed must achieve the support of a critical mass of staff to accept a challenge. Weil (1994:57) says, "you cannot have a learning organisation without a shared vision." This represents a big challenge to UHI where the extent of staff 'buy-in' is not clear.

Warner and Palfreyman (1996) regard organisational culture as a key determinant in whether a higher education institution is successful or not. Dobson and McNay (1996:24) argued that there is usually a dominant culture. They refer to Handy's (1993) use of four cultures – power, role, task, and people – cultures. There are other 'nomothetic' approaches such as Berquist's (1992) four cultures – collegial, managerial, developmental and negotiating and McNay's (1995) categorization into collegium, bureaucracy, corporation and enterprise, and Becher's (1989) who gave us perhaps the best known example of an attempt to categorise organisational

cultures; the hierarchical, the collegial, the anarchical and the political. But Trowler (2009:xi) favours an 'ideographic' approach which is grounded in observation of particular institutions. These signals include what leaders pay attention to, measure and control; reactions to critical incidents; role modelling; and criteria used for rewards and incentives. Stuart (2002:34) notes that further and higher education partnerships have invariably been associated with hard managerialism. There are distinct cultural differences between types of institutions. Bargh et al (1996:10) talks about the 'governance culture' of the newer universities and also to the reduced enthusiasm for "enforced culture change" in places like Huddersfield, Bournemouth and Portsmouth. A key issue is the extent of the 'ownership' felt by staff for teaching, learning and research policies. The value of the cultural approach is encouraged by Bargh et al elsewhere (2000:116),

> *the particular strength of a culture perspective is that it draws attention to key elements of the university's organisational configuration including how the leadership imagines the organisation in relation to its external and internal constituencies.*

The culture of teams can also be considered. Fullan (1993) refers to the problems of teams – 'groupthink', uncritical acceptance, suppression of dissent, inter-group conflict are major features. Duignon (1989:75) emphasises the "artistry of management" and the need for team members to find a sense of belonging. Course leaders have to "cultivate the art of the possible".

3.7 The FE/HE Dimension in UHI

A further theme is the relationship between FE and HE (McNay 2000:132). Trim (2001:191) argues that a transformation is underway, part of this being the relationship of FE colleges with local universities and the development of mass education and lifelong learning. "Partnership arrangements are most likely to be successful if it takes into account the needs of the local community". A series of government publications such as the *Access and Opportunity* White Paper (SO 1992) already noted emphasise the role of HE within FE. Woodrow (2002:58) notes,

> *the present and future relationship between further and higher education has become internationally a strategic policy preoccupation…the case for continuing separation between the sectors is hard to sustain.*

The blurring of the FE/HE divide is underway and is evidenced clearly in the UHI case (Gallagher 2007). There are several examples of good FE/HE collaboration such as that in the Salford area although a clear issue is the fear of compromising standards (Doyle 2000:128). This is part of the wider view that mass education necessarily involves a challenge to standards based on the dominant discourses. Calls for greater articulation between FE and HE comes through in official documents such as Garrick (1997) and in the work of some academics such as Schuller (1995:21) who argues that most of the future expansion in HE should be in FE colleges.

The effect of HE work on FE staff is noted by Shackleton (1995:26) who argues that many staff have,

> *a deep bias towards HE, many of its academic staff feel most at home and most fulfilled when associated with it.*

There are distinct problems though including a tendency in FE to use more class teaching. Further problems are the need to develop an overall learning environment and the need to develop a scholastic environment, what Coldstream (1994) calls the 'scholarship of application'. The mixed experiences of FE staff delivering HE and the relationship between FE and HE deliverers in 'dual sector' institutions (Bathmaker 2009) is noted by Turner et al (2009). The idea of FE professional identity is rooted in teaching is noted by Harwood and Harwood (2004). There is a 'positioning' process going on at both individual and institutional levels (Bathmaker 2009) whilst the fact that all universities are responding to a changing environment and are developing development communities is noted by Blackmore et al (2010).

The pressures of HE delivery on FE staff is not just a UHI issue. SHEFC (2000:68) noted that,

> *…the development of degrees has stretched and tested the resolve of FE staff who have had to meet the needs of non-advanced, HN and degree programmes on limited time and with FE unitized funding.*

The Scottish Office (1998:36) noted that HMI's overall view on FE delivering HE is that,

> *overall, staff in all colleges were 'sufficiently qualified.'*

There are basically two views about professionalism in FE, Robson (2000) argues that professionalism is weak in FE because it lacks self-regulation and entry-gate control while others such as Taylor (1999:vii) argue that academics are "players not pawns in the process of change". FE staff can retain professionality despite the "triple challenges" of accessibility, quality and cost-effectiveness. He argues that a new professionalism can be achieved through engagement, articulation and internal agreement. Taylor's arguments about 'high-status' researchers and 'low-status' teachers in HE is pertinent to the experience of UHI. He argues (Ibid: 122) for a move away from 'lone-ranging' and a move towards a more collective networked professionalism and empowerment of teachers. At the heart of this is team-working which Taylor invites staff to put some "effortful thinking" into (Ibid: 155) to engage in change rather than to reject it. This all resonates for UHI staff with their course teams and new challenges and for this study. UHI offers an interesting opportunity to look at the impact of HE work on the FE staff.

3.8 Professionalism

The general literature on professionalism in HE reflects the challenges provided by the world of Barnett's idea of 'supercomplexity' (2000). Barnett argues that supercomplexity is about infinite interpretability. He develops a new 'constellation' of concepts including uncertainty, unpredictability, changeability, contestability and fragility (Barnett 2000:63). Watts (2000:11) notes the challenges to professional knowledge; autonomy, staff development and trust/accountability balances.

Nevertheless on professional status others would appreciate the "heroic" efforts of staff whilst noting a real sense of loss for some (Bocock and Watson 1994). Quicke (2000:301) calls for a redefinition of professionalism in these "new times" where "nothing is dead certain", this is also called for by Taylor (1999:58). One way to achieve this is through the development of peer review and peer expertise which has been around for centuries but offers a way of spreading innovation and good practice (Wilks 1992:62). Scott (1994) also takes this idea but notes that peer review and team work are hard to separate from the issue of accountability.

Some literature provides warnings and notes threats to professional status. Watts (2000) and Hughes (2000:4-5) note the attributes of the professional – specialist knowledge, autonomy, service. However they live now in "turbulence" and are threatened by the rise of the market, increased consumerism, state reform leading to greater accountability, intensification of work, and loss of control. The basic problem is that the professional claims autonomy in a bureaucratic and hierarchical context which demands flexibility.

Another way of specifying two basic theoretical approaches to the idea of the professional are the idea of the preservation of standards and ethical standards on the one hand, and self-interest and powerful vested interests on the other (Randle and Brady 2000). We would have to say that the FE profession probably isn't a profession at all on the former terms.

The FE profession can be located within the new public service paradigm. However FE staff does not constitute a powerful group in political terms and is probably caught between managerialism and a sense of professionalism. The idea of the "FE profession in crisis" and staff as being "particularly vulnerable" is put forward by Robson (2000:14) who argues that the key to understanding the FE culture is that it is a "thin" culture where staff have dual professionalism – as FE teachers and as members of a vocational group. FE staff are therefore an anomalous group with ambivalent status and unclear identity (Ibid: 14). The idea of the teaching profession generally being de-professionalised and becoming a "bureaucratised state profession" is put forward by Ozga (1995). Concerns about de-skilling and de-professionalisation in higher education is also expressed by Rutherford (2002:22). A particular concern

which is certainly relevant to UHI is the idea that falling professional status in FE might be particularly acute for staff *not* involved in HE (Watson 2000). The development of HE in FE colleges has led to a redefining process for professional identities as institutional boundaries are blurred. (Whitchurch 2008).

All this indicates that there is a good case for arguing that UHI represents part of a new professionalism. Watson (2000:10) argues for a new professional approach characterized by collegial teamworking, networking, attention to teaching and learning strategies and transferable skills. Lawn (1996:112) supports this view:

> *the market is re-defining teacher professionalism as a form of competent labour, flexible and multi-skilled… the new good teacher is to be described as a teamworker.*

This might ignore the problems involved in the intensification of work but it can be used to support the thesis that UHI is generating an upskilling in the professionalism of previously FE staff. Bottery (1998:171) gets to the same conclusion but through 'three realisations' – financial, cultural and epistemological - to do with teaching students how to learn and,

> *re-locating professionalism within a citizenship agenda – the professional domain as a focus of collective life and social cohesion.*

Nixon (1997) argues that professionals can actually re-build their power base through a new language of collegiality, negotiation, co-ordination and partnership. Nixon proposes a new paradigm stressing continuous learning, professionality, teaching and learning and reflective practice, all to compensate for the challenge to the old professionalism of the professional-as-expert. We should note that one of Trowler's reconstructive strategies (Ibid.) is reprofessionalisation. The prospect of an "emergent new professionalism" is noted by Walker (2001: ix). Another aspect of evolving FE professional identity is the notion of distributed leadership traditionally more characteristic of HE (Bolden et al 2008)

There is the well-known issue of whether teaching generally represents a profession. Scott (2000:154) asks this question and argues that it matters because it raises the issue of professional responsibility and self-regulation, the components of which are competence, conduct and compliance. He argues however that university teaching has never developed an explicit code of conduct which is the defining feature of a profession. Day (1999) argues that professional status requires four criteria to be satisfied; technical knowledge, a service ethic, professional commitment and professional autonomy. It might be argued that since FE lacks the fourth of these, it is not a profession but a semi-profession. In the case of UHI staff were attracted by the chance to move out of SQA-related work and into OUVS work which allowed for more autonomy. Day goes on to argue that the key to professional progress is to work with others in partnerships and collaboration. Some of the features of professional change identified by Day (1999) are apparent in the case of UHI – intensification of work, limited resources and the sense that senior staff are not always on board. On the other hand UHI might benefit from being fairly new and is not yet hidebound by traditional practices.

Brown (2004: xi) takes the view that the staff themselves have to take some responsibility here.   "Ultimately the only guarantee of high quality and standards of teaching, learning and research is the professionalism of the academic community itself…a rigorously self-critical profession learning from experience and regulating itself is sustainable in a way that a system of improved external controls will never be."   It is argued that academics need to put into their teaching, learning and assessment the same quality of scholarship that they put into other work.

3.9   The Policy Concept

Implementing policy raises questions about the meaning of policy itself. It is a term that is difficult to define but should be regarded as both process and product. Rist (2000) and Taylor (1997:24) suggest that policy making is a more complex, interactive and multi-layered process than rational models would suggest. Colebatch (1998:2) defines a policy as "a systematic pattern of activity addressed to a problem". He argues that structure and choice are two key dimensions of the policy process. It also has vertical and horizontal dimensions (Ibid: 29) these referring to the transmission down of authority decisions for the former and relationships among the

policy participants for the latter. Castells (2000:176) notes the worldwide shift from vertical bureaucracies to the horizontal corporation. Colebatch specifies the essential elements of policy as being a process, the attempt to create coherence in the face of ambiguity and contestation, and the idea that it is a problematic and graduated rather than a definitive and absolute thing (Ibid: 113).

> *The term policy is not a scientific absolute, but a socially constructed variable*
>
> (Ibid: 114)

Humes (1999) developed a conceptual model influenced by Ball (1990) and MacPherson and Raab (1988) who offered a way to explore the fragmented model of the policy process. Humes offers 'official' and 'unofficial' views of what happens in policy making in order to "dig beneath the surface of policy statements and interrogate their origins, justifications and intent" (Ibid: 73)

The policy context has to be framed in some way. Colebatch (1998) notes that there is a vertical and horizontal dimension, that there is an empirical and a normative component, the latter giving "sacred accounts" of differential power, and that language is a key part of the action (Ibid: 61). The possibility that discourses promote an overly simplistic view of policy processes is recognised by Canning (2003).

Summary

The main themes emerging from this section are that UHI has developed very much within a policy context involving its regionality, Scottish developments, HE developments more generally, but more specifically in terms of FE/HE issues and particularly the effect of this on professional status. The cultural aspects of institutions and professional groupings are also a key theme that is worth exploration in the UHI case.

Chapter 4 - Literature Review

4.1 Introduction

The success of UHI in achieving university status depends heavily on the work of course or programme teams operating across a network of FE colleges. Central to this success is the implementation of UHI's teaching and learning policy as operationalised in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, first written in 2003 and with updates in 2007 and 2010. This chapter will review literature relating to the implementation of policy at institutional level, particularly the role of programme teams in this process in a network context and given the particular cultural characteristics of the diverse academic partner colleges who make up UHI.

The need for research into policy implementation at the departmental level and in this kind of context has been recognised by several writers. Canning (2003:439) notes that;

> *in comparison with the compulsory years, there has been limited research in other equally important areas such as the multi-level processes in policy implementation…*

It is also recognised that policy implementation impacts on those 'on the ground' and therefore attention should be focused here. The idea that institutional goals are contested, ambiguous and conflictual makes this an exiting area for study (Bourgeois 1999:36). The need to understand the "multiple cultural configuration" of complex institutions was noted by Alvesson (1993) and Sackman (1997). The idea that organisations do not have a unitary whole but have a whole set of cultures is particularly the case for UHI. Trowler (1998) argued for the need to understand such multiple cultural configurations and identified the need to "trawl deeper", while noting support for this approach from Smyth (1995), Becher (1989) and Cuthbert (1996). In his 1998 work he argued for the benefits of a phenomenological approach which rejects the idea of organisational culture as a lever of management and instead saw it as something filtered through implementation processes.

4.2   Implementation

The value of "grand narratives…now seen as 'masterful narratives'" is limited for a study of this nature (Edwards 1997:21). Edwards notes that we tend to talk about 'post-everything models' – post-modernism and post-structuralism – while newer ideas such as the learning society are not yet fully developed.   He further argues that,

> *any critique of current policy must also engage in and inform a debate over changes and alternatives in policy and practice and this implies first a critical understanding of policy and policy implementation* (Ibid: 66).

Morgan-Klein and Murphy (2002:66) argue that policy should not be criticised in the abstract – we must look at changes and alternatives in policy and practice,

> *and this implies first a critical understanding of policy and practice implementation…debates over the purposes of lifelong learning have largely failed to address the question of purpose and motivation in practice and in policy implementation.*

Their basic argument is that the institutional policy context has been largely ignored in educational research and that this is a "*serious omission*". This approach was taken by Webster (2003) who addressed this issue in the context of UHI in his own research where his overall aim was to develop an understanding of the ways in which the UHI initiative has been affected by the process of implementation.

The idea that implementation is "an exceedingly elusive concept" (Fullan 1982:55) is also recognised by other writers such as Colebatch (1998) who recognises the 'implementation problem'. The 'implementation problem' is the failure to achieve the outcomes of the policy or the partial achievement or the achievement of something other than what the policy intended.   Fullan (1982:14) showed that we need to look at why some changes succeed and others fail. He constructed a matrix which showed actual implementation, failure to implement, implementation of something of little value (a bad change), and not implementing something of little

value (a 'proper rejection'). The classic text on implementation is that of Pressman and Wildavsky (1979). They argue that;

> *implementation is worth studying…because it is a struggle over the realization of ideas* (Ibid: 194).

The authors acknowledge "endless difficulties in defining implementation" (Ibid : xi) but go on to define it as;

> *the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired results.*
> (Ibid: xxi).

Dill (2002) who sees HE as a "rich context for the study of policy implementation" outlines the history of research into implementation starting with this 'influential' Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) work and the studies this inspired such as those of Cerych and Sabatier (1986). However;

> *soon thereafter the policy implementation literature fell into decline, caused in part by theoretical disputes over the relevance of 'top-down- versus 'bottom-up' approaches to policy implementation as well as debates over the fruitlessness of the approach for the design of public policy.*

Dill argues that this is unfortunate given the major wave of HE policy reform in recent decades, and given the fact that,

> *the decentralised, loosely coupled nature of academic structures and the strong tradition of professional autonomy…provides a rich context for the study of policy implementation as well as a potentially crucial consideration in policy design.*

The idea that policy implementation is a creative and "contextually contingent" process, was at the heart of the work of Trowler (2002:1). He proposes a more

organic and complex model in which policy making and policy implementation are not distinct. At the institutional level, policy making and implementation are seen as the results of negotiation, compromise and conflict (Ibid: 2-3). The 'implementation gap' arises out of the differing interests and perceptions of where people are in the process. This approach was in turn based on that of Selznick (1949), who argued that 'real' objectives tend to become increasingly divergent in different locales, and of Brown and Duguid (1996) who distinguished between canonical (official papers) and non-canonical practices (those conditioned on the ground). It was also influenced by the useful idea of the "implementation staircase" (Reynolds and Saunders 1987:44) which recognises that there are national, institutional, departmental, class and individual levels each of which perceives policy and its implementation in a different way. There is a "loosely-coupled" relationship between policy initiatives at the top of the staircase and outcomes at the bottom. The distinction between contextual factors and individual actors was also noted by Kogan (2002).

The significance of the implementation process has been central to the work of Trowler over several years from 1997 to 2009.

A full appreciation of the policy process needs to encompass the implementation stage, or rather to see policy implementation as another aspect of policy making.

(Trowler 1998:141)

His theme is that the traditional rationale-purposive model of policy making misses the "messiness" of policy. Instead, his is an organic and complex model which suggests that policy is made in the process of implementation.

Policy is expressed by different participants who exist in a matrix of differential although not simply hierarchical power.

(Trowler 2002:1).

He had argued (1997) that there is a need to emphasise the role of academics as important actors in the study of policy implementation in HE, looking particularly at academic responses to changing contexts and the ways they change policy outcomes.

He argued that academics are not powerless, that they have more resources than that and they have "latitude for action" (Trowler 1997:302). Academics find themselves facing personal and professional dilemmas but we need more developed theories about the contexts in which they work, and at the powers of constraint on individual actors. In later work Knight and Trowler (2002:156) assert again that change emerges in the process of implementation and in particular development should take place through implementing practices at departmental level. He had earlier looked (1998:2) at how attitudes and values translate into policy implementation strategies and at the role and power of actors in shaping policy. The theme is repeated in 2003 and 2004 papers where he notes policy accords which lack an 'implementation mechanism' and develops a review of European universities and how they have dealt with the implementation process.

4.3   Theoretical debates

Colebatch (1998) shows that there are basically two approaches to the literature on policy implementation in education, the 'top-down' approach as outlined by Pressman and Wildavsky and the 'bottom-up' approach supported by Trowler. Colebatch also puts forward two basic perspectives on policy. There is 'authorised choice' on the one hand which refers to the policy implemented as the idea of the people at the top, and 'structured interaction' which recognises that a range of participants are involved in policy making. Wildavsky (1983) and others such as Sabatier (1986) developed a way of bringing these together. Scott's (2000) fragmented/multi-directed model recognises the way that policy is 'made', contested and remade during implementation. This offers a way of looking at the complexities of policy making at the institutional level where the dominant discourse tends to be one of rational management (Edwards 1997:90).   But we have to be cautious about "false dualities" in such theoretical debates (Clegg 2002: 806)

Trowler (1998) suggests that top-down and bottom-up approaches to understanding change are both appropriate at different levels of analysis. This view echoes Yanow (1987) who differentiates four lenses through which policy implementation can be studied – through human relations, political (dynamism in groups), structural (organisational) and systems 'lenses'.   However these approaches reflect an ontological positivism, i.e. it assumes a rational stance where the aims of policy are

the achievement of objectives and problems represent an 'implementation gap'. Palumbo and Calista (1990:4) note that implementation gaps are universal and inevitable – but that this concept rests on technical-rational model assumptions. In his work Webster (2003) argues that the technical-rational model is flawed because it over-simplifies context and causation, it over-looks meanings attached to practice by practitioners, and due to the complexity of ground-level practice compared to the 'helicopter' view of planners.

Trowler and Knight (2002:143) complain that institutional change is often conceived in an oversimplified way eg Berquist (1993) identifies universities as one of four types – collegial, managerial, negotiating, and developmental. He notes (Ibid: 144),

> *dominant discourses about institutional change in HE involve considerable contextual simplification.*

Those in charge tend to adopt the technical-rationalist approach where any problems are assumed to be caused by incompetence or lack of commitment 'down the line'. Trowler and Knight (2002:145) develop an alternative perspective which sees institutional cultures as dynamic, not static or singular;

> *every university possesses a unique and dynamic cultural configuration …with particular values, attitudes and assumptions.*

Trowler's approach (1998:100) is based on "the wise appraisal of the realities of organizational change" found in Fullan's *Change Forces* (1993). The approach that looks at the implementation of policy at several levels including individuals and groups is also supported by Yanow (1987) and Barratt and Fudge (1981) who explicitly articulated the bottom-up approach by criticizing the classic text on implementation by Pressman and Wildavsky (1979)   Knight and Trowler's (2001) basic case is based on Fullan (1989) and Senge (1990). Trowler (1998:2) argues that there is a lot of literature on change from the top but not on the ground. He complains (Ibid: 95) that the study of change in HE is at a "theoretical dead-end" – most studies being top-down (Weil 1994, Beckhard and Pritchard 1992) in which top managers ensure implementation and academics are seen as passive.

Trowler (1998:100) rejects top-down approaches, preferring a much greater focus on bottom-up approaches to change which imply that phenomenology and interactionism are in, and structural domination is out. Trowler (1998) likes the theoretical view of Yanow (1987) in which policy implementation can be at several levels – individual, group, organisation, and inter-relationships between organisations.

Trowler (1997) notes that terms like the 'Robbins trap' suggests a 'trap' metaphor which emphasises the powerlessness of those caught in it. But he argues against writers such as Trow (1989), Bocock (1994) and Haslum (1994) who tend to focus on the passive nature of the academic. He further argues that weberian, neo-marxist and Foucaldian perspectives are also doing this. In contrast there are studies such as Apple (1989), and Fullan (1991) where academics are regarded as important actors. Reynolds and Saunders (1987) also take this approach in their conception of the "implementation staircase". The underlying theoretical perspective taken by Trowler is that of Giddens (1994:16) who claims that,

> *all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who*
> *are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This*
> *is what I call the dialectic of control in the social system.*

Cutright (2004) summarises Trowler's position which is that there is "slippage" between intention and outcome in policy; policy in reality is essentially incoherent, unintended consequences are shaped by local conditions, the policy process is 'messy'. Rational-purposive or top-down perspectives are challenged and academic cultures and contexts need to be considered. An 'adaptation' process takes place. Dill (2002) notes that Trowler makes a case for a fuller understanding on university environments, disciplinary cultures and the nature of academic organisation. Dill feels that Trowler's 2002 book critiques the aims of public policy, it explores the strengths and weaknesses of the processes through which policy is actually implemented.

In all this Trowler (2002:6) outlines that the underlying theoretical perspective is the structure/agency debate. Policy implementation involves the tension between structural forces and individual choices. The role of structure/agency in policy making is also recognised by Bleiklie (2002:26) who specifies the role of 'policy instruments'. There are different 'tools' - authority tools, incentive tools, capacity tools, symbolic tools, and learning tools.

There is further support for the role of agency in the work of Bargh et al (2000:65) who noted that'

> *individuals really make a difference in universities. You can turn around entire departments within a period of two years.*

Similarly,

> *creating the right informal atmosphere of teamwork, cooperation and purpose is immensely more important than the formal structural framework.*
> (Price 1994:37).

4.4   The Top Down Approach

The top-down approach is associated with Beckhard and Pritchard 1992 (the key text which focuses on the role of the leader), Newman (1994) and Lipsky (1980). The 'forward mapping' of Elmore (1989) is also based on top-down thinking. However top-down has limited interest in ground-level responses. It,

> *under-theorises the role of academic staff…the invisibility of the views and responses of ground-level staff*
> (Trowler 1998:97).

Trowler (1998:95) asserts that most management change literature is top-down such as the influential Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) and Weil (1994). Weil tends to omit any critical dimension on the change process itself. Weil puts forward this view arguing that the key to achievement of change is to "gain multiple loyalties and

pluralist political cultures". Weil uses personal accounts from those at the top rather than critical theory or the perspectives of other participants. It is rationalist and managerialist which may once have been paradigmatic, but theory has now moved on. Fullan (1993: ix) calls the top-down approach "chronologically new but paradigmatically old or wrong".

Webster argues that the top-down approach is managerialist and positivist. Webster criticises top-down's over-emphasis on the intentions of those at the top and its relegation of the ground-level. Top-down examples in literature also include Taylor (1999) and Sporn (1999). Sporn reviews theoretical frameworks which might contribute to an understanding of processes of adoptive change in universities by developing a "grounded theory of adaptation in HE" ie a top-down approach. Underpinning this is Weick's (1976) concept of 'loosely coupled systems' and also Conrad's (1978) policy of change which sees collegiality as a myth.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) develop their approach to what they call straight 'implementation failure'. Typical reasons for failure would include ambiguous aims, policy contradictions, a low priority for the policy, insufficient resources, conflict, unexpected outcomes and attention shifting to other policies. Responses to implementation failure might include enforcing compliance and addressing contestation by encouraging the participants who share a commitment to the policy. Structural factors include educational ideology, organisational culture, and professional culture.

A number of criticisms of the top-down approach were put forward by Marsh and Rhodes (1992). They argue that it gives too much attention to the goals of central actors; assumes unrealistic conditions for implementation; ignores the unintended consequences of policy; and that it can't deal with policy that lacks specific objectives. The case for rejecting a top-down approach to policy implementation is also noted by Senge (1999). He rejects the notion of the hero-leader and calls for a "genuine capacity about limiting forces" (Ibid: 10). He emphasises the "capacity of a human community to shape its future" (Ibid: 16), the basic approach taken up by Trowler and others.

The basic case in Trowler's work is that top-down policy is not realistic – that academics adapt, they do not adopt. Policy is made as it is put into practice – it arises in diffuse ways and is not just about what is written in documents. Trowler (2002:1) argues that policy is made in ways other than in formal settings. He argues (2002:17) that policy making is best described as 'muddling through', also that policy makers tend to think their job is done once the policy document has gone out. This confirms the conclusion reached by Lindblom (1959), who talked about the "science of muddling through", or 'disjointed incrementalism'.

An explicit articulation of the bottom-up view was taken by Barrett and Fudge (1981) and the case was summarised by Marsh and Rhodes quoted by Trowler (1998:104) who argue that top-down approaches focus too much attention on the goals of central actors, ignore unintended consequences of policy and assume policy is linear. It is recognised however that the bottom-up approach can also be criticised as overestimating the influence of actors and underestimating the constraining influences of structure put in place by those at the top. So he argues that a more sophisticated understanding of HE organisations is needed especially to understand the 'implementation gap'.

Haslum (1994) argues, "my thesis is that many of the implementation costs of the changes in the HE curriculum are, and will continue to be, hidden or they will fall not on the senior management but on the people who drive the system and deliver the courses". Haslum (Ibid: 109) goes on to argue that for many staff they have to "invent the wheel as we are using it". He goes on to argue that using the wheel while building it has not been fun. He talks about "probably …the worst of all worlds" where a bottom-up model hasn't worked.

Trowler notes that it is commonly argued that academics are passive and that it is often assumed that top-down models work, but he argues that academics respond to policy in ways not predicted by policy makers. Trowler (1998) questions the "bleak view" of de-professionalisation and degradation (Ibid: 141).

Elmore (1989:244) noted that "implementation research is long on description and short on prescription. Most implementation research is case studies". He complains that little guidance comes out of it. He argues that this is because most implementation research is based on a 'forward mapping' process where those at the top of the hierarchy set objectives and sort out the steps leading to the outcomes. But he calls this a "noble lie" (Ibid: 246) which reinforces the myth that implementation is controlled from the top. He argues instead for a 'backward mapping' approach which sees real authority as lying closer to the problem the policy is designed to sort. This approach focuses on the intersection of private choices and the problem itself. This means that policy makers have to understand where tasks should be performed. "Informal authority derives from expertise, skill and proximity to the essential tasks that an organisation performs…" (Ibid: 249).

4.5   The Bottom Up Approach

The bottom-up approach is associated with Barrett and Fudge (1981) which is an explicit critique of the top-down approach. These views are also noted by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) and Marsh and Rhodes (1992). The bottom-up approach focuses on changes in individual and group behaviour and culture and shows how this affects the policy. Webster describes this backward mapping view as taking a phenomenological approach. It is interpretivist or phenomenological in orientation which emphasises those at the front line. It develops an understanding of the contextual situation, of one's own values and judgements, and of how people reinterpret and modify policy, while making challenges to the top. The classic text is Lipsky (1980) and the idea of 'street level bureaucrats' in which independent actors at all levels can and do pursue goals. It is all about agency. The important factor in studies on policy implementation is the role of the academic in the process. This kind of approach is also recognised by Trowler (1998), Reynolds and Saunders (1987), Giddens (1984), Deem and Davis (1991), Fullan (1977) and by Hoyle (1988:56) who nevertheless argues that the "micropolitics of organisations" has been largely ignored. Micropolitics embraces those strategies by which individuals and groups in organisational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests. The idea that academics do not engage with the role of change agent is also accepted by Denning (2002) who argues that the absence of interaction and dialogue has potentially serious implications. But he argues that

there is little in the literature about the academic as a change agent. A rather negative view shared by Martin (1999). This is the gap filled by Trowler and Knight's several writings. Trowler (1998) for example takes an optimistic and positive approach to the role of the 'ordinary' academic's response to a changing university environment.

Denning (2002:147) warns of the danger of a "victimisation mentality" among academics who can respond to change, he argues, in three basic ways. There can be an 'enthusiastic commitment' to changes brought about by policy, there are the 'sombre enthusiasts' who attempt to engage through practical involvement, and there are the 'disillusioned'. Trowler's work focuses probably on the second of these categories. This 'practical involvement' with policy implementation processes create "zones of uncertainty", the idea outlined by Fullan (1982:28), referring to Schon (1971) who argued that policies can go through periods of 'false clarity' where they think they have changed but have only done so superficially, and 'painful clarity' where unclear decisions have been made which don't support the achievement of the policy change anyway.

Marsh and Rhodes (1992) summarised objections to the bottom-up approach: it over-estimates the influence of lower-level actors; it does not identify what is the source of actors' definitions and perceptions; it ignores the fact that the top set the ground rules; it doesn't really engage with implementation analysis, focusing instead on understanding actor interaction. Webster's view is that there is value in the bottom-up/phenomenological insights but there is also a danger of over-stating the case. The "minutiae of actors" perceptions and definitions of reality may cause bottom-up researchers to overlook structural and institutional factors including resources. It may also play down the extent to which the top sets the general direction, agenda and ground rules (Webster 2003:63).

Sabatier (1986) identifies a more fundamental problem, which is,

> *its failure to start from an explicit theory of the factors affecting its*
> *subject of interest. Because it relies very heavily on the perceptions*
> *and activities of participants, it is their prisoner – and therefore it is*
> *unlikely to analyse the factors indirectly affecting their behaviour or*

even the factors directly affecting such behaviour which the
participants do not recognise.

Sabatier develops a composite conceptual framework but looks at policy change rather than policy implementation.

4.6   A Synthesis

It is possible to identify a synthesis position or a third perspective – 'implementation as evolution' – in which the key text is Majone and Wildavsky (1978) and which is supported by Trowler.

This should be seen as a sensible and moderate approach to
implementation analysis

(Trowler 1998:107).

Trowler follows this view as do Reynolds and Saunders (1987) and Pratt and Silverman (1988). Trowler emphasises the idea that the academic is an important actor but in a wider context.   Further useful sources here are Apple (1989), Fullan (1991), Reynolds and Saunders (1987), and Giddens (1994:16). Fullan (1999) talks about the "change sandwich", the mix of top-down direction with bottom-up energy and local adaptation.

Trowler (1998) rejects the top-down, managerialist approach of Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) and complains about writers who tend to "under-theorise the role of academic staff". He notes the "invisibility of the views and responses of ground-level staff" (Trowler 1998: 97).   On the latter,

Giddensian structuration theory has helped us to understand that the
actor is both constrained and free, operating within social structures
yet able to change them to some extent

(Ibid: 102)

Trowler rejects the top-down approach but also rejects Ball and his heavy emphasis on structure. Giddens (1976) developed structuration theory which uses the tension between structure and agency.

The top-down/bottom-up dichotomy shows that,

> *the different approaches could be viewed as conflicting interpretations of the locale of power and control in the policy making and implementation process.*
>
> (Trowler 1998: 103).

Structuration stresses "reproductive and inherently mutually causal relationships between agency and structure" (Ibid: 39). An illustration of this approach is revealed in Lisewski (2004) who argues that the key feature in the implementation of teaching and learning strategy is where the top-down strategy meets the bottom-up culture.

Criticism of Giddens' work can be found in Hammersley (1993). A further criticism of structuration is that it underestimates the constraints imposed by structures (Craib 1992)

Cutright (2004) notes that Trowler and Knight (2002),

> *draw heavily on modern conceptions of organisation change and culture…to critique top-down technical-rational understanding of change.*

The latter perspective has flaws, it simplifies casual relations, fails to take account of meanings and perceptions, leaves out contextual background, and does not take into account the "messy" details of life. Trowler and Knight propose instead a "connectivist conception of change and policy". Cuthbert (2000) argues that the synthesised approach of Trowler (1998) "achieves a more balanced view in a compelling argument". He notes that, "the theoretical orientation is Alvesson's 'multiple cultural configuration' perspective on organisation, enabling diverse views,

top-down and bottom-up to co-exist in an interpretive account of socially constructed realities". Trowler himself (1998:158) argues for a,

> *rebalancing of thinking about change in HE, to overcome the dominance of rationalist top-down prescriptive 'policy science' by injecting more 'policy scholarship' approaches which situate an understanding of education policy in the context of the cultural and ideological struggles in which they are located.*

On the other hand Elton (2002: 5) noted the difficulty in combining the top-down initiative for change with bottom-up facilitation.

Book reviewers have tended to react positively to the work of Trowler and colleagues. Tapper (2002) argues that Becher and Trowler in 2001 provided an updated edition of what was considered to be a classic text published in 1989. This thematic text emphasises the role of agency and discourse in social construction rather than using structuralist approaches. Knight and Trowler's 2001 work is praised by Morgan (2001) who calls this an "intuitive and important book". Cuthbert (2000) took the view that Trowler (1998) had "produced a major work of policy scholarship…giving a voice to the 'silent majority' of academics in the new HE". It is a "powerful antidote to narrow thinking" in a work of "bold imagination and meticulous scholarship".

Elmore's (1989) key point is that the local level of policy making,

> *depends on some critical sense of the formation of local coalitions of individuals affected by the policy.*
>
> (Ibid: 253).

He focuses on the "street level bureaucrats" who are "essentially free to develop their own 'coping devices' for simplifying and often distorting the aims of policy makers". Elmore goes on to argue (Ibid: 254) that the implementation literature provides,

> *strong support for an analytic framework that takes account of*
> *reciprocity in the relationship between superiors and subordinates*
> *in organisations, the connection between hierarchical control and*
> *increasing complexity; discretion as an 'adaptive device' and*
> *bargaining as a precondition for local affairs.*

The key seems to be that problems are solved not by policy makers but by someone with immediate proximity to events. A programme leader in the UHI context would be in this position. Jackson (2003) uses this approach in the context of an unfavourable environment for self-motivated change pointing to intensification of work, managerialism, reduced collegiality, uncaring institutions, and weariness. However it is argued that there is a residue of autonomy, that,

> *no matter how radical imposed change is, there will always be a*
> *group of people who can exploit or come to terms with it…it is the*
> *copers and innovators who provide an experiential learning from*
> *which knowledge of how to do it can be grown and shared…*

4.7   The Meso Level of Analysis

In much of Trowler's work he argues for the significance of the meso level of analysis. He argues that this is a particularly significant and largely forgotten field (2005). An application of these ideas at the departmental level is provided by Knight and Trowler (2000:69). They focus on 'activity systems' which are "a functional subsystem of a larger system in which people work together on the task which the system was created to manage". The argument they make is that attempts to improve learning and teaching will not work unless departmental cultures are conducive to better teaching. They argue (Ibid: 71) that a "bundle of changes" have "militated against" improving teaching and learning. These changes are intensification of work, managerialism, and loss of collegiality. The authors here look at academics' perceptions of their work contexts, the themes being collegiality, autonomy, uncertainty, role conflict, service, teaching, workload, multiple roles and expectations. They refer to Fullan's notion of change as a journey and not as a blueprint. Again the authors' make the case for research on this topic. "It may be that the 'middle manager' in education in the shape of departmental leadership is a

research topic whose time has come" (Ibid: 81). Clegg (2002) and Hellawell and Hancock (2001) both note the relative lack of attention paid to middle managers and the insights to be gained from looking at practitioners.

Trowler and Knight (2002:144) argue that an approach to research which emphasises the workgroup level has much to commend it. They argue that "dominant discourses about institutional changes in HE…involve contextual simplification". Instead of the technical-rational, their approach is to see institutional cultures as,

protean and dynamic, not singular and static…any university possesses a unique and dynamic multiple cultural configuration.

(Ibid: 145).

They go on to commend social practice theory despite the difficulties Trowler recognises elsewhere (2008). The authors see organisations as "networks of networks" or "constellations of communities of practice" (Ibid: 149). This theoretical approach,

> *ponders how they* (academics) *interact in various social settings under different relations of power between actors, discourses, tools and rules*

They reject McNay's (1995) model outlining four cultural conditions – collegium, bureaucracy, enterprise, corporation – as oversimplistic and unrealistic. Also rejected are other cultural category systems such as those of Handy (Trowler 2009).

Trowler et al (2005) strongly makes the case for ways in which the omission of the departmental level might be rectified. Micro, individualist and macro, structuralist theories are rejected in favour of the 'missing meso level'. He argues that little work has been done on this. He shows that a social practice theory of change helps us to understand how change can be blocked or facilitated at this level. Social processes at departmental level are significant because that is where change actually takes place. The case is that the most significant aspects of change in teaching and learning involve social interaction at the level of the workgroup. Initiatives for enhancement

or change are "filtered and adapted rather than just adopted according to local cultural characteristics" (Ibid.). Social practice theory suggests that workgroups develop distinctive approaches as they engage in tasks over time. Trowler and Cooper (2002) elaborated this for the concept of teaching and learning regimes. These regimes comprise a set of cultural components or dimensions. In publications in 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2009 Trowler and colleagues develop a 'constellation' of eight cultural characteristics discussed further below.

The notion that change can only really happen at the departmental level is strongly supported by Knight and Trowler (2002:160) who argue;

> *that change strategies that put the department at the centre provide a better account of the way things are than those that privilege institutional management or that treat individual academics as free or powerful agents*

This perspective is made interesting because it contrasts with the widely accepted perception within UHI that it was a top-down imposition, though it should be said that this is not uncommon in FE (Loots and Whelan 2000).

Knight and Trowler's (2002:142) approach is the phenomenological one which looks at context and contingency. Other studies tend to focus on the micro or the macro level whereas they look at the "meso-level of social processes operating in workgroups". This approach has "much to offer" (Ibid: 145). Their approach focuses on the distributed character of leadership, "taking the spotlight off the heroic leader and focusing instead on *teams*". The situated subtleties of departmental contexts is the emphasis. They combine sociological, psychological, organisational and management studies into a study of social-practice theory in the departmental context.

Bamber et al (2009) have also developed this kind of approach this time using enhancement of teaching and learning as the instance of research being considered. "A key point in our argument is that policy makers and change agents would do well to think carefully about the context of enhancement as well as the enhancement

itself" (Ibid: 144). These authors assert, "we can revel in the fascination of a meta cultural analysis that returns power to the thoughtful reader" (Ibid: x). The key premise of this book is that "change, enhancement and learning happen within a social system" (Ibid: 103).

Tight (2003) argues that higher education in general is perceived as a relatively under-researched field. A major theme of HE research is the nature of academic work, raising questions such as 'how do academics conceive of their different roles and relationships'? Tight refers to the work of Knight and Trowler who argue for the examination of research at departmental level using documents, surveys and social theory. Similarly Troyna (1994) noted that the "broad sweep of curriculum policy remains under-analysed and as a consequence under-theorised". So,

> *in order to gain a greater sophistication in our understanding of*
> *change we need to look much more inside real institutions…(to) get*
> *the actor back in the picture.*
>
> (Trowler 1997: 315)

Knight and Trowler (2000:69) define "activity systems" at that level. The activity system is a "functional subsystem of a larger system in which people work together". They argue that attempts to improve teaching and learning will, "have little impact unless departmental cultures are conducive to better teaching". Knight and Trowler (2001) also looked at the departmental level using the concept of "communities of practice". Work at this level is contingent i.e. it deals with the specifics of a time, place and set of people (Ibid: vii). It "offers a conceptual torch to illuminate practice and highlight possibilities for changed practice" (Ibid: viii).

Trowler (2008: xi) returned to his theme when he looks at culture at the macro and then micro level before focusing on the meso, "showing how workgroups at the departmental level are particularly significant in the construction and enactment of culture", using the specific example here of Teaching and Learning Regimes. He argues now that research must rebalance in favour of the meso level.

> *The missing level of analysis is the meso level – the point of social interaction by small groups…workgroups within departments are the most significant aspect of social life for the individuals involved*
>
> (Ibid: 20-21).

In a 2004 study, Tight found that only 18 out of 406 journal articles used the department as the level of analysis. Clegg (2003) and Newton (2003) had both addressed this by conducting case studies into the implementation of policy at the departmental level.

It is important to note that analysis at the meso level is a choice – an analytical distinction, not an ontological one (Trowler 2008:21).

> *There is no claim here that the meso level is in any sense ontologically superior to other levels of analysis.*

The meso level of analysis places social processes at the forefront, by focusing on social relationships, to take into account the historical background and the affective domain. Individuals are probably also seen as moving between positions rather than conforming permanently to particular types.

As noted above Knight and Trowler (2000:81) argued that the departmental level is a research topic whose time has come. My project intends to make a contribution to this work at this level of activity.

4.8 The Need for Research to focus on the meso level

Elsewhere Trowler (1997) had argued that there is an urgent need to emphasise the role of the academic as an important actor in the study of policy implementation in higher education. He calls for researchers to take account of organisational cultures and the ideological characteristics of particular contexts arguing that,

> *the number of good empirical studies of this social construction in operation is very limited"*
>
> (Trowler 1997:301).

The case was made for the need to examine rank and file academics. More data is needed on "ground level" staff and on changing the "nature of the inner cultures of universities". He argues for a "fundamental realignment" of our thinking about the implementation of change in higher education (Trowler 1998:112). He asks for more research at what might be called the lower-status end of the system. (Ibid: 136). To understand ground-level implementation "it is necessary to develop a more sophisticated appreciation of cultures in HE organisations than has been deployed so far and to consider the consequences of this for the policy implementation process" (Ibid: 142).

The idea that successful change must address issues at the 'coal face', workgroups inside departments, was repeated in later work (Trowler 2008). Throughout his work, Trowler does not feature students directly. It is about change and the role, practices and attitudes of academic staff in their work rather than teaching and learning in itself and this needs 'close-up' study. The idea that institutional policy implementation is an under-researched and under-theorised field was noted by Newton (2003: 428), Clegg (2003), Moore (2003) and Young (2001).

4.9 Organisational Cultures

Trowler's thesis (1997:312) is that we need more developed theories to assess the personal and professional dilemmas academics find themselves in bearing in mind context and constraints. The organisation, professional and other "cultural traffic" found in a unique configuration on every site becomes the focus rather than the epistemology of the discipline.

A key concept of the 1998 book is the idea that organisational culture is continuously constructed and not simply imposed by managers. Staff are active agents in this construction of culture, in the way things are done and in prevailing values, norms attitudes and discourses. In a book review, McDowell (2001) says that the author "sets himself the difficult challenge of integrating the theoretical and conceptual elements of his work with the empirical data".

Bamber et al (2009:103) defines culture thus,

> *a university's culture could be seen as the core beliefs and values held by staff which have developed over time and are shared to varying degrees by different groups within the organisation.*

Bamber et al (2009:1) argues that,

> *in university cultures, ground level staff always have room for manoeuvre.*

One approach to understanding cultures is based on the work of Alvesson (2002) and the 'multiple cultural configuration'. This sees cultures as open, multiple in one organisation, dynamic, both enacted and constructed, cultures within organisations occupy different stages – 'front of stage', 'under the stage' and 'behind the stage'. For Trowler (1998) culture is to do with attitudes, values, and how things are done. The key finding of this book is the need to develop a concept of multiple cultural configuration. The literature on the managerial/rationalist school is regarded as simplistic and flawed. He looks at the nature of organisational culture and argues that most accounts of organisational culture are one-dimensional but argues that there is a "multiple cultural configuration" which is a set of cultures, not a unitary whole. This concept of multiple cultural configuration shifts the level of analysis to the organisational sub-unit; "a market gardening rather than an agribusiness approach" (Trowler 2008:15). In this book he,

> *assumes cultures in universities to be multiple, generated and sustained at the level of the workgroup within departments.*

Trowler (2009) notes the importance of three issues which arise out of the case studies he reviews in this work – inertia' or the tendency of things to "snap back"; context; and theory, understanding change needs good theory. The 'established way of doing things', or the 'grammar of HE' is powerful.

Knight and Trowler (2000:78) looked at the reception, perception and application of changes to teaching and learning which "passes through cultural filters and personal contexts" Webster (2003) also uses the idea of a 'cultural lens' made up of context,

values, and multiple meanings – this requires an interpretive logic rather than an ontological logic. Yanow (1987) identifies three features of the cultural lens:

- implementers interpret policies – the more actors the more variation in policy
- implementation requires persuasion
- implementation is adaptive and iterative

Trowler (1998:158) favours the 'policy scholarship' of Grace (1995) rather than the notion of 'policy science'. The former is about situating an understanding of educational policy in the context of the culture and ideological struggle in which they are located. This "holds the promise of an important understanding of social reality in universities as organisations and hence to organisational development in a difficult environment" (such as UHI).

4.10 Communities of Practice

The idea of the community of practice has been widely used in the social sciences in recent times and has been applied to studies of organisations and professions and appears to be relevant to this study although elsewhere this is criticised (Tight 2007), Trowler 2008). It has appeared in educational research such as Fanghanel (2007) and Trowler and Knight (2000). This is an alternative to an approach based on discipline-based discourses.

Much of Trowler's work is based on that of Fullan and Senge who are quoted by Wenger et al (2002:237) who notes,

> *we are finding again and again that the guiding principle is that significant innovations must be diffused through informal, self-organised networks, through horizontal communities of practice. How you strengthen these communities is the key to how you disseminate innovation and maintain the innovators.*

In Knight and Trowler's 2001 work they use the communities of practice concept but they feel it is a term which has "acquired multiple meaning" (Ibid: 63). It has also been criticised as being 'cosy' (Bauman 1995). These authors also recognise the idea that mutual understanding or 'inter-subjectivity' cannot be assumed in workgroups.

In a 2008 work based largely on experiences in South Africa, Trowler recorded being "surprised and puzzled" to find factions within departments which raised questions about the communities of practice. There seemed to be a lot of diversity and conflict as well as consensus and community, therefore, "the notion of cultures within academic departments clearly merited sustained attention" (Trowler 2008: x). The idea that communities of practice are not necessarily harmonious, that individuals have experiences outside of them and in other communities, and the fact that they underplay concepts such as power and status are further criticisms that might be made. The 'fragmented' nature of communities of practice was also noted by Land (2001: 4).

4.11 The 'Teaching and Learning Regime'

Trowler and Cooper (2002) developed earlier work by using the concept of the teaching and learning regime (TLR) which is a socially constructed 'constellation' of rules, assumptions, values and relationships related to teaching and learning teams and the issues they face. The primary location of TLRs is departments and workgroups because this is where academics engage over time with the task of delivering the curriculum. The concept of TLR is sociological and the term 'regime' draws attention to social relations and practices. The authors develop an analytical framework consisting of eight dimensions, or 'moments', and these involve decision-making, choices, negotiation and contestation. These eight dimensions interact with each other and are separated out purely for analytical purposes. This concept draws attention to consideration of how academics in workgroups respond to changing circumstances and the eight dimensions provide a means of making sense of the characteristics of course teams, or regimes. We may regard a UHI course (or programme) team as a teaching and learning regime.

Trowler (2004:199) argues that the "multiple social worlds within …universities will obstinately filter and refract the policy thrust…" He has developed the idea of such social realities into the concept of Teaching and Learning Regimes (Trowler and Cooper (2002) and Trowler (2008)). Regimes develop over time, as academic staff working on common projects (such as delivering undergraduate degrees) establish a social context in which tensions and conflicts around identity and power are played out and develop sets of meanings, attitudes, and practices. Diversity, competition

and even conflict go on within regimes. But they do display a distinct set of characteristics – a strong "flavour". Newton (2003: 432) identified a similar approach, talking about "local practices and local cultures". The regime concept however gives us a way of breaking this down into identifiable components.

The workgroup can be seen as developing "a set of contextually specific characteristics which could be described as a culture or subculture" (Trowler 2008:51). Regimes are 'leaky', they are open to other cultures and have shifting boundaries for example through multiple team membership for UHI staff. The boundaries between the eight 'moments' are analytical and subjective constructs useful for analysis. Whereas the term 'community of practice' implies consensus and harmony, 'regime' recognises power, conflict and resistance and so is a preferred term. It suggests a more political and realist view. Regimes "are open, natural systems; highly permeable, vertically nested and horizontally multiple" (Ibid: 53). Trowler developed eight analytical components or 'moments' from an analysis of the literature and from his own empirical work.

> *If culture is understood as a particular configuration of the moments of social life, in a particular place and space, then regime is that constellation as it is mobilised in relation to a given area of activity, towards a given subject, with a given historical background, with particular tools and capacities and in the context of a given social framework…It is best to see a TLR as the figure in its ground, as a choice of subject on which to focus.*
>
> <div align="right">(Trowler 2008: 53)</div>

The main features of each of eight "moments" were first set out by Trowler and Cooper (2002) These moments are:

1. recurrent practices – 'recipes' (Berger and Luckman 1966:65), or pragmatic, unreflective routines, sometimes more easily seen by newcomers. These might include themes such as turn-taking, online discussion board etiquette, assessment feedback, timetabling of staff. Practices become 'hardened' and certain things become 'beyond question'. An example in the social sciences

course team is the use of tutorials. All this adds up to models of practice, the way we do things.

2. implicit theories of teaching and learning – there are a range of theories of learning and teaching but team members are influenced by the way they were taught and by assumptions about the way students should be taught now. These are rarely discussed but they shape notions of 'good practice'. How does the team come to a view on this and what influences decisions? What do we do if a team member diverges from the team position? Do we achieve independent learning, or student-centred learning?

3. tacit assumptions – taken-for-grantedness. The things that go without saying such as subject qualification levels, teaching practice, understandings of what is relevant to teaching and learning issues and module content. Particular ways of categorising things and people develop. Perceptions grow about 'us and them'. Disciplinary modules might be seen as preferred to inter-disciplinary for example, or the other way around. There were attempts in the BA Social Science case to try to establish certain practices to make them taken-for-granted but which never quite came off such as the use of reflective journals. A tacit assumption would be that a social sciences degree should include sociology but not personal and professional capabilities. Such issues tend to arise when something contentious comes up.

4. discursive repertoires – discourse is influenced by social context, certain words and expressions get priority. The location of the UHI and its regional orientation has made the region itself a feature of degree programmes – where is the 'UHI-ness' in this? Managerialism tends to feature in the UHI partner colleges but within UHI itself there tends to be a discourse of research and scholarship. In UHI contexts staff will talk about research-based learning whereas back in the 'home' college there is a focus on 'full timetables', teaching hours, teaching 'load', and FE classes 'still needing to be taught'. There is a strong student-centred discourse in UHI and also a quality monitoring/enhancement one. All this raises again the issue of legitimacy

and authority – who determines the decisions? There may well be multiple discourses but usually a dominant one.

5.   rules or conventions of appropriateness – based to some extent on experiences of the past. This is a peculiar feature of UHI because different partner colleges had different historical associations with university associates. One way to tease out such rules is to identify cases of 'deviance' from some 'rule', the rules being codified in handbooks for example. Examples here would include attempts to use reflective journals rather than 'straight' essays in assessment. Some rules are specific to particular disciplines, for example the psychologists insisting that an inter-disciplinary research methods module should be heavily quantitative, when other disciplines wanted a more qualitative orientation. This indicates an area where a team delivering a 'general' degree have issues that wouldn't arise in a single discipline based degree team.

6.   power relations – this raises relationships with other institutional power configurations within UHI.   There are faculty and subject network relationships; relationships with other course teams; individuals may simultaneously be a member of several teams; college relationships; the college/vertical/line   management   relationships   alongside UHI/horizontal/collegiate relationships; changing and differential roles. How much autonomy do staff have?   Do they feel uncomfortable and disempowered?

7.   identities/subjectivities in interaction – relates to professional identities and the positioning that goes on between alternatives. Certain identities are seen as central, with them comes certain power, certain restrictions and boundaries. Merger situations raise this theme in particular. The social sciences team went through this process when Chisholm College joined the team in 2000. In a UHI context, there are debates about whether academics 'feel' part of UHI, or of their 'own' college, or of their discipline, or their occupational background, or their FE heritage. Interesting here is where academics define the criteria they use to assess the status and power of

colleagues within this collegiate, federal institution. Where does authority and legitimacy reside?

8. codes of signification – 'signs' that staff share understandings of the significance of certain codes or situations. This might involve perceptions of threats to institutional or individual autonomy. Staff tend to regard terms such as 'QAA' and 'OUVS' as having powerful connotations and evoke certain feelings. The same thing happens with for example assessment instruments such as examinations and learning logs. The achievement of teaching degree awarding powers for UHI in 2008 changed this in some ways. It is interesting to consider how 'internal' subject network reviews are looked upon compared to 'external' QAA subject reviews. These codes indicate dispositions in terms of meaning and emotion. Codes of signification relate to status eg between teaching and research. In UHI this might be more likely to be between FE and HE. There is a sense of what counts as 'real' HE. Such codes may be localised and conceptually very pertinent to the UHI experience.

Different TLRs will be "mobilised" in diverse ways. This diversity is what results in different receptions and implementations of policy initiatives. Problems can arise where individual team members adopt positions different from the rest of the team. Lack of alignment between individuals and the team as a whole might lead to growing negativity, anxiety, hostility, and so on. Such situations might only become evident when some critical incident happens.

There is a need to consider the use of discourse here. Trowler (2004:197) notes the use of the word 'reform' for example by people "unaware of its uncritically positive overtones". He goes on "even in contexts where there is much goodwill we can expect differential interpretation, selection, and enactment of policy initiatives" .

4.12 Social Practice Theory

Knight and Trowler (2001) set out the case for using social practice theory (SPT). SPT is a theory of change which is associated with dispersed/distributed/situational/collegial leadership. It is also associated with an

ideology of power seen as operating through empowerment, collaboration, community of practice and collegiality (and therefore of importance for UHI). Morgan (2001) in a review of Trowler and Knight (2001) feels that they "offer a crystallization of the social practice implications for leadership in higher education". This theoretical approach links with the 'sensemaking' approach of Weick (1995:3) which is about constructing accounts of institutions which are socially credible.

These authors "offer a conceptual torch to illuminate practice and highlight the possibilities for changed practice" by applying social practice theory at the meso-level of the community of practice (Knight and Trowler 2001:viii) The social practice approach emphasises the social construction of reality which gives theoretical underpinning to the collegial. It originates partly in Vygotsky's (1998) activity theory with its Marxist heritage emphasising structure and partly in Wenger's idea of communities of practice with roots in phenomenology, constructivism and structural functionalism emphasising agency.   But only limited application of social practice theory to higher education has been used, and only to pedagogical teaching and learning issues (Ibid: 48).

Trowler and Knight (2002:145) argue that SPT is more complex than the "reductionist assumptions of Enlightenment positivism". To understand how groups generate multiple cultures "we commend SPT" (Ibid.146). Gherardi (2000) calls this 'practice-based theory' in which individuals engage with the world in a social way – it takes on 'taken for granted' approaches which "become invisible to members of these departments" but novel to outsiders (Ibid: 146).   All this means that conceptions of change must be modified away from more traditional technical-rational assumptions.

Social practice theory suggests that the rational-purposive approach to the change process assumes that those on the ground actually implementing policies are 'social dopes' who either adopt in full or resist any innovation. The social practice approach on the other hand tells us that social reality is constructed and enacted by individuals including those on the ground through the change process itself. Some autonomy always survives.

"From this perspective cultural diversity and dynamism, even within a single institution, is the norm. Social practices and the beliefs, values, emotions, and frames of reference they are founded on differ significantly from place to place: there are small worlds and different worlds everywhere".

Trowler 2004:198)

Knight and Trowler (2002:149) take SPT and "ponders how they (ie networks and communities of practice) interact in various social settings under different relations of power between actors, discourses, tools and rules". The authors see organisations as 'networks of networks' (Ibid: 147) or as 'constellations of communities of practice' (Wenger 1998). They also see communities of practice as interacting groups of practitioners whose identity is dynamic not fixed, and where discourse is itself a form of social practice. Practices are social and evolving and 'nested' in cultures.

In later work, Trowler places SPT into a more fully explored sociocultural theory which is social constructionist in nature. Thinking is located within the "cultural realities" of the institution (Trowler 2009:7). Workgroups have agency but not control. They interact creating values and attitudes. There is an interaction between structure and agency. Discourses develop which express, constrain and delimit reality, people shape and are shaped by identity, historical background is important, the particularities of context means that things are received and interpreted in unique ways. These discourses may be managerialist, quality or network based. A combination of these identities makes us 'bilingual' (Bamber et al 2009:50). Another dimension is 'tools used by workgroups' which in a UHI context would be virtual learning environments, email systems and feedback pro formas as examples. Such tools can be "domesticated" to align with the context of use. In this situation the adoption of say a new instrument of assessment is seen as a social as well as a pedagogical development.

The key to sociocultural theory is that it takes as its unit of analysis social practice rather than individual agency, cognition or social structures…a nexus of practices

This approach integrates a number of theories (Schon 1991, Eraut 2001, Wenger 1998).

A sociocultural understanding of teaching and learning policy would place the spotlight on certain features: workgroups developing recurrent practices, taken for granted ways of behaving, establishing "the process of weaving webs of meaning" (Trowler 2008: 17); interactions with objects such as virtual learning environments being socially mediated; workgroups developing 'discursive repertoires' which express and constrain social realities; individual identities being conditioned by the social context; historical narrative taking on significance for meaning; "from a sociocultural perspective, policy is created in the doing of it" (Ibid: 38). A sociocultural approach draws attention to the way things are received and dealt with in unique ways according to the specifics of the social context (Bamber et al 2009:7).

A number of criticisms can be levelled at SPT (Fuller 2005). We have noted that the community of practice is a problematic concept in itself. It underplays the concept of power and its operationalisation in social contexts. Theories of power such as that of Lukes (2005) is not taken into account. There are problems of inter-subjectivity, of practitioners understanding meaning in the same way (Knight and Trowler 2001:63). We might also note that at no point does Trowler specifically refer to Further Education. SPT probably over-stresses the idea of shared understanding, and sees workgroups as relatively closed. In a UHI context staff move from one to another. It is not good at locating the effects of inequality and status differences in organisational dynamics (Trowler and Turner 2002: 241).

Webster (2003:67) made some use of SPT in his study of UHI but also had some important caveats. There was the general problem of permeability and relative vagueness of boundaries around the concept of communities of practice. Group members may have atomised professional roles and membership of other groups and indeed institutions. There is the baggage carried by everyday use of the word 'community' especially where institutional self-interest, competition and conflict are the norms. And the above point about imbalances of power is noted.

4.13 The Trowler Typology

Out of a sociocultural context and social practice theory Trowler puts forward his important typology on how academics respond to change. There are four categories of response based on a content/discontent axis and a status quo/change axis. The four categories are swimming, sinking, coping, and policy reconstruction. Trowler identifies the last as the biggest and most interesting. He looks at the patterns to be observed in academic responses and attitudes to change and how these translate into policy implementation strategies and how these in turn change the policy. Academics use reconstructive strategies including policy reconstruction and reinterpretation, avoidance, evasion, and manipulation. A particularly interesting example of reconstruction is 'reprofessionalisation', taking control in the face of deprofessionalisation and proletarianisation.

He goes on to outline five reconstructive strategies:

- curriculum innovation – a tendency to drift back to the old; a regressive approach
- syllabus innovation – also regressive; such as the use of electives and subject choices
- reinterpretation of policy – to do with the latitude created by lack of clarity in policy making intentions
- policy manipulation – use of regulations, avoidance, and evasion
- re-professionalisation – the more positive adoption of new skills and the maximisation of decision making opportunities in the design and delivery stages of the curriculum

(Trowler 1998: 114)

This typology looks at the role of both individuals and groups in responding to and reconstructing policy. 'Sinking' is about deskilling, fatalistic assumptions, perceptions of personal damage, ritualism, retreat-ism, and disillusionment. 'Swimming' is about accepting, seeing benefits, recognising, personal rewards, the development of the new. 'Coping' is about retreat from innovation, and finding opportunities to reduce workload. 'Reconstructing' is about staff reinterpreting and reconstructing policy; academics seeing themselves as robust movers and shakers, as

proactive and not passive. Trowler's approach rejects the discipline-based epistemological approach of Becher (1989), Clark (1987) and Trow (1994) preferring perhaps to look at more teaching-based institutions.

On this typology McDowell (2001) supports the grounded theorising within a multiple cultural perspective, noting,

> *what I really liked about this book were the typologies of academic's responses to change. These are extremely illuminating and helpful in clarifying thinking about our confusing situations. Academics responses…are described as traditionalist, progressive, enterprise focused, and social reconstruction. Later on we find academics responding to their personal situations by sinking, swimming, coping or reconstructing policy.*

Cuthbert (2000) also notes,

> *Trowler offers a simple typology of responses…which connects with the post-modern academic experience in a refreshingly direct way.*

Trow (1989) talked about the Robbins trap, the idea of the massification of HE with continuing elitist principles. The idea of a 'trap' suggests powerlessness – Halsey, Bocock and Haslum all suggest academics as passive, dispirited victims. Trowler (1997:302) rejected such assumptions and on looking at policy reinterpretation and reconstruction, quotes Ball (1994),

> *in many cases policy makers are unsure or divided about what is intended and so policy can be deconstructed in a number of ways.*

Trowler's argument (1997) is that;
- there is latitude for implementers on the ground
- there are examples of "more active policy manipulation" – a particularly interesting example of this being 're-professionalisation'

- there are examples of staff taking control; and looking for opportunities to determine things (Ibid: 309).

A similar model of response is offered by Gosling and Hanan (2007) who identify three reconstructive strategies; 'playing the game', reframing the policy to one's own advantage, and 'strategic compliance'. This (innovation) idea is also the focus of Hanan et al (1999:279) who warns that innovation can be a career risk which can lead to punitive effects, severely increased workload, the undermining of confidence and suspicion about motives. Hanan et al also noted that "the literature concerned with innovation in HE is sparse" (Ibid: 280) though asks who are the innovators, what characteristics they have, and why they innovate.

Trowler Typology	Accept status quo	Work around or change
Content	*Swimming*	*Policy Reconstruction*
Discontent	*Sinking*	*Coping*

Trowler (1998:112) Academic Responses to Change

4.14   Reconstruction

On the idea of reconstruction, Trowler (1998:141) questions the "bleak view" of de-professionalisation, degradation, and donnish decline. This view fails to consider the resources academics have available to them to respond.

> *Academics are clever people. Rebellion and innovation are their forte and they frequently stand in strategic locations on the 'implementation staircase'*
>
> Trowler (1998:55)

Another example of this approach is Saunders (2009:98) who reviewed a national initiative and noted how it could be adapted for local conditions.

The capacity of a new policy to be reconstructed rather than transferred at ground level depends on the relationship between fidelity and the extent to which policies can be reconstructed and translated.

Low fidelity means there is a clear vision but generic enough to allow enactors to act in their own situation. Trowler (2008:144) argues again that change always happens in a context where the change gets "domesticated". He identified work which noted the variety of factors leading to inertia such as insolence, resistance, 'mere rhetorical compliance or reconstruction of initiatives that undermine or reconfigure their intended effect". Here reconstruction is presented in a more negative light whereas usually this author is presenting reconstruction as a positive. (Ibid: 177). The idea that academics respond in a dynamic way and do not simply conform to a single category of response in the typology is noted in the idea of 'positioning' by Fanghanel (2007).

The idea of reconstruction is considered in a slightly different way in Trowler (2005 and 2008) where the term "domesticated" is used to refer to workgroups engaging with some initiative to re-fashion it to the cultural context. This is seen as "extremely significant for our understanding of policy" (Trowler 2008: 38). This more recent work has emphasised the importance of understanding the cultural 'flavour' of programme teams, or teaching and learning regimes, because this is what gives rise to reconstructive or domestication strategies. One particular example with resonance in the UHI context is the notion of academic ownership of modules – sometimes seen as 'fiefs' (Ibid: 125). Epistemological arguments can be used to justify the retention of a particular module. Tutors and programme leaders can 'domesticate' QAA and institutional requirements to be compatible with their own programme. The workgroup can adapt rather than adopt – this almost always happens and is the process of 'domestication'.

Fanghanel (2007) has contributed to work on policy reconstruction through a discourse analysis of a policy text. This is placed into the context of studies on this subject already referred to above (Trowler 1998, Lipsky 1980, Reynolds and Saunders 1987) and theorised through 'structuration' (Giddens 1984). In

Fanghanel's study, the term 'disjunction' is used to refer to negative reinterpretations of the policy text while 'alignment' refers to positive or accommodative interpretations. 'Fragmentary positioning' means somewhere been the two. Where staff are positioned on this continuum depends on filters which shape the positioning – these filters being experiential, epistemic, ideological and pragmatic.

The opportunity to resist change, one of the reconstructive strategies, would appear to be considerable. Outram (2004) lists 53 ways in which colleagues resist change. These include both passive and reactive factors. These include factors all the way from the stability of the existing order to the 'collective fantasy' of enthusiasts – we are right and you are wrong!

In summary, Trowler et al (2005:435) advocate that the meso level of analysis is under-represented in research and that the key to change actually happening in teaching and learning depends on what happens at this level. The key to understanding this is the social interaction that takes place at the level of the workgroup and therefore social practice theory is the appropriate way to help us to understand whether change can be facilitated or blocked. Any changes to practice will be mediated by prevailing local cultures and it is through these that learning and teaching policies will be filtered and adapted. An elaboration of the social practice approach is the idea of the teaching and learning regime (Trowler and Cooper 2002) and although contestable this does provide a means of analysing the nature of any given workgroup or programme team. The regime consists of eight components or 'moments'. It is argued that there is a gap in research at this level and this needs to be filled, also that a reflexive institution requires to be self-conscious about this regime concept There is no attempt here to explain why regimes take on the characteristics they have, the emphasis is to first understand them as social entities as they are.

4.15   Summary and issues

A number of clear observations can be made on the basis of this review;

1.   implementation is hard to define

2.   there are few studies of implementation in the FE/HE environment

3. studies tend to be top-down rather than focused strongly at the ground level

4. Trowler and other writers support the need for more research at the 'missing meso level'

5. the key level in institutional policy implementation is the meso level though some writers (eg Webster) take issue with this

6. policy is adapted and not adopted according to Trowler

7. Trowler does not deal with Further Education or particularly with the FE/HE intersection. His work tends to be fairly abstract with few concrete examples though his 2008 work makes extensive use of 'vignettes'

8. The Trowler typology is fairly static whereas it may be that a more fluid model is necessary. Fanghanal (2005) uses a similar concept, a four-filter model, but it suggests greater dynamism and fluidity.

9. the eight moments offer a useful analytical tool to describe what a 'culture' looks like but there is no indication of what it is that makes the 'regime' take on the characteristics it has. The eight moments are purely for analytical purposes and have no ontological significance but at least three of them seem to overlap a good deal – tacit assumptions, implicit theories and recurrent practices.

10. Sociocultural theory as elaborated in social practice theory and the teaching and learning regime provides a coherent theoretical model which can be used to apply to particular case studies.

11. My application of this approach to a case in UHI generated a large amount of data, it also provided a focus on the workgroup which intuitively and through experiential observation would genuinely appear to be of great significance

for the achievement of UHI's objectives. This theoretical model therefore provides a useful tool with which to analyse a case study of significance.

11.   This makes it possible to construct a research project which makes a genuine contribution to knowledge. It applies a theoretical approach to a significant case and provides an opportunity to both test and perhaps develop the theory.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

5.1   The question of research

Hammersley (2002:52) complains that a criticism of educational research is that it has not produced a cumulative body of knowledge that is of practical use. One way to test the usefulness of research is to consider its aims as put forward in a useful framework by Punch (2000) who asks us to question what the proposed research is about, what it is trying to find out, how it will go about doing it, and what we will learn and why it is worth learning. We need to identify relevant literature that the study can be located within and determine how it will be handled.

5.2   The case for my own project

The research project proposed here is built on a relativist ontology, a constructivist epistemology and the use of the interpretivist paradigm as the basis of a methodology using interview methods supported by documentation. There may well be certain weaknesses in this for example how to find workable criteria with which to assess the credibility of such research. Assessing the 'fidelity' and 'trustworthiness' of such research data may be a subjective business. Silverman's plea (2001) to find more quantitative ways of establishing the validity, reliability and objectivity of qualitative research is a challenge. It is however too easy to dismiss the positivist paradigm if you read qualitative methodology and so there is a move towards the greater use of documentation rather than personal stories and to techniques of measuring the occurrence of categories as a way of justifying claims rather than the selection of 'soundbites'.

The approach proposed in my study is consistent with Coffey's call for a "sixth moment…characterised by reflexive, experiential texts that are messy, subjective, open-ended and conflictual (1999:4). This is why Bell and Opie (2002) suggests the need to establish an "informed base" though without getting into "data overload".

A lot of research has been conducted on the basis of postmodernism which Denzin and Lincoln (1994) call a "fifth moment". Since about 1990 this has been "a new sensibility that doubts all previous paradigms". It highlights a 'double crisis' on

representation (that qualitative researchers can directly capture lived experience) and on legitimation (the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research is now a problem). Postmodernism "suspects all truth claims" (Ibid: 517). However, Marcus (1994:573) indicates anxiety about the "excessive scepticism and paralysing relativism" of postmodernism.

The value of professional practitioner-based experience is noted as the real source of questions in research. Lee (2002:18) argues that the idea of finding a gap in the literature and answering a research question coming out of it is an "unworkable myth". Finding the research question he says is like finding an elusive animal – this requires a 'circular' view of the research process rather than a 'linear' view. Lee argues that research questions can be either coherently described from the start, or they emerge as "fuzzy beasties" (Ibid: 24). We might hope for coherence from the start but with an emergent dimension recognised. This notion is also recognised by Punch (2000:13) who distinguishes between pre-structured and unfolding research. This looks familiar in my case though he also notes that in fact research proposals are often informed by some perspective or paradigm (Ibid: 37).

Trowler (1998) calls for this kind of research, for insider, participant research, what Stenhouse (1979) called the 'second record' of the accumulated knowledge of participants "in order to interrogate and interpret data fully". This is the 'discursive consciousness' approach using interviews (and questionnaires) favoured by Stenhouse. Trowler developed the case;

> *an insider account based on multiple methods of data collection…has the potential of allowing us to move beyond the meanings, understandings and intentions of actions, giving insight in to the structural contexts…there is a clear need for more anthropologically-oriented studies which are able to apply a more subtle understanding of the complexities of discursive production of social life*
>
> (Ibid: 148).

He goes on;

> *a developed understanding of the underlife of HE can highlight more clearly the ways in which action is implicit in structure, how*

structures are perceived, socially constructed and responded to in variegated ways"

<div align="right">(Ibid: 152).</div>

The justification of a practitioner-centred approach taking account of practice and its underlying beliefs and values is made by other writers such as Bourner et al (2000) and Troyna (1994:9) who nevertheless warn about individual accounts lacking credibility and rigour. We have to avoid the suspicion that qualitative research is uncritical, subjective and value-laden. Anderson (2002:34) makes the point that practitioners tend to find insider research more compelling. They are also more likely to be "critical consumers" of this kind of research which suggests that "an epistemology of 'insider' site-based research and accompanying methodology is urgently needed" (Ibid: 23). But Anderson also notes the problem of issues of purpose, lack of guidelines, lack of formalised methodology and lower academic status for the practitioner-researcher. The existence of a set of methodological problems is also noted by Bell and Nutt (2002) who note divided loyalties of practitioners, multiple roles, competing explanations, confidentiality problems, and the role of professional codes of practice as dilemmas.

A number of further issues arise though for the practitioner-based researcher. May (2001) warns that value-neutrality is simply not possible while Tickle (2001:350) argues that "contentiousness is endemic and power is unequally distributed". Various ethical dilemmas are noted by Silverman (2001) particularly in engagement in private lives. Guidelines of non-harm and confidentiality are needed. Writers on educational institution culture refer frequently to the anthropological work of Geertz (1973) who favours 'thick description'.

5.3 Educational Epistemology

Education research is not characterised by a single paradigm. The appropriate paradigm in my case is interpretivism although Denzin and Lincoln (1994) refer to the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm which derives from the hermeneutic tradition. In later work, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define a paradigm (Giddens talks about 'frames of meaning') as having three aspects, for example, constructivism has a relativist ontology, a transactional or subjectivist epistemology, and a hermeneutic

or interpretivist methodology. Scott and Usher (1996) see this as influential but not dominant. Usher (1996:25) does not simply adopt the hermeneutic/intepretivist position but instead challenges the whole interpretivist – positivist dichotomy. Positivism associated with traditional natural science is one of the major research paradigms and certainly used to be the dominant one. We may identify a number of paradigms but also a number of ways of looking at them. One approach is to identify positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and postmodernism as one framework. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) identify positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and critical theory (post modernism being a strand of this). Crotty (1998:5) identifies three main theoretical views; positivism, post-positivism and interpretivism (which includes various sub-groups including critical theory and postmodernism). Schwandt (1994:118) identifies a single approach – the interpretivist/constructivist. All this reflects the 'fuzzy boundaries' problem. There is a general confusion around epistemology. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) and Flyvbjerg (2001) both note disillusionment even with positivist natural science. Radnor (2001) outlines her interpretivism as an "intermingling" of social theory of action and hermeneutics

Usher (1996:9) argues that failure to examine assumptions about epistemology and ontology leads to research which is merely a technology. He argues that positivism emphasises a scientific approach comprising determinacy, rationality, impersonality, prediction, and unreflexive research. (Ibid: 13). This position has been criticised and has lost ground to the hermeneutic/interpretivist epistemology which is "influential but not dominant" (Ibid: 18) where positivist generalisation, prediction and control has given way to constructivist interpretation, meaning and illumination. Atkinson and Hammersely (1994:252) note a "general disillusionment with natural science" but also unhelpfully cast doubt on the "very possibility of social science knowledge" (Ibid: 254). However Denzin and Lincoln (1998:203) argue that we are now progressing on the basis of a constructivist epistemology based on a relativist ontology.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:13) propose that within the constructivist paradigm, the criteria for assessment should be trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability. Crotty (1998:13) argues that the objectivity, validity and

generalisability of positivism are not realisable for other approaches to research and that therefore researchers need to lay out the whole research process for scrutiny. We can establish the credentials of research by explaining how we have gone about it (Ibid: 41). Crotty argues that what makes research positivist is not quantitative method, but objectivity, validity and generalisation. He complains that "rampant subjectivism seems to be abroad" and urges that the criteria for assessing qualitative work needs to be tightened (Ibid: 47).

There are nevertheless wide differences in the ways 'policy scholars' have operationalised their research. MacPherson and Raab (1988) use interviews, Salter and Tapper (1981) use primary documents, and Bowe uses a partial ethnographic approach. Halpin and Troyna (1994:5) look at research as a 'real-life', flesh and blood activity where we "grapple" with theoretical, ethical and political dramas.

Crotty (1998:5) identifies the positivist position as being associated with an epistemology of objectivism which operationalises concepts in a measureable way, tests hypotheses, achieves validity and reliability, and seeks generalisable results. The alternative epistemology is constructivism (Ibid: 42) in which knowledge is seen as a social construct, is constructed, rejects the possibility of objective truth and the positivist claim to achieve value-free findings. These two basic approaches can be referred to in different ways. De Cock (2001) identifies two approaches to constructing and organising reality; the 'logicoscientific' which uses empirical verification, and the 'narrative mode' which emphasises the 'creation of good stories' that are contextualised. This 'narrative paradigm' gives a 'kaleidescopic understanding'. Similarly Weil (1994) talks about two distinct approaches, the 'privilege explanation' which is to do with 'traditional science' and 'lower status approaches' which are based on practical and experiential learning.

Trowler (1998) notes the idea of the essentialist paradigm ie values, attitudes, behaviour are rooted in the epistemological knowledge structures of disciplines eg Becher (1989) and Burton Clark (1987). This paradigm leads to a focus on research, elite institutions and individuals 'at the top'. He wants power to be considered in any account of culturally-bounded policy implementation. Trowler notes that there is a basic theoretical debate on where academics get their values from – either from the

epistemological character of the discipline (Clark 1987, Becher 1995) or from wider cultural perspectives (Huber 1990, Evans 1993). Trowler adopts the latter. Trowler (1997:312) wants to move beyond the essentialist position that the epistemology of the discipline is all-important and instead wants to look at the idea of cultural "traffic". He rejects the epistemological claims of the discipline as an explanatory priority as put forward by Becher (1989). Instead he wants researchers to take account of organisational cultures and the 'character' of particular contexts which may be in ideological terms. Trowler here offers a critique of 'epistemological essentialism' the idea that academic's values, and attitudes stem from their disciplines. Instead he argues that for many if not most HE staff, teaching rather than research is the dominant experience.

5.4   Qualitative Research

My proposal is within the qualitative tradition. Silverman sees the qualitative tradition as an umbrella term for a variety of approaches. Its greatest strength is its ability to analyse what actually happens in natural settings. It can have "considerable force and persuasiveness" (Silverman 2001:259). Qualitative research is seen as easy to collect and hard to analyse. There is too much description and not enough causation or theory building. It needs to achieve more relevance and usefulness. Qualitative research is seen by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as interpretivist and naturalistic but frequent criticisms are about its journalistic character, its anecdotal, biased, exploratory nature, and entirely personal conclusions. Stake (1994:244) talks about the conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative researcher; seeking patterns of data, selecting themes and issues, triangulating key observations, selecting alternative interpretations, and working up generalisations. But in all this Silverman (2001) wants to see qualitative researchers using more 'scientific' notions such as reliability, validity and credibility.

These concerns about qualitative research are developed further by Silverman (2001: x) who is "discomfited" by four tendencies in qualitative research; the failure to base social research on social theory with too much exploratory work and not enough hypothesis testing; too many open-ended interviews with too much empathy and focus on experience whereas there should be caution and an avoidance of the "romantic impulse to associate experience with authenticity" ; too much use of data

extracts that support the researcher's view without proof of the contrary evidence having been reviewed – he rejects the down-playing of validity and reliability for 'authenticity' – "we cannot be satisfied with 'telling convincing stories'" (Ibid: xi); and that partisan or value positions too often determines how we analyse data.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) raise the idea of the qualitative researcher as 'bricoleur', a master of all skills who sees research as an interactive process where researchers tell their stories in a kind of value-free social science. The qualitative commitment is to the naturalistic and interpretative although (Ibid: 6) it is recognised that it is often accused of being journalistic, soft, unscientific, entirely personal and biased. Qualitative researchers have an "uneasy awareness" of these complaints and so have tended to critique the positivist position. Hammersley (2002) also wants qualitative research to have a greater impact on policy, noting (Ibid: 85) an "incompatibility between qualitative enquiry and the instrumentalism which gives rise to much current criticism of education research".

On the quality of qualitative research, Silverman (2000) identifies four major quality issues; the need for more analytic depth and theory; the need to maintain validity and reliability; too much use is made of interviews, it is too easy to look at 'saying' rather than 'doing; and the research needs to inform policy and practice, the usefulness of research has to be doubted if there are doubts about the rigour of the research. Spencer et al (2004:5) raise similar questions,

> *…despite their growing use, there are no explicitly agreed standards regarding what constitutes quality in qualitative research evaluations.*

These authors develop a framework based around four guiding principles; the need to contribute to advancing wider knowledge and understanding; being defensible in design; being rigorous in conduct through systematic and transparent collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data; achieving credibility in claim through well founded and plausible arguments about the significance of the data generated.

For Silverman (2001:9);

the troubling question is, why should we believe what qualitative researchers tell us?... how do they demonstrate that their descriptions are accurate and that their explanations hold water?"

Further criticisms are that it tends to be exploratory, anecdotal and lacking objectivity. However strengths are; its ability to focus "on actual practice in situ…looking at how social interactions are routinely enacted" (Silverman 2000:286). It wants to look at how people do things, not how they see things. Edwards (1997:5) emphasises the "story-telling capacity of human beings which is held to be fundamental to their being".

Several other sets of criteria are put forward for assessing the credibility of qualitative research. Scott (1996) puts forward the traditional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Further criteria are applicability, consistency, neutrality and representative value. Guba and Lincoln (1989) attempted to translate quantitative concepts into qualitative, so, we have credibility instead of internal validity; transferability instead of external validity; dependability instead of reliability; confirmability instead of objectivity. Further criteria include fairness, authenticity and empowerment. Hammerley (1992) criticised much of the above and established a three-point plan to establish validity, namely, plausibility, coherence, and intention. The problem with all of these terms is trying to define them and construct some means of measuring them. Silverman (2001) simply calls for more use of quantitative concepts such as validity and reliability but also for more naturally-occurring data. He is sceptical of the "interview society" and suggests two basic questions; have the researchers demonstrated why we should believe them; and, has the research problem or question got any theoretical and/or practical significance?

There is a need to develop the credibility of qualitative research. Gaskell and Bauer (2000:349) also call for;

a *collective commitment to elaborate such criteria... otherwise qualitative research will be condemned…to the backwater.*

and go on to talk about confidence criteria (triangulation and reflexiveness, transparency and procedural clarity), and relevance criteria (local surprise, communicative validation). Silverman (2001:1) complains that qualitative research is often regarded as "soft science or journalism" whilst the "gold standard" of research is still quantitative.   The interpretivist challenge to positivism and quantitative research may just be a 'blip'. However qualitative research has no underlying doctrine although there are several candidates such as; postmodernism, feminism, interactionism and ethnomethodology.

The general theme of the credibility of qualitative research is taken up by several authorities.   Bauer and Gaskell (2000) take a social constructivist analysis of qualitative research and recognise the need for explicit criteria for what constitutes good practice.   They reject 'knowing quality when you see it' and bureaucratic approaches to criteria achievement.   They identify options for achieving quality as; the application of quantitative criteria, the rejection of quantitative criteria, the support of new qualitative criteria (such as fidelity and persuasiveness), and the finding of a 'functional equivalence' to quantitative approaches.   These authors propose two broad categories; of confidence measures (triangulation, transparency, procedural clarity) and relevance measures (compliance and non-compliance, interviewee-verified reports).   Other criteria that count as both confidence and relevance measures are 'corpus construction' (to do with sampling) and 'thick description' (to do with verbatim reports);

> *which should avoid the careful selection and editing of sound-bites*
> *judged to support the writers prejudices*

(Gaskell and Bauer 2000:347).

Silverman (2001:222) argues that quantitative criteria can in fact be addressed in qualitative research. Reliability can be achieved by 'low-inference descriptors' by eg recording detailed observations rather than just constructing what people say – standardised methods of recording field notes and transcripts are possible. Validity can be achieved by 'analytic induction' by eg the constant comparative method ie by finding another case to test out method, or by deviant case analysis.

5.5 The Case Study

Yin (2003:137) sets out four broad principles that should underlie all social science research: use all the evidence; use all major rival interpretations; include the most significant aspects of the case; include your own prior expert knowledge. The last point is useful legitimacy for the insider participant observer.

Yin provides extensive support for the case study and advice on how to do them. They are preferred when 'how' and 'why' questions arise and can be used for more than just exploratory research. They can be used for descriptive or explanatory research as well though their use remains challenging (Ibid: 1). Their "unique strength" (Ibid: 7) is in their ability to deal with a variety of evidence. A case study is defined as (Ibid: 13) an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly defined. Yin notes the traditional objections; that they lack rigour, that they are sloppy with no systematic procedures, are biased, and that they offer little grounds for generalisation. But Yin goes on (Ibid: 10) to make the important point that they,

> *are generalisable to theoretical propositions, not to populations or universe.*

> (Yin 2003:10)

> *In analytic generalisation the investigator is striving to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory*

> (Ibid: 37).

A basic point to consider is the selection of the case in the first place. Yin (1993) argues that the selection criteria could be criticality to theory, or topical relevance, or feasibility. Related to this is the key issue of whether we do a single-case study or a multiple-case study. Yin prefers multiple-case studies but a single-case is appropriate where a critical case is testing a well-formulated theory, or when a single case represents an extreme or unique case, then it can represent a significant

contribution to knowledge. The next decision is whether to go for a holistic design (a single unit of analysis) or an embedded design (multiple units of analysis).

Yin shows that a key stage is the definition of the unit of analysis (1993:10). He talks about 'embedded units of analysis' within larger categories and favours the use of theory. In a descriptive case the units of analysis can be chosen for comparison purposes, looking for contrasting scenarios. Explanatory theory is about causal relations while descriptive theory is about scope and the depth of the case being described. Key questions include where to start and stop; and what to include and leave out. The criteria used to decide these things represent the theory. It needs to be stated at the beginning; it has to be kept under review and has to be used to 'design' the case study. Causal cases can be dealt with through exploratory theories such as social interaction theory. Though Yin further argues that

> *the most compelling designs are those attempting to test rival … theories" (Ibid: 32)… I have found no concept more helpful in conducting research than the concept of rival theories* (Ibid: 60).

The main aim of case study research design is to avoid a situation where the evidence does not address the initial questions (Ibid: 20). The research design needs a preliminary theory and it needs to embody a theory of what is being studied. This is not a grand theory but "the simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint for your study" (Ibid: 28). Yin argues that "a fatal flaw is to conceive of statistical generalisation as the method of generalisability" (Ibid: 32). In fact the main point is to do analytic research. In this respect positivist, scientific criteria can be achieved by the case study (Yin 2003:34). Construct validity can be achieved through multiple sources of evidence; internal validity through addressing rival explanations, explanation-building, and pattern matching; external validity through the use of theory and replication logic in multiple case studies; reliability through using a case study protocol and developing a case study database. Yin accepts that construct validity is a real problem in case study research, one way round this is to define carefully key terms so that a case study for example on change would need a specification as to what a change is.

Yin favours the use of a variety of research methods. The approach might be termed 'policy scholarship' as outlined by Grace (1995:69) who defines it as,

> *attempts to make a conjunction of history, culture and social-political analysis with the specifics of fieldwork, empirical data and personal accounts from participants in the research process.*

Policy scholarship insists that problems can only be understood within the complexity of relations. The alternative 'policy science' view is uninterested in history or cultural antecedents and excludes political ideology and value issues (Ibid: 3). Halpin and Troyna (1994:3) noted an increase in policy scholarship following the 1988 Education Act and noted its use of social science interpretations as distinct from the abstract empiricism of 'policy scientists'.

The situating of educational research in the context of organisational culture and ideological struggles leads on to what Trowler (1998:158) also called 'policy scholarship'. He warns against 'policy science traps' and instead goes for policy scholarship because it "holds the promise of an improved understanding of social reality in universities as organisations". The policy scholarship approach was also favoured by Grace (1995) though other writers like Ball and Ozga favour instead an 'education policy scholarship'.

Despite Tight's (2003) scepticism about the case study as a research methodology, there is a lot of support for its use. Gaither (1999:147) argues;

> *the in-depth investigation of a single case still remains the best means for investigating and revealing the wholeness of the system and the various processes in action.*

Similarly Gomm et al (2000) shows the popularity of the case study. They can be authentic and authoritative in terms of "capturing the unique character" of something. Yin accepts that the case study is "stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science methods" but is still used extensively (Yin 2003: xiii).

Yin advises the use of a case study protocol due to the absence of routine formulas (Ibid: 68) as a major way of increasing reliability. The protocol should include an

overview of the project, the objectives, the case study issues, related readings, field procedures, case study questions, and the guide for the case study report.

Tight defines a methodology as a philosophical approach to an approach or a paradigm that underlines the research. A method is a tool or a technique. Unlike Yin he does not regard case study as a separate research method in itself. He argues that most research in HE is case study and that therefore it is so widespread that it is not itself a useful categorisation device. (Tight 2003:187). He argues that it is too generic and too widely used.

On interviewing, Yin (2003: 58) specifies the "desired skills" of the interviewer which are to ask good questions, be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and be unbiased by preconceived notions. A central research method in the UHI case is the interview. Generally, interview data is more easily gathered than analysed. Gilham (2000:8) comments that if the interviewer can achieve "expert openness" and becomes a "confident listener" we "may be surprised at the richness of what emerges, expressed in a way that commands attention". The use of prompts and probes will ensure that "the dynamic character of interviewing can be its most fascinating aspect, leading to genuine discovery" (Ibid: 52). Gaskell (2000:39) is another proponent who talks of the "fine-textured understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations in relation to behaviour of people in particular social contexts", this enables us to, "accumulate insight". On interviews Taylor (2002) advises researchers to look out for 'unvoiced assumptions' and 'glorifying' words such as quest, struggle etc. An interesting issue arises for the participant, insider interviewer. Allan describes being an "absent presence" in her approach to a piece of research involving an insider perspective (2003:293).

De Cock (2001) talked about his "research intervention" in which he conducted interviews at various levels of the hierarchy. De Cock gives no information about the details of the conduct of the interviews and he used no deviant cases. He admits to "severe editing" and refers to "interventions not discoveries". The initial impression of this research is one of sophisticated and comprehensive research but it turns out to be lacking in basic information. In another case Hellawell and Hancock

(2001) use an "opportunity sample" in their research and comment on "clusters of questions" though they report on "feelings" most of the time.

Weil (1994:155) in her research admits to "creative engagements" and talks about stories leading to 'agency and communion' though it is not clear what this means. In her approach to personal stories she admits that her claims are not those of a neutral observer. She does identify categories such as 'agency and communion' but these are vague. She claims to "delve deeper" to make sense of "intricacies and meanings" though she also makes assumptions eg that "making it work" can be made possible by understanding the "passion and perspiration" of the people. The conceptualising of the interviewer is crucial to the whole process. Weil gives very limited details on the conduct of the interviews even though she talks about "structured listening governed by strict rules".

A further method is documentation. Scott (1996) emphasises the need to learn how to 'read' policy documents which are seen as being constructed and positioned within particular discourses. Professionals need "educational literacy". Coffey (1999;4) calls for a "sixth moment", coming after the postmodernist "fifth moment" , which is characterised by "experiential texts that are messy, subjective, open-ended, conflictual". Bauer and Aarts (2000:30) propose pulling together all text including interview transcripts into a "corpus construction" in which the text includes annual reports, this offering the best opportunity to triangulate interview findings. Silverman (2000:151) strongly advocates using textual data. We "make too little use of the potentialities of text as rich data". He acknowledges the constructivist and ethno-methodological use of naturally occurring data.

This data collection issue is described by Yin (2003:83) who identifies six case study sources; documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. He sets out three principles of data collection; the use of multiple sources of evidence; the use of triangulation and the convergence of evidence; and the creation of a case study databox which markedly increases reliability.

> *The lack of a formal database for most case study efforts is a major shortcoming of case study research and needs to be corrected…and the maintenance of a chain of evidence showing the derivation of evidence and the tracing of steps citing the data base.*

<div align="center">(Ibid: 102)</div>

Yin (2003:110) agrees that data analysis is the "least developed and most difficult" part of case study research and recommends the work of Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggest there are no formulas here, only rigorous thinking, sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations. Miles and Huberman propose a matrix of categories, creating data displays, and tabulating the frequency of different events. This requires an analytical strategy with strands: relying on theoretical propositions which is the preferred option with the theory indicating causal relations; how and why questions, this being potentially extremely useful in case studies; thinking about rival explanations; developing a case description, the least preferable but useful if the other two can't work.

The next major issue to consider is data analysis. Arksey and Knight (1999) note "considerable problems with data management and analysis". The standardisation of interview questions and conduct is essential to later analysis. "Sprawling" interviews should be avoided. Silverman (2000:40) also takes the view that everything depends on analysis. Interview data do not speak for themselves and have to be rigorously and critically analysed to separate "fact from fancy". It is possible for analysis to be realistic, journalistic/confessional, or narrative. The latter looks at how people construct cultural stories and make 'frames of reference'. A major criticism of interview data analysis is anecdotalism and the use of "authoritarian rhetoric" (Schostak 2002:165). The analysis process involves some kind of coding and categorisation. The coding involves the identification of a corpus of texts, identification of the basic unit of analysis, selection of appropriate themes eg actions, assumptions, repetitions, conflicting interests, and might also look for contradictions and meanings.

5.6   The Research Design

The basic approach in this case study and the source text is R K Yin (2003) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods.* In this section I will note the criteria and characteristics of the case study as a method and respond (in italics) to indicate how I have approached my research study.

The case study is the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are posed and when the focus is on contemporary phenomena within some real-life context. (Yin 2003:1) Although very challenging it allows investigators to retain the "holistic and meaningful characteristics" of real life situations. It does not have to be exploratory; a case study can also be explanatory or descriptive (Ibid: 6)

The case study in my case is a programme team within the UHI Millennium Institute. It is a real life situation and one of the most important developments in Scottish education in recent times. Previously, degrees were validated by OUVS. The study is largely descriptive and the research questions are:

1. *Using the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime', what are the cultural characteristics of a programme team which has delivered an undergraduate degree for the past 11 years in the UHI Millennium Institute?*

2. *how has this programme team responded to the UHI teaching and learning policy?*

3. *what are the implications of this case study for Trowler's sociocultural theory as elaborated by social practice theory and the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime?*

The study will also consider future research potential pertinent to this case study including the question 'what have been the barriers to the implementation of the UHI teaching and learning policy'?

The key to the case study is defining the research question which has to have both substance (what is it about) and form (who, what, how) (Ibid: 7)

The case is about workgroups working on policy implementation in UHI with a focus on teaching and learning policy. In order to understand the operation of the programme team, we need to understand its culture. The culture is defined in terms of the 'teaching and learning regime'. The study is about the operation and role of a programme team in designing and delivering courses in the UHI context but specifically in the implementation of teaching and learning policy. It focuses the characteristics of the team and on whether policy is changed in the process of implementation. It is a single-case analysis. This team however operates out of three of the UHI partner colleges.

The two features of the case study that make it different from the study of history are
- direct observation of the events being studied
- interviews of persons involved

I have observed the development of UHI since my first involvement which was in March 1998. I became programme leader for the BA Social Sciences programme soon after and have been leader for the last 10 academic sessions. I handed on the leadership to a colleague in February 2009. I was a direct participant in the major events in the history of the course. The landmark events that can be noted here are:

a) The validation of the BA Social Sciences (BASS) programme by OUVS in the summer of 1998. It was a general three-year and interdisciplinary degree modelled on the Garrick Report.

b) The QAA Subject Review (Sociology) in the 2002-03 session

c) The decision to delay the introduction of an honours level in March 2003

d) The decision to replace the first year of the degree with an HNC and to adopt an HNC-plus BA2 and BA3 model in March 2003

e) The re-validation of the programme in May 2003 with modification to make the programme more discipline-based

f) The adoption of a programme teaching and learning strategy to be incorporated into the programme in 2006 which adopted a blended learning approach with the team's own 'blend'.

g) The re-validation of the programme with honours in March 2006, the honours year being delivered as from September 2007

h) The piloting by Grant College of an online HNC in 2009 to students living in more remote parts of the region

I also served as part-time Dean of Faculty from 1999-2003 and as Subject Network Leader since 2003. The subject network is an embryonic department of academics from a number of degree teams across the partner colleges – across the network. I have also had a more peripheral role in a number of other UHI programme teams such as Culture Studies, Scottish History and Child and Youth Studies. The BA Social Sciences team has been fairly stable though with some newer members.

Twelve interviews took place, with the first one being a pilot. Changes were made as a result of that. There was a male/female gender balance of 6/6 and the interviewees came from across the three participating colleges with one external, though ex-member of the team. Two earlier interviews with senior managers were also used.

The "unique strength" of the case study is the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence (Ibid: 8)

I have access to a comprehensive set of documents stretching back over 10 years – annual course reports, external validation reports, external examiner reports, QAA and other review reports, external examiner reports, course committee minutes, internal UHI documents, records of programme leaders forums etc. The interview questions and data analysis were inevitably informed by my own observation over the years. This sensitised me to particular points

made by interviewees and to 'reading between the lines' of the documents.

The Literature review enables us to develop more insightful questions (Ibid: 8)

The literature I have looked at is to do with the role of the 'meso level' in policy making and in the tensions between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' influences in the policy implementation process. The work of Trowler and his colleagues suggests that academics at the meso or departmental level can adapt policy and indeed make it through responses to implementation. The UHI case presents a particular organisation form – essentially a network partnership across a geographically disadvantaged region. This creates particular teaching and learning strategy issues – how to deliver a curriculum to a large but sparsely populated region. Trowler and others have argued in favour of research at the meso level and have developed the idea of 'teaching and learning regimes' to describe the culture of programme teams. This literature raises questions about the scope for policy initiatives from this level. It also reveals the significance of the meso-level of analysis and points to the lack of research in this field. Wider contextual material was also reviewed including regional, national, professional and FE/HE materials.

The traditional complaints (Ibid: 10) about the case study are:

1. lack of rigour – they are sloppy with no systematic procedures and are prone to bias

2. there is little basis for generalisation (in science this comes from replication)

3. the case study is generalisable to theoretical propositions, not to populations – the aim of case study is to generalise to theories (analytical generalisation) not statistical generalisation – the case study does not have to be wordy.

My study is based on Trowler's theoretical propositions and will apply them in the peculiar UHI case. It is a case that makes possible theoretical generalisation. This generalisation could be to other UHI programme teams, or to other network or partnership situations. There is no attempt at statistical generalisation and none is intended although the numbers of interviewees making particular points is noted. Procedures in terms of interview questions and data analysis will follow the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994) for the recording of data in matrix formats.

The analysis as presented in the findings chapters includes comments indicating the range of responses given. There is no attempt to select sound-bites that support some particular point of view. The collecting of both documentary and interview data was systematic and followed a standard procedure throughout. There were no changes of tact during the process of research.

A case study (Ibid: 13) is an empirical enquiry;

1.   that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when,

2.   in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident.

It relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. It benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

This case is certainly a real-life context and one of considerable significance. For UHI to achieve its mission and to operate effectively and efficiently it has to find ways to make dispersed teams work successfully over a geographically challenged area. Triangulation will be achieved through linkages between documentary evidence and interview data. My own observations helped to inform some of the follow-up questions in the semi-structured interviews. The relationship between the phenomenon

(the programme team), and the context (the UHI project), is at the heart of the idea of multiple cultural configuration. The findings of interviews can be analysed by using the eight 'moments' of culture set out by Trowler and Cooper (2002) and the former's typology of academic responses to change. Triangulation is possible through the use of interviews reflecting on events which can also be studied from the point of view of the documentation which takes a variety of both internal and external forms.

On research design the data needs to link with the research questions (Ibid: 20) – but "unfortunately case study research design has not being codified".

The design is based on qualitative research practice and on recent guidance offered by the main theorists used to influence this study. The literature clearly directed the interview questions and the analysis of both types of data and these are clearly linked to the research questions.

The key components of research design are (Ibid: 21):

1.   the questions

2.   the propositions of the case study – a proposition directs attention to something that should be examined – eg if organisations collaborate because of mutual benefit we would look for such examples. This tells us where to start looking for unit(s) of analysis.   The unit depends on the research questions, the individual, group or thing to be considered, inclusions and exclusions will be decided with reference to literature

3.   logical linking of data to propositions

4.   criteria for interpreting findings

1.   The questions are about the cultural character of a programme team defined as a teaching and learning regime, the opportunities to adapt, domesticate or 're- construct' policy, about constraints on teams, and barriers to teaching and learning across the network

2.   The propositions come from Trowler and focus attention on reactions to the teaching and learning policy/strategy in terms of 'reconstructing' policy. This means looking at examples of re-professionalisation, examples of adjusting learning and teaching, examples of decisions making, categories of activity where there is scope for team decision making and categories where there is not.

3.   The unit of analysis is the programme team, in this case a single team to allow a 'thick description' or 'close-up' study

4.   A matrix approach as per Miles and Huberman was used to extract findings of significance to the points noted below in point 5 to the volumes of interview transcription and documentation.

5.   The criteria used to interpret the findings are the eight 'moments' developed by Trowler and Cooper (2002) to define the cultural characteristics of a 'teaching and learning regime' alongside the four categories developed as part of the typology of responses by academics to changes in their institutions developed by Trowler (1998).

Yin argues (Ibid; 28) that a case study needs a preliminary theory – this separates the case study from other research methods such as ethnography or grounded theory. The "simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint for your study…theory developed prior to the collection of any case study data is an essential step in doing case studies". Generalisation from a case study is about theory, "analytic generalisation", attempts to achieve statistical generalisation is a "fatal flaw".

Trowler's propositions, based on sociocultural theory, and specifically social practice theory have been elaborated in the idea of the 'teaching and learning

regime' idea which provides the theoretical base for the case study. Social practice theory is also the basis of the typology of responses to change.

We have to address the criteria for judging the quality of research designs. Yin (Ibid: 34) offers tactics for dealing with four tests of judgement;

1. construct validity is a real problem in case studies. The case study approach to this is achieved by using multiple sources of evidence. For example a study on change needs some way of operationalising events that constitute 'change'. The case study can address this by:
    -   selecting the types of change to be studied
    -   show that measures of change reflect the types of change

    My study uses multiple sources of evidence which I can readily access. Slightly more difficult is the operationalisation of the concepts being studied – what will represent an example of re-construction? What will represent an example of re-professionalisation? The Trowler typology and eight components of teaching and learning regimes will assist in this process.

2. internal validity can be addressed by looking at rival explanations or alternative perspectives. It is to do with establishing causal relationships which achieves explanatory analysis.

    My case is probably more descriptive though the data analysis does note alternative interpretations of phenomena. .

3. external validity can be addressed by the use of theory in single-case studies, establishing what a study's findings can be generalised to. External validity has been a major barrier to doing case studies but this is unfair because of comparisons with the survey method – it is not about statistics but about generalising results to a broader theory, a "replication logic" allows cumulative knowledge.

    The single case study will be theoretically based.

4.   reliability can be addressed by the use of a study protocol which is about developing a case study data base – (data collection) – demonstrating that the operation of the study can be repeated with the same results. On reliability the key is to document research procedures and to make as many steps as possible clear.

I have worked up a de facto protocol in that all of the documents used in this study can be accessed. The eleven main interviews have been transcribed and interviewees given copies of the transcripts and invited to make comments.   I would propose to use a footnote system when referring to these in the findings chapter dealing with an analysis of the documentary evidence.

Yin (Ibid: 40) distinguishes between single-case and multiple-case studies. Although he prefers multiple cases (Ibid: 53) single-case studies are appropriate in certain circumstances such as the UHI course team where there is a longitudinal dimension. The programme team as a unit of analysis allows for a future embedded design in other programme teams.

Case study researcher skills include asking good questions, being a good listener, being adaptive and flexible, having a firm grasp of the issues being studied, being unbiased by preconceived notions.

The case study approach appeals to me since my experience over the years has been in this line. I have done a lot of interviews and have completed documentary analyses. The documentation studied in this case comprises course committee minutes, exam board minutes, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, UHI event records, occasional memos and letters. The 'documentation findings' chapter makes about 260 specific references to documentary sources.

Yin (Ibid: 68) calls for a case study protocol which he sees as essential for a multiple case though less so for the single case. The protocol has the following sections:

- an overview of project, objectives, case study issues, relevant readings
- field procedures – credentials, access, major tasks in collecting data
- case study questions (Ibid: 74) – questions to specific individuals, questions for individual cases, questions to all, normative questions,
- guide for the report

All of these features are outlined elsewhere except perhaps the 'field procedures' section. I was able to study all the documentation which is stored chronologically. Having been a participant in the events I have been able to 'read' the documents and interpret them with more insight than would be the case for a non-participant.

The "least developed and most difficult" part of case study research is analysis (Ibid: 110). "Much depends on the investigator's own style of rigorous thinking, along with the sufficient pressure of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations".

Yin recommends Miles and Huberman which I have used. This is where the use of the eight components of cultural configuration and the typology appears to be a good solution.. The findings chapters in this study present the whole range of views expressed and illuminated in the documentation and so I have considered alternative explanations. I propose to ask the research questions of the documentation, use them to guide the interview schedule, note points relevant to the questions and propositions involved. The analysis involved identifying items in the documentation which pertained to each of the eight moments and the four typology responses and presenting these in consolidated papers which then made an overview of each category possible. This was a fairly lengthy manual process.

Yin (Ibid: 137) notes four principles which underlie all good social science research;

1. attend to all the evidence
   I have been careful not to pick out only supporting evidence and have quantified the number of times particular issues arise in the documentation

2. attend to all rival interpretations

Individualistic responses in the interview data are noted and presented in the findings.

3.   attend to the most significant aspects of the case
        The study has focused on major episodes in the history of the BASS course.

4.   attend to your own prior knowledge.
        I wrote a reflective statement as part of my own sensitisation to the history of the BASS course team. This helped to inform the questions and the analysis. I have included this as Appendix 3. I did not make direct use of this in this thesis but it inevitably coloured my questions and interpretations.

5.7   The Research Design – summary

The study makes use of documentation and semi-structured interviews. The documentation was studied in the summer of 2008 and comprised all of the following relating to the BA Social Sciences course team from 1998 to the 2007-08 session:

BA Social Sciences course committee minutes

Examination Board minutes

Annual Monitoring Reports

Academic Partner college sub-committee minutes

External Examiner reports

Minutes and records from special meetings

QAA subject review report

Validation panel reports

Occasional minutes and records of other UHI meetings and events

There were 12 interviews. There were six men and six women. There were also two earlier interviews with senior staff. One interview was a pilot and was used to test the questions.   The pilot interviewee was asked to comment on the interview schedule after the interview and a number of changes were made to the questions and to the pre-interview briefing. The content of this interview was not used in the data analysis except to note one point, that the interviewee thought that the Trowler model needed to be more fluid than the 'four boxes' seemed to allow. The other interviews

involved 6 from one college and two interviews from each of the other two colleges plus one external, an interviewee who had been a team member in the past. The interviews lasted about 50-55 minutes each. They were recorded and transcribed and the transcriptions analysed according to a Miles and Huberman matrix. The interviews took place between November 2009 and March 2010. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The use of both interviews and documentation provided a triangulation opportunity. They also complemented each other when certain 'moments' were more likely to emerge out of discussion rather than text, the 'tacit assumption' moment for example.

The Interview Schedule

The questions were based on a study of the eight moments and the four categories used in the Trowler typology. The literature on these subjects was reviewed and the questions were designed to encourage reflection that would pertain to each of the eight moments. Some questions were based more simply on the four responses in the typology. The questions covered all of the moments although some had more questions than others. The questions allowed all of the eight moments and four typology responses to be addressed. All of the interviews included some follow-up to interesting responses though it was not always the same questions that produced this interest on my part. The 12 interviews therefore, whilst they covered all of the questions, did not do so always in the same order and the following up was on a range of issues depending what seemed to be of particular significance to the interviewee. The interview schedule is available as Appendix 1.

The Documentation

This was reviewed in the summer of 2008. All of the documents were reviewed chronologically. The fundamental device that made this possible was the annual 'course folder' which is a large ring-binder containing all documents relating to the course in more or less chronological order. There were ten of these covering the academic sessions from 1998-99 to 2007-08, though the final one was not complete at the time of the data collection in the summer of 2008. These folders were in good order and all were readily available. All points appearing to relate to any of the

moments or four typology categories were noted, usually verbatim with a note of the date and type of document. This generated a large volume of data.

The Data Analysis

Two sets of analysis took place, one relating to the documentation and one for the interviews. Key points from documents and interview transcripts were identified and noted on A5 paper. For the documents, the moments and categories were used as organising devices. For the interviews the organising devices were the interview questions. In this way a thematic approach was achieved which made it possible to extract from the whole set of documents information relating to each moment and category separately. Information from the interviews was extracted relating to each schedule question. Patterns were then sought under each heading. The Discussion chapter will 'pull together' the main points of interest from the eight moments and the four categories, directly from the documentation analysis, and indirectly via the relevant interview questions for the interview data.

The moments and categories in the documentation relate to the interview questions as follows:

Theme	Relevant interview Question
Codes of signification	Q2, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q11, Q12
Discursive repertoires	Q2
Recurrent practices	Q9, Q10, Q13, Q17
Identities in interaction	Q6 Q14
Power	Q15 Q20
Implicit theories	Q8
Rules of appropriateness	Q4 Q5 Q10
Tacit Assumptions	Q16 Q20
Typology of responses	Q21 Q22

Some questions covered more than one moment and some moments got more questions than others, this reflecting the significance of the moment and its centrality to the concept of the regime.

5.8   Reflections

1.   The documentation studied covered the period from 1998-2008 while the interviews took place after that.   When asked about critical incidents or examples some responses referred to issues that took place after 2008. There was therefore not a complete overlap in time.

2.   It may be argued that since social practice theory was used and that this focuses on work groups, that group interviews rather than individual interviews should have been used. However Trowler's typology allows for an *individual* academic's response to change as well as collective ones. It was thought that interviewees would be more open and more genuinely reflective in individual interviews since some questions asked them to reflect on the team. A single group interview could only have been done using video-conference which it was felt would inhibit the transparency of the discussion. There would also be less scope to explore follow-up questions or to let the interview take a natural discursive course.

3.   Some of the moments lent themselves to discussion rather than text, for example, tacit assumptions.   The interviews compensated for issues which were sparse in the documentation.

4.   Clegg (2002:806) notes that insider researchers face the problem of sharing the 'taken-for-grantedness' of the situation and therefore not seeing phenomena of interest to the researcher. Bourdieu (1990) notes the epistemological problem for the insider separating out practical and scholarly knowledge – being able to 'break out' from the insider experience.

5.   On the other hand there is the chance for the insider to really understand the "undergrowth" of the organisation and to achieve the "thick description" of the case (Pritchard et al 2003: xv)

6.   My study might constitute what Alvesson calls a 'self-ethnography'. (2003:174). Self ethnography is where the researcher has "natural access" and is an active participant in the "home base" setting being studied.   The researcher is able to use experience, knowledge and access to get useful

material and to guide questioning of interviewees. The self-ethnographer is able to "draw attention to one's own cultural context" (Ibid: 175). Nevertheless the purpose of the research is to do a "cultural analysis and not an introspection".

7. There is no doubt that analysis of qualitative data is difficult. The 12 interviews produced somewhere in the order of 55,000 words of data. The documentary data collection also produced a substantial amount of data. Matrices were very useful in sifting through this material for the selection of material that seemed to offer particular insight into each of 12 categories – the 8 moments and 4 typology responses. The Miles and Huberman matrix approach worked up on a whole set of A3 papers made it possible to achieve a coherent approach to the analysis process.

8. The study provides a contribution to knowledge through the application of theory to a case which then provides not only a chance to test and perhaps develop the theory, but an opportunity for analytical or theoretical generalisation. This study will be of interest to practitioners working on the implementation of teaching and learning policies in network situations, in partnerships, and in FE colleges working with HE institutions. It will also be of practical use to UHI which continues to work on its approach to blended learning through a new 2010 LTAS.

Chapter Six – Interview Findings

Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings of the interviews that took place as part of this study. There were 12 interviews in all, one was a pilot, six from Grant College, two each from Chisholm and Ferguson and one external interviewee who was previously a member of the course team. Each interview lasted approximately 55 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcripts were written. The data was then analysed by setting out responses in matrix format against the interview questions. References in the transcripts that pertained to each question were selected and entered on to a matrix. The main findings for each question are set out below. The transcripts varied from about 3500 to 7000 words per interview. Together there were some 55,000 words of data. The interviews were semi-structured so that although there was a list of 22 questions, there was scope for follow-up questions. The conduct of the interviews did not rigidly follow the order of the questions. The conversation was allowed to follow a 'natural' course although all the main questions were covered if not always in the same order. The interviewees were allocated a reference code such as A1, B2, E1 and so on, to ensure anonymity. Interviewees were assured of confidentiality and of the lack of any possible harm. The findings are set out for each question as summarised in the headings below. The interview schedule is available as Appendix 2. To emphasise direct quotations these are provided below in italics with longer statements set out as indented lines. The reference beside the longer quotes is to the interviewee who made the comment.

1.   **Personal Background**

   The twelve interviewees have a variety of personal and career backgrounds. Four of them had themselves been mature students and came into the teaching profession later in life. Four colleagues had experience as Open University tutors. Several interviewees had worked in other fields such as research psychiatry, social work, community education, social research, statutory agencies, nursing and school teaching. Three colleagues had previously worked in established universities.

2.   **Personal Academic Values**

   All of the interviewees except one were humanistic and liberal in their personal academic values. Several interviewees (B1 A4) favoured learning for the sake of it. Education is seen as a public good and a feature of a decent civilisation. They valued

equality, fairness and inclusion (A1). A3 wants to "*enfranchise people*". A6 used similar terms when saying that education should be for the "*fairly unenfranchised*". Education is a "*door opener*" and should be "*open to all without exception*" (A6). We should be;

> *trying to pull people into society rather than trying to keep people out*
> (A6).

There was a strong sense of the transformative value of education (A1). It is about changing lives (A2). A3 sees the college rather than UHI as "*a major agent of change*".

There is a strong sense of wanting to support the mature student. B1 "*feels strongly*" about the student experience but especially the mature student. A5 also spoke about the case for providing opportunity for the mature student especially in the Highlands and Islands region where geographical isolation is seen as an additional form of inequality.

> *It is about accessibility, without UHI people in the Highlands and Islands wouldn't have had a chance* (A5).

The sense of commitment to education of the members of the course team was noted by several interviewees. B2 said "*there is a huge sense of commitment among the staff*". A3 referred to this strong sense of commitment though saw this as a feature of the college rather than UHI as such. E1 noted this "*strong sense of commitment*" too.

E1 referred to the fact that UHI provided an opportunity to "*enable intellectual engagement*" in a geographical area to which the interviewee had moved having previously worked in one of Scotland's leading universities. Both B1 and C2 referred to UHI and the opportunity to work in it as an enticement to move to this region.

The one less positive view was not so much to challenge access and participation but to note some personal regret that "*massification*" had led to questions about quality and standards in Higher Education. Whereas several interviewees had themselves been

mature students, C1 had gone to a traditional university from school and wondered whether students today have the interest and commitment to their subject areas than in remembered student days. This was not so much a critical view about access as a question as to whether mass education should be seen as entirely positive.

3. Commitment to the Institution

Eight of the interviewees expressed strong support of UHI (B1 B2 A3 A6 A1 A4 A5 and E1) though A4 noted that UHI as an entity is not easy to identify with. Only one expressed any sense of disillusion about it (A2). Three interviewees noted tensions between academic partner colleges and UHI (B2 A2 C1) and one emphasised the continuing importance of Further Education (A3).

A1 commented about feeling '*passionate*' about UHI;

> *I believe the vision of UHI is a good thing.*

B1 "*absolutely believes in UHI*" and indeed it was because of the UHI dimension that the college job looked attractive enough to apply for. This interviewee also noted the similarities between the OU vision and that of UHI.

> *I believe passionately in that…there is so much wasted talent out there.*

A4 said "*I believe very strongly in the idea of UHI*". A5 talked about being "*passionate about it*". A5 was fully behind;

> *the idea of bringing education to a part of the world that was to a large extent ignored.*

For A4:
> *I believe very strongly in the idea of UHI….there is a great need for it, to cater for scattered populations.*

A certain pride in what the team does was evident. B1 "*feels strongly about the service we provide*" while B2 said "*we have worked incredibly hard to produce a really good product*".

There was a view that UHI is simply a mechanism to bring HE to the region and that the colleges are also identified with strongly. A3 had a stronger commitment to the college and saw UHI as just another dimension of the college. The college and "*what it has done for the local community*" is a stronger source of allegiance than UHI. A5 made a similar comment:

> *UHI is simply another mechanism for that (facilitation of knowledge) to happen but it still has a pivotal role to play.*

There were a number of other more complex responses to the question of commitment to the institution. Only one interviewee asked whether by 'institution' I meant the college or UHI and noted that it can be "*problematic*" to be committed to both college and UHI. B2 said it is "*difficult to disentangle the two, college and UHI*". E1 felt frustrations with the college which have ramifications for UHI, feeling that the college is not fit for purpose, "*the infrastructure is not there*". This interviewee also felt that the individual may have a commitment to the institution but it doesn't necessarily work the other way round. C1 said;

> *I often feel I serve two masters…and the college management doesn't always appreciate the broader audience*".

A2 said;
> *I have gone through different levels with this one* (feeling that there have been different stages) *but now losing faith with the whole UHI thing.*

The administrative complexities of the federal partnership model have clearly been an issue for some members of staff.

> *It is difficult to feel a strong emotional attachment to the rather elaborate machine of the UHI, but the idea motivates me quite strongly…it can be difficult to feel a sense of belonging* (A4).

4. **What do you most value about your involvement?**

The point most frequently made was that there have been benefits from being part of a wider academic team. Six interviewees referred to this. A typical comment was made by A5;

> *What I found great was having an expanded team and being able to talk to other practitioners from the same discipline.*

There was a lot of "*pragmatic stuff*" in dividing up the workload. C2 made the same point;

> *it widens the pool of people to work with, it opens up discussion.*

A3 said;

> *I like working with colleagues to shape things.*

A1 referred to "*being part of something bigger than myself*" and also mentioned the support received within the team having "*perhaps not been supported in other are*as". B1 liked the mix of subject areas in the Social Sciences team and felt that a team made up purely of one discipline would be "*ghastly*". B1 has been impressed by the team's concern for students, the big commitment and involvement with students. A2 talked about the "*sense of euphoria*" that accompanied the original validation of the BA in 1998 and "*a real sense of a team working towards a common goal*".

On the other hand A4 responded to this question by saying "*I could waffle a lot*" on this point and A3 brought in a different point that a career in a FE college is like a game of snakes and ladders, you go up and down the ladder according to periodic re-structuring of the management system.

5. **Are your personal values, the course team's values, and those of the institution, the same?**

There was no clear consensus on this question. Two interviewees (A5 A6) took the view that these values are aligned, with another two noting some alignment (A1 A4).

Four noted that there are tensions between the college and the UHI (B1 B2 E1 C1). Another four, (A3 A2 E1 C2) felt that there was little or no alignment. Only one (B1) asked for clarification about what I meant by 'institution', the academic partner college or the UHI.

B1 asked;

> *Which institution? Ferguson College or UHI? That is the elephant in the room always isn't it?*

This interviewee said;

> *I am very aware that there are two institutions…acutely aware that there is a UHI with a set of values, strategies and so on…and I am forced to confront every day that there is the college I work in. The two don't always coincide and the two do not always knit together neatly*

B2 talked about "*huge issues*" between the college and UHI. E1 noted a gap between the rhetoric and reality when it comes to the fulfilment of values;

> *The institutional culture is not conducive to my work.*

This interviewee went on to say;

> *The institution purports to have academic values but it is more rhetoric than reality, and to some extent things happen despite the institution. I have to say I didn't find the institutional culture particularly conducive to my work…working in that workroom was very stressful, it was energy sapping.*

On whether there is an alignment C2 said;

> *I am not convinced about that at all. I feel we are trying to do too much both FE and HE; there is a big tension there, quite frustrating at times.*

A3 said;

> *my values and the course team are the same. But there are great tensions with the institution (ie UHI)…there are conflicting pressures.*

A3 also felt that the college does not espouse the values contained in the mission statement. Another perception on this came from A5.

> *I think they are aligned…we have all grown together including UHI. I think we have all learned and developed along the same lines*

A6 sounded less convinced, "*I would imagine at some level they are*". A1 felt there was alignment "*to some degree*".

6. Which aspects of UHI do you identify with?

This question produced a range of views with little consensus. Two interviewees (A2 C1) identified mostly with the course team. Two interviewees (B1 C2) identified mostly with UHI. Each of the following attracted the identification of one interviewee each; the college (A6), both college and UHI equally (E1), and the HE product rather than the institution (A5); there were two other more unique views and one was not sure.

A2 identified mainly with the course team on a day to day basis. C1 put forward a fairly complex perspective but seemed to identify principally with the team:

> *It is complex; it is multi-layered; it has a type of vertical integration and a type of horizontal integration at the same time. I feel quite lot of commitment not just here at Chisholm College but to my colleagues at Ferguson and Grant. And yet it is at that networked degree team where also some of the tensions are on delivery of the*

programme as well. My colleagues are all in the same boat, but there
are tensions too. UHI EO is rather abstract and remote

B1 took a very positive view about UHI.

I say I work at UHI based at Ferguson. I am proud of working for
UHI and I think it is more interesting.

E1 took the view that identity is split;

it is kind of split, UHI mainly. There are different levels of identity at
work. I have to be very political, the college has its own relationship
with UHI.

A6 identified very much with the partner college;

I still don't feel any real connection with UHI as an entity; it is very
much bits and pieces of it.

A2 took a highly pragmatic view, seeing a hierarchy of, from the top, the students, the
course team, the college, UHI,

It is the students that keep me in a job, not a commitment to the college

A5 took the view that what matters is the HE opportunity in the region. The main thing
is the delivery of HE in the region and that we give students a choice. The system or
the institution as such is not the issue, it is the fact that it can happen. UHI means;

we can pool our resources to deliver to the region.

A6 identified very much with the partner college rather than UHI;

I still don't feel any real connection with UHI as an entity.

C2's view was influenced by doing mainly UHI work but also being on the college Board of Management which;

> *brings me back to earth…a different set of realities.*

These realities were discussed by A4 who said that the idea of some 13 academic partners made it difficult to see UHI as a unitary entity.

> *UHI functions in a rather remote way…it is perhaps unaware of the pressures going on within the academic partners…there are also tensions between the partners.*

This view was also taken by A2.

> *sometimes UHI itself can seem a bit anonymous. It is difficult to know who is who sometimes. UHI is a nebulous state*

A3 talked about being "*back down*" at the operational level after moving out of a more managerial role.

7. **On status differences within the institution.**

A variety of responses were again made on this question. The main themes to emerge were:

- there is a 'them and us' relationship between partner college and UHI – A1 A3 A6 B1

- Research gets top status – A4 and E1

- the course team is or should get the most status – A2

- UHI is too remote – B1

- there are no status differences other than the 'them and us' point – A3

- there are distinctions between FE and HE – A2 C2

- there are confidence issues rather than status differences – A3 A5

- there are divisions within and between partners – B2

- there are differences between subject areas – C1 E1

A1 talked about having a "*sense of distance*" from UHI. The daily work experience is one of a teamwork ethic. This interviewee also used the term "*hierarchical*" to describe the partner college. A3 felt that some people perceived a *'them and us'* culture between the colleges and UHI. B1 saw UHI Executive Office as "*remote*" and thought it simply "*issues edicts*". This view was also made by A6,

> *There is a distinct gap between us and them, the people at UHI who*
> *are administrators.*

B1 talked about the response inside the academic partners towards UHI. A "*filtering*" process goes on in the college where "*a lot gets filtered out* ". College management are considered not to appreciate the fact that UHI policies and strategies exist.

> *it filters down though it doesn't – it doesn't filter…there is a lot that's*
> *blocked or is filtered out…I have to say there are people in this*
> *college and probably in all the other colleges who are quite hostile to*
> *UHI…there is still a them and us culture*

B2 referred to this issue with more of a focus on the relations between the academic partners;

> *I think within and between the academic partners there is a them and*
> *us divide. Academic partner managers don't think about UHI. There*
> *is a within and between huge problem. But this big divide is not at*
> *the individual level*

B2 felt that;

> *in many ways networking has been good for the networkers.*

Individuals have benefited from a pooling of staff resources but managers are "*more self-interested*" or more "*partner college-interested"*.

A4 felt that those academic partners with a research focus had a clear status advantage within the UHI network. E1 took a similar view though talked about the importance of research informing teaching.

A2 focused on the FE and HE distinction.

> *I think there is a perceived difference, working in both FE and HE. I think there is a perceived difference in the college…if you are working on a degree programme, you need more time. (When working on a degree programme) I felt we should be treated differently …I moaned that that we weren't being given more time because of the culture of the college and we were still allocated the same teaching time as somebody doing practical subjects.*

C2 made a similar point, that some people in the colleges are sceptical of UHI.

> *some feel resource has been diverted from FE.*

A3 and A5 took a different approach to this question. A3 felt there are no status divisions but the key to perceptions in this area is self-confidence. Some people don't really know UHI, they find it "*strange*" whereas it is harder to "*pull the wool over the eyes*" of more experienced staff. A5 also spoke about the confidence or lack of it in different teams. A5 also made an important observation, that UHI Deans, Subject Network Leaders and Programme Leaders do not get much status among the colleges;

> *They are not seen as being important. They are an afterthought. This is obviously part of the whole culture*

8. **What do you understand the UHI teaching and learning policy to be?**

This is one question where there was a fairly clear consensus from the interviewees. Five interviewees responded to this question by saying in effect they had no idea (A1 B2 A3 C1 C2) while another five said they were unsure or 'mystified' (A4 E1 A6 A2 A5). Two were able to talk about 'blended learning' and the '7-stage model' of

blended learning (B1 B2). A5 talked about it in more detail but noted its main use, to be rolled out for validation events and not much else. No one was able to point to a policy or strategy document but they all had some sense of what it was broadly about.

The immediate response of interviewees to this question was interesting. These included the following:

A4   *"I am sometimes mystified by this"*

B2   *"My understanding of the policy is, nobody understands the policy"*

A3   *"I wouldn't be able to, I simply wouldn't be able to, I have no idea"*

A6   *"Not clear, seems down to the individual colleges"*

A2   *"not sure"*

A5   *"I think it is one of the problems, too much out there and not embedded in course teams, people only dip into it"*

C1   *"My immediate response is 'what is the learning and teaching policy'"?*

C2   *"You've got me there…I'm not up to speed on that"*

E1   *"it evolved, it did not come from the top"*

A1   not able to say

Most interviewees were however able to go on to discuss the realities of the blended learning approach though they were not able to point to familiar and much-used documents.

B1 thought it was about the '*7-stages*', (a reference to an internal paper which proposed a 7-stage continuum from traditional classroom–teaching to entirely online delivery), student-centredness and then talked about blended learning;

> I *think it is important that we have debates about this*

A4 was able to talk about the use of a lot of jargon, and noted;

> *blended learning comes to the fore a great deal.*

B2 felt that;

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> *the problem is that the policy has never been set out.*

And went on to suggest that the 7-stage model has been important but has generated the perception that we should all be going for the fully online model, which is stage 7;

> *I think the 7-stage model has fooled a lot of people into thinking they have got to get to stage 7, but people have to know that not all has to be at level 7. I think everyone is looking to get to a stage we shouldn't be aiming for.*

A3 has an intuitive understanding of the policy despite the immediate reaction noted above;

> *I feel confident that I am matching the learning and teaching strategy but I can't actually tell you what it is…I am not sure about where pure online matches in with the learning, teaching and assessment strategy because I can't recall if there is an element about that.*

A6 does a lot of online teaching yet is unsure about what the policy actually says;

> *I don't know what the UHI had in mind…we played to the strengths we had.*

A2 is less involved now than previously and felt;

> *I probably don't understand very much now, I think they are trying to provide opportunities for students…trying to ensure delivery of a high standard of work…that is roughly what it is about.*

This interviewee spoke positively about the advantages of working with colleagues in a wider network.

A5 felt that course teams should be making more routine use of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy, reflecting on it in annual reports. It needs to be more "*embedded*";

> *I still have major problems about that; it is used in validation documents…I feel they only dip into it when they have a revalidation to be honest. We need to make it easier for course teams to actually work with it. We need to get all the staff to know about it.*

On the intuitive understanding, C1 said;

> *I'm sure I would know it if I saw it, but as an upfront concept I am not entirely sure what that means.*

C2 was able to talk about blended learning and the move from face-to-face teaching to online methods but admitted;

> *I still hanker after the traditional class.*

A view on the move to online teaching reflected by E1 was;

> *It evolved. It is to do with enabling people to work across boundaries, not because someone at the top said so but because there were people who saw it, they were enthused by it and motivated by it, it generated a kind of energy and people were looking forward to having a different role. It started evolving. It evolved as a continuum from face-to-face to fully online.*

9. How did the course team respond to the teaching and learning needs of UHI?

Responses to this question indicate a clear engagement with the UHI teaching and learning scenario even if interviewees could not point to a specific document, though these were variable and individualised. The course team was clearly influenced by management (A2 B1) and by other course teams (A5).

A1 noted that course team meetings for *"taking stock"* happen but there has to be *"juggle";*

Sometimes it can be there are tensions.

B1 felt that policy decisions in the partner college tend to go to either the 'finance person' or the 'quality person'. It was thought that the college wants to go to increasingly online approaches because the management think it is cheaper;

Locally, what drives it is purely finance and short-termism.

The course team can be driven by other things;

> *I think everybody in Grant College was unhappy about that (*the decision to replace the BA1 with the HNC) *and it wasn't our choice. We 'pretended' to have meetings about this being imposed on us*

There were also positive responses to the needs of UHI. A5 notes that the course team responded but in different ways;

> *Some took to it (*online*) more quickly and with more enthusiasm than others" depending on whether individuals had been involved in the BA* (other course) *degree.*

E1 says we responded very well but we could have made more use of available expertise in the region outwith the colleges and could have done more on research-teaching links in the early days.

10. How did the course team respond to the UHI Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategies (LTAS) of 2003 and 2007? Did it play a part in your life?

Overall, most interviewees said that these documents did not feature large in their work (C2 A1 B1 A4 B2 A3 C1 A5). Two interviewees said it had some but little impact (A6 E1) while one (C1) took issue with the ideas contained in these documents.

Again the immediate responses of interviewees to this question reveal an overall trend:

A1	*maybe I am not aware of everything, the chalkface worker like myself is probably just getting on with it*
B1	*probably not, course committee and special meetings had more of an impact*
A4	*I am afraid not. I take a look at the jargon and I tend to recoil from it…I often feel that thousands of words are expended on rather thin ideas. I will disappoint the management, I can't recite the LTAS*
A6	*They haven't fundamentally altered what I do*
B2	*No, not at all*
A3	*I don't think they affected what I do, it is not something I keep at my fingertips*
A5	*No, I don't think the course teams did respond, I don't think it was something they were aware of*
E1	*I can't remember it explicitly having any effect on the team*
C1	*Apparently not, I'm sure the implications of them filtered down in other forms but no, not as an up-front policy*
C2	*I paid little attention to that*

In further discussion it emerged clearly that interviewees did engage with these strategies in some ways. For A1;

> *I follow the overall direction of the department*".

B1 referred to the value of course team meetings to "*chew the fat*" where after general discussion "*it lodges more in the consciousness*". A4 felt the team is willing to take on broad ideas and the team has clearly moved towards online delivery.

B2 made an interesting point about the use of such documents,

> *at the revalidation we all did a great job talking about this…but it didn't impinge on my life a great deal. I think I knew it existed but I probably didn't read it*

This is the same point noted by A5 who felt course teams generally only use such policy or strategy papers in revalidation documents;

It is out there but it is not part of their thinking.

A3 took the view that college mission statements and strategy documents simply reinforced what people were doing anyway.

I do recall reading it and saying to myself, this is what I do anyway, and so it reinforced my own particular strengths. I don't think I had to readjust

A3 felt that the team has responded well to increasing online learning and curriculum flexibility but;

I am not certain that the LTAS is the driving force behind that flexibility. What is behind it is an economic imperative, the LTAS may be the philosophical vision but actually there is a much clearer economic imperative – be flexible or you are out of work.

This is why there is the focus on student numbers-per-module in the *"whatever-it's-called strategy"*. But at the same time A3 believes in flexibility to be able to intervene in the life chances of people in the community. The pragmatism shown here also comes through in the E1 interview. E1 could not remember explicitly using the LTAS but noted that it was about blended learning.

somehow by osmosis we absorb it. It did exist and I don't know where that came from. Some of these things are iterative , they are messy, some of it may have come from policy and some of it from practitioner experience.

The interviewees on this question were fairly much of the same view, that the LTAS documents themselves were not memorable but through course team discussion and engagement with other teams and the institution, the broad message was absorbed and

indeed acted upon. The one alternative view came from C1 who took issue with the move from face-to-face teaching to a more blended and online approach.

> *I've got a lot of issues there to be honest. I have concerns about that. I would certainly have been somebody who felt uncomfortable with the move away from classes being taught face to face and that the too rapid move to the other end of the spectrum where in some extreme cases like* (other course) *are completely online. I am enough of a dinosaur to think that this is not the model that I actually would aspire to. I felt we somehow got catapulted at one point to being online but there was a bit of a fightback and it became blended learning… I think it devalues the student experience.*

C1 is not convinced of pedagogical evidence for this model and felt that the move away from conventional teaching "*threw away*" positive attributes such as commitment, involvement and personal relationships in the teaching situation and will be "*an absolute turn-off*" for some students.

C1 also provides a unique perspective in commenting on the lack of resistance from the team to this development.

> *I don't think my colleagues necessarily provided sufficient opposition to what I thought was an unedifying scramble to get to the end of the spectrum that was closest to being just online materials. People went along with it. I don't hear people apart from my immediate colleagues going to meetings and saying we would like to see more time going to the lecturer. It is so swimming against the flow, it is so a waste of time, you will get absolutely nowhere with it. There seems to be this oppressive weight that is determined to have minimum lecturer contact and as much shared online as possible.*

Asked if this pressure is coming 'from the top' the response was

> *I think inevitably it is coming down.*

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11. **The nature of the course team's response to LTAS compared to other teams.**

A number of different responses to this were received but with the overall impression that the LTAS does not seem to play a big role. Other factors are more important but a variety of other points are made.

Both A1 and A3 said that the course team generally 'got on with it'. A3 said;

> *I am not certain. As far as I can remember direct discussion of it rears its head only occasionally. In general things tick along but I haven't found much emphasis in the course team about 'let's discuss this particular strategy'.*

A3 also felt that a lot of discussion is discipline-based and noted in this respect that;

> *the team works fairly well on a consensus model.*

B1 was able to describe how the BA Social Sciences teaching and learning strategy used in the 2006 re-validation was worked out.

> *The BASS teaching and learning strategy was thrashed out at course committee and various workshops. Conversations between B1 and* (a senior college colleague) *led to the online/class contact model, that was influenced by UHI generally.*

A senior member of staff at Ferguson College was the originator of the 7-stage model and this was referred to by A5 who felt that this model was better known than the LTAS. Terms like 'blended learning' and 'networking' get "*bandied about*" and staff "*maybe had to respond*". People do know about the 7-stage model, networking issues and sharing of modules. But;

> *the curriculum architecture is being imposed on them and that is what they are aware of as opposed to the LTAS.*

A number of other one-off views were expressed. B2 made the interesting observation that the key person in the course team and in the implementation of policies and strategies is the programme leader.   The programme leader:

> *told us what to do and we did it…*(the PL) *protected us too much…PLs have done a lot and protected people. Lecturers are overwhelmed, our working environment is not conducive to do all that stuff (*ie read policy documents)*…it is an oppressive workroom.*

A6 also put forward a view some aspects of which were shared but others not. This was the view that the BASS team has become fragmented over time and that the early sense of optimism is being dissipated. The position of module leader is growing and the sense of being a team is declining. This is seen as a UHI-wide issue and not just a BASS one.

> *unless you have spaces and places in which to get together as a course team, not just a bunch of people, you are not going to get that sense of a team.*

The sense of the BASS team declining is shared, with A2 feeling that BASS lost its way as a team especially over the issue of the HNC-plus approach to the degree. The colleges were not all doing the same thing,

> *I felt we (*academic partners*) weren't all singing from the same hymn sheet.*

This sense of fragmentation is noted also by C2 who said;

> *I suspect the course team would like to maintain the traditional model. There seems to be no consistency from UHI on the teaching and learning model.*

Another unique insight was given by E1 on the nature of the response of the team to the LTAS;

> *It happened because the team began to get to know each other –*
> *relationships are based on trust; that comes over time. Policies were*
> *common sense, people could see that numbers weren't huge*
> *therefore there was a viability issue. People began to see how the*
> *system would work. I don't know if it was a conscious process or just*
> *something that people just picked up, it evolved.*

12. **The BASS course team compared to other UHI course teams**

On this question four interviewees (A4 A6 A2 A5) took the view that the BASS team had declined in cohesion over time. Three interviewees (B2 A5 C2) felt that the BASS team was much the same as other teams. A3 and A5 emphasised the importance of discipline-based teams within BASS which marks it off from other teams. One (B1) observed that the BASS team was "*more academic"* than others while a number of other views were expressed by one interviewee. A2 noted the importance of the original, historical circumstances of each team in having an ongoing influence; A5 noted the influence of the FE aspect of the partner colleges; C1 noted the importance of the partner colleges themselves, and E1 could not express a view on this.

B1 took a positive view of the BASS team;

> *I think the BASS team is much more of a team actually, there is a*
> *pride and a consensus across the team in academic standards and*
> *university level teaching…it is more like a small version of a*
> *university department*

It is seen as more of an academic team than other UHI teams some of which are seen to be;

> *more of an FE team, there is more of an HE ethos in BASS*

A4 partially agrees with this but not entirely, regarding one of the other courses as having;

> *quite a strong sense of common identity…*(it) *has a lot of debate about the*
> *technical details of the course*

Whilst having a strong collegiate sense it is perhaps less 'academic' so in this respect the same point is being made as made by B1 above.

A4 actually felt that BASS had less of a sense of identity. A6 agreed with this and felt that the team had lost out due to several changes of leadership in recent months and because there is resistance to moves towards online learning;

> *BASS has lacked somebody to hold it together.* (It has also been affected by) *a certain resistance from certain members and constantly finding reasons for why it* (online) *wasn't as good.*

A2 made the reasonable point that other teams started differently. For example the BA Child and Youth Studies was fully online from the beginning. BASS on the other hand had to go through several changes;

> *we had to go through several quite big changes, we have had to endure, if that is the word, rather than enjoy change.*

E1 has been involved in two other UHI teams but didn't manage to attend course committee meetings and so couldn't comment on this question.

C1 used the 'herding cats' analogy to describe the team though also noting that social scientists tend to be "*intelligent, affable, very hard to coordinate, and individualistic*". The main feature of the course team is that it is made up of "*different colleges with different interests*". C2 has found the three teams engaged with to be "*broadly similar*".

The most insightful comments on this question came from A5. A5 has some involvement in four teams other than BASS. On these teams;

> *there is a heck of a lot of similarities*

One consequence of the rise in the number of teams over time and of BASS members getting involved in other degrees is that staff have reverted back to identifying

primarily with their discipline area rather than with a general degree programme team. But this has inevitably meant that;

> *I think maybe BASS has lost some momentum recently while some of the newer degrees have taken off…we have lost the cohesion of the team…some people still don't agree with the way forward, that is the biggest difference* (between teams) *is the buy-in to UHI, to the way forward.*

A5 felt that the "stable FE culture" was an important factor in resisting the "*way forward*". Some staff are seen as "*protecting themselves*" from UHI imposition, but this is a reaction from staff who are still located within the FE culture. The UHI trends are towards modularisation and;

> *I think the transition from degree to modularisation is going to need managed better before we end up having problems with the cohesiveness of the staff…we have to get this across as a natural process …people need to realise this is a positive way forward. That is what we are not doing very well; we are wrapping it all round finance and student numbers because of the economic climate.*

A5 is concerned that some staff are looking on change as an imposition from UHI.

13. Anything about the course team that struck you as noticeable?

Interviewees again responded to this question in a number of different ways. Three interviewees (A1 A3 A4) noted the enthusiasm and effectiveness of the course team. Two (B1 A4) saw the team as very complicated when they first joined. Two also emphasise the pressures upon the course team coming from partner colleges (A4 C1) and two noted the implications of joining a team already established (C1 C2). One found it difficult to say having no experience of any other team (B2).

A1 found the team to be encouraging and "friendly".

> *Our aim is true I would say, we are trying to do our best in the situation.*

A3 commented on the fact that the team did not differ from other teams except that it did have meetings, agendas and a culture where people can "*chip in*". A4 noted that whilst it took a while to feel part of the team;

> *it is not by any means a dysfunctional team, it is doing a very effective job.*

But A4 started with;

> *a certain amount of confusion and perplexity, I tended to see individuals who were often under a lot of pressure sometimes in one or two cases complaining bitterly…but I now have a sense of a real team and I feel part of it.*

A4's initial impressions of the team were of a team that had positive teaching relationships with one another. The negative aspects were that;

> *they all felt under pressure from partner colleges…that was where the real problem lay.*

C1 also made this point about the impact of decisions made in the partner colleges.

> *it was like it* (the course team) *was already formed and we were Johnny-come-lately where we would always be playing catch-up.*

But C1 felt this was very much due to management decisions over several years and very much a matter for the partner college and not the team. C2 also made this point that things were pretty much decided by the time the team was joined.

The sense of initial perplexity made by A4 was also made by B1;

> *I couldn't believe how complicated it was…I thought there weren't clear lines of communication and responsibility…I felt it was a muddle and a fudge.* (However) *It is much improved.*

14. How have decisions been taken within the team?

Responses to this question prompted three interviewees (A5 C1 A4) to refer to imposed decisions. Two (A4 E1) referred to pragmatic responses while A2 and E1 also referred to the role of vested interests. The most interesting alternative perspective was that the team tends to acquiesce and is not assertive enough (A4).

A4 made a number of separate points on this. There is a pragmatic response;

> *By and large the course team has been very responsive to demands for change…decisions are made in a fairly conventional way ie the decision had to be made, there is an inevitability about it…this is what you have to do and you do it.*

A4 also felt that the course team tends to take the lead from management and does not assert its own position;

> *the habit of acquiescence to management decisions…this is a deeply ingrained attitude in the teaching profession.* (The team) *should take initiatives and take ownership, they would make much better headway…the team tends to have the attitude that decisions are made elsewhere and we complain…democracy functions in a rather negative way.*

A5 also responded to this question by referring to impositions. When asked for an example, the response was;

> *the classic one was at the revalidation where the HNC-plus was imposed by management. That was a huge event and it caused I think a lot of destruction in the team. It was taken right out of our hands…we ended up servicing the whole first year to other degrees which felt very frustrating, most of us were involved in developing*

> *those modules and they just disappeared. That was an important event, a critical event for the team.*

A5 gave another example, the move from face-to-face teaching to more online approaches;

> *…but there is that pressure to almost go like BA* (other course). *These are all external, we had no control over these things.*

When asked whether the team has any autonomy, A5 said;

> *We can decide around the curriculum, modules, content, module leadership, but less control over the degree.* (This has made us go back into our disciplines), *perhaps that is where we feel we have more control.*

C1 also referred to an example of a decision where the key factors seemed to be external to the team. On the decision to hold back the development of an honours level in 2003:

> *rather bizarrely it got knocked back. Something seemed not right. There seemed to be factors operating that were outwith what was going on in the room that day…collectively, we all felt a bit knocked back by that.*

Going back to the earlier days of the BASS and the decision to attempt to validate the degree in a short time frame, E1 made the case that the course team did make things happen and indeed despite the institution;

> *with BASS people could see an opportunity and an option and that was about developing skills, and that was really important. It was also an opportunity to secure their own futures, they were responding to the situation pragmatically and also seeing it as an opportunity to develop themselves.*

Another response to this question which emphasised the role of vested interests was given by A2;

> *I think often the stronger characters have made decisions, some people have an agenda. …we have known what constraints we have to work with…within the constraints of our own colleges and so to some extent they are defending their own colleges and their own jobs. I do wonder if decisions are made purely for the benefit of the students or is it about protecting their own jobs, which is natural.*

The influence of the wider context is noted by C2;

> *decision making is easier in a growth situation…'jam today'…*

15. **Where does power lie?**

Five interviewees quite clearly took the view that power comes from above (A1 B1 A5 C1 C2) while one talked about the constraints that apply to the course team (E1). A1 saw opportunities for the course team to act while different responses included the idea that power lies with discipline teams (A3), the programme leader (A2) and module leaders (A5). These other interviewees however also recognised the role of 'constraints' and this came through quite strongly.

A1's initial comment on this question was that "*it comes from above*". A college manager will act on the basis of "*what she has been told*". A5 also noted the idea of power from above;

> *I think power is seen not to be as strong in the team, that changes are happening and being imposed on them.*

For C2 'above' means UHI. When asked whether there were tensions between colleges and UHI the response of C2 was;

> *Very much so. I tend to get the impression that a lot of what is happening is driven by UHI… I've always thought that ultimately UHI will consume the colleges.*

The role of vested interests and 'those above' also came through in the comments of C2;

> *…that's the crux of the thing, there are times when it is an external source that may be pushing or nudging a change. Let's face it, decisions tend to suit somebody.*

A particular example of a decision from above was the HNC-plus decision in 2003. On this B1 noted:

> *that was being pushed by Ferguson College…a very strong vibe at the time.*

But other views were also expressed. A1 felt that on decisions from above "*there is always the opportunity for feedback*". A3 talked about the role of the programme leader who was not seen as an autocrat though this does happen in other teams;

> *in Social Science power is much more shared, no one is inhibited, it is a fairly open forum. Power moves around.*

A3 pointed to the power of the discipline team and identified one discipline as being a "*powerful force*" but another discipline team "*feels marginalised*" and more "*on the fringe*".

The notion that power 'moves around' was perhaps also picked up by B1;

> *One of our strengths is that we can be frank with one another. I feel listened to within the team. I am not listened to in BA (other course) and certainly not listened to in the College".*

A couple of points not raised by anyone else came from A5 who noted that power has shifted in the direction of module leaders. The role of the college 'site leaders' was also noted but seen as "*not fixed*". The importance of recent trends and policy directions were noted;

> *I think power is seen not to be as strong in the team, that changes are happening and being imposed on them* (A5).

The role of the programme leader was focused on by A2 and this view was that this is where power lies;

> *I suppose the programme leader has an overview of everything; the only person with an overall knowledge of college constraints and UHI demands is the programme leader.*

The principle of constraint also comes through from A1 and E1. For A1;

> *We are kind of left to get on with it,* (but)…*we can only action things within the range of the strengths we've got.*

And for E1;

> *the course team works within the constraints of the institution, SQA, UHI etc, they are not completely at the mercy of that either, they can make little choices I think.*

16. **Examples of contentious issues.**

When asked to reflect on particularly contentious issues in the lifespan of BASS answers inevitably reflected the time period the interviewees had been involved in the team. However four of them (A1 B1 A4 A3) referred to the fairly recent issue of delivering the HNC programme online to remote students. Two interviewees (E1 C2) talked about the use of learning logs and reflective journals in the early years of the degree while one talked about much more recent issues, one concerning the UHI 'curriculum architecture' and another concerning joint awards.

On the HNC online issue A1 noted;

> *That caused a rumpus…obviously if it has a negative influence on people's hours…tensions arise if hours are threatened.*

B1 also noted the fact that the online HNC has "*implications for people's hours*.

A4 noted the controversial process the online HNC went through but also recognising that it was implemented at least as a pilot.

> The online HNC *caused a fair amount of grief and controversy but that has been accepted. I think there are real problems about that and about the lack of responsiveness.*

A3 was also aware of the difficulties with this issue but also raised the underlying fact running through the team's experience, the FE base.

> *I believe it had to be sold fairly well. That is the first time really that I think the tensions of an FE base and the HE bolt-on have really hit the Social Sciences team. I was aware it was handled at separate meetings.*

Some other issues were raised in the interviews. A4 also raised the issue of joint honours awards, noting that one discipline team had shown concern about feeling left behind as other teams progressed towards joint award approval events. A4 felt that;

> *UHI encourages that kind of behaviour, the feeling that something is happening elsewhere.*

E1 and C2 both gave as examples the use of personal and professional capabilities, the use of learning logs and reflective journals from the early days of the degree. C2 felt this,

was pushed by someone who was enthusiastic, and the rest were dragged along…a few individuals wanted to mould the degree very much as they wanted.

E1 noted that changes came about because of both "*staff and student power*".

It was very difficult to work a system where there was such a lack of consensus among the staff. Nobody is powerless basically, we all have some levels of power in different contexts.

A much more recent issue, the UHI curriculum architecture, was raised by A5 who reflected on differing views about this process, and expressed the interesting view that the team can have a say as long as they 'go with the flow';

Some people want nothing to do with sharing and doing it differently. I think that is a difficulty, a huge difficulty. The team has to deal with this, individuals will have to think whether they stick with their principles or go with the flow.

A general conclusion on this question was provided by A2 who observed:

There have been a lot of contentious issues. In the main, superficially at least, most things have gone OK. When push comes to shove at validation events and things like that, people have come up with the goods.

17. On Individuals finding it hard to conform.

When asked about this a variety of responses were given though the main theme from three interviewees was that staff generally get on with things (A1 E1 C1). Two interviewees raised the FE factor in the team (B2 A3). Other issues included physical distance as a problem (A1), variable levels of positive thinking (B1), the negative impact of the college (B2), and the need for team consensus (A5).

E1 felt that it had been hard to 'fit in';

> *I had a different way of doing things. In a way I found ways of surviving the system.*

B1 described the team as "*a prickly bunch…there are people who are not a positive presence*". 'Positive' was taken to mean doing your best for the students, making the degree work for both UHI and the partner college.

A5 gave a similar response;

> *Yeah, individuals driving their own agenda…the team has got to come to a view. Whatever has been decided, there has to be unity.*

B2 and A3 both reflected more widely on the institutional context influencing the idea of the maverick individual. A3 noted that some staff don't participate and are not involved. The "*original tension*" is the FE base. The reason for the situation being;

> *I think it is the FE conditions of service…people mythologize the HE conditions as being the gold standard. (The 24 hours teaching per week) saps your energy. The mission statement is about a centre for excellence but actually what we are doing is screwing the staff as hard as we possibly can so we can't be a centre of excellence because everyone is knackered. The Marxist model would give the best insight into how the UHI and FE colleges work – a model of exploitation.*

B2 also explained the existence of the maverick or the non-engaged by reference to structural factors. Two groups of staff were identified, those who have engaged and had the 'rug pulled from under them', and those who have never engaged. The context of this is negativity from within the colleges about UHI.

> *managers will switch from positive to negative views about UHI depending on the audience*

There are also perceptions from some FE staff in the colleges that UHI "*gets all the money*" according to B2.

Two other interesting comments were made. A1 noted;

> *the course team does work but the physical distance does create that mental distance if you like. It would be useful to have more team meetings where we are physically together.*

While C1 noted that "*individual eccentricities*" and "*the quirky*" are good things.

> *a tendency to non-conformity is not the same thing as acting in terms of self-interest.*

18.   Examples of good practice within the team

Five interviewees (A1 B1 A4 A5 C2) pointed to the team working well together as an example of good practice. A4 noted good feedback to students and also the willingness to write online materials as examples.

Fairly typical comments on this theme came from A1;

> *We work well together. We have adapted to changes… we are left to our own devices.*

B1 said;

> *we are good listeners and respectful of people's views. We look out for one another.*

A2 noted that scrutinising one another's work, course team meetings and working together as a team were examples of good practice.

C2 concurred with this;

We have got better at working together and trying to be supportive.

This theme was also taken up and developed by A5;

Over the years it was definitely working together. We've got the confidence to decide ourselves. What we learned at the beginning has stood us in good stead throughout the whole time of the course.

A4 provided some interesting development of this theme. A4 was;

impressed by the dedication to provide students with effective feedback. People have responded positively to writing online materials.

When asked about the motivation for this the response was that it is partly career motives and partly commitment to the general idea of education. A4 also volunteered some insight into the 'de-motivators' which were "*the remoteness of managers"* and *"the bottom line".* Although the course team has a real commitment;

It is very, very rarely that you have a discussion about anything academic within the team and that seems to me to be a great shame and that is something that in a more ideal world should be addressed. That is a missing element here and I think perhaps it is one of the reasons why staff are not as proactive as they could be. There isn't that sense of academic community.

When asked why this is, the view was;

The most obvious reason is that UHI is based on FE institutions. (People are) *rushing about…*(with a range of classes). *It is very significant, I think the long-term health and success of UHI is going to depend on the staff being able to transcend this situation.*

When asked if the course team can do anything about this;

I think they can do more than they are doing – (another programme team) *seem to have this sense of academic community, maybe that is why they are so jealous of their territory.* (Another team) *has a convivial sense of community at exam boards, but it is not an academic community.*

19. **What makes it possible for the course team to achieve the examples of good practice?**

Responses to this question tended to come through in questions 18 and 22 so there were limited comments unique to this section.

Responses were factors such as dedication and commitment (A1) and money and good training (A3). A3 produced some interesting insights into the challenge of changing established practices.

I think perhaps the problem is that the social sciences degree is so well embedded in its current position that shifting them is very hard because it is not a priority for people who have modules that work. Why change them just because they don't work as well as they could doesn't mean they don't work at all. And I think that is what stops the move to reconstruction.

20. **Observations about critical incidents.**

Interviewees identified a number of critical incidents. E1, A2 and A6 focused on the HNC-plus decision taken in 2003. A4 noted the honours revalidation of 2003 while A2 talked about the entry of Chisholm College to the team in 2000 and A1 noted the more recent online HNC topic. B2 noted the importance of self-interest. Interviewees were asked to comment on the main decision makers and their motives.

A1 felt that there was resistance to the online HNC from other colleges. The reason was;

mainly due to the hours. Change is necessary; ultimately decisions will come from above.

A4 talked about the honours revalidation.

I thought the team responded very positively. It struck me that people are very eager and enthusiastic and they project an incredibly positive image at events, perhaps even in a rather exaggerated way, but it does reflect a motivation to get things off the ground and make them work.

At 'events', that is validation and review events, A4 has been;

impressed by the sheer jargon...people respond in this innocent manner without being tongue in cheek about it.

A3 combined both the online HNC issue and the Honours validation issue and developed another unique insight into this.

I think that's one of the things, the course team doesn't support the programme leader in. The course team tends to think the programme leader will write everything. The programme leader really did all the work. The team is happy to discuss things, quite happy to agree things but they are not able to engage much further because they don't have any time. We have validations where people go in being terribly supportive but also terribly vague because there is only one person who has got a handle on the document.

The self-interest point was made by B2;

my main observation is that we do moan, but we have kind of adopted the Niki attitude, 'just do it', 'get it done-sorted'. We have responded better to major changes than to minor changes. We are in a situation of self-preservation, people get nervous about jobs, people get protective. Ultimately we have a survival instinct. We are going back

to a protective element, a self-preservation element at the moment. My mortgage and pension fund is the BASS degree. You are my safety blanket.

A2 raised the major structural change which was the entry of Chisholm College into the programme. On the impact of this;

They had to change it just by joining. That was quite difficult but I enjoyed working with my opposite number.

The structural problem was because;

They probably never did deliver in the same way that we did.

A2 also offered the insight that the HNC-plus decision was possible because;

we had moved apart as a team. We organised an awayday and tried to make a real effort to come back together as a team.

On the HNC-plus decision E1's observations on that were;

my feeling was that was a policy decision on the part of UHI and I think we were responding to that decision to some extent. I remember some debate about whether we should go down that path…the HNC was a pragmatic solution…I felt the HNC was not the best step to do but that on the other hand I can see the case for having it. Sometimes you just have to accept things.

A6 had a similar pragmatic view of the HNC-plus;

It was very much a case of deferring to people who knew more about it but trying to serve two masters (SQA and UHI) has I think been very difficult. On the HNC I think there were possibly vested interests…I

am not sure that the agreements that have taken place are completely
open.

21.   Response to the UHI teaching and learning policy since 1998.

This question was completely absorbed into others so there are no specific comments to make here.

22A. Trowler's Typology – Responses ref Coping/Swimming/Sinking

The notion that interviewees might find it difficult to locate themselves within one of the four quadrants of the Trowler model and that positioning might mean moving from one 'box' to another in a fluid and dynamic way was indicated in the pilot interview (A7). Interviewees were asked about this positioning on the basis of both personal experience and perception of the position of the team. The responses on three of the quadrants were fewer and more conflated than for the fourth, reconstruction. This section therefore focuses only on the three headings indicated in the sub-title above.

Four interviewees (B1 A3 E1 A5) felt that the team had avoided sinking. Three felt the team had not been 'swimming' (B1 E1 A6). Three interviewees focused on coping as the most likely scenario (B2 A3 E1) while one (B1) felt the team had done better than coping. Two gave evidence of swimming (A3 A5) while two perceived a combination of all three elements (B2 A3). A4 and A2 saw the team responding positively to change. A more individualistic response came from C1 who came up with a different definition of swimming.

A concise overview was given by B1;

> *I don't think we have sunk. I wouldn't say we were swimming. I think*
> *we are doing better than coping.*

A3 took a similar line noting the *"re-jigging"* of modules that has to take place. On the four typology elements;

> *"possibly all four elements are happening simultaneously. I don't get*
> *a feeling of sinking – I get a feeling of coping quite often. People are*

getting on and getting by. Every year we want to change modules but every year we decide we can't do it, so I imagine that is down at coping level.

A3 gave an example of a module that was changed after feedback from both staff and students indicated the need to change;

that module was lifted from sinking to coping, it was sinking but was raised to coping level.

A3 also felt that in at least one discipline modules seemed to be going well, and therefore concluded;

In some areas swimming is definitely happening.

There were other positive responses. A2 said;

over the years I think they have been positive about responding

A6 responded to this question by saying that the team response was;

somewhere between coping and reconstructing I suppose. I certainly wasn't swimming.

E1 confirmed this general picture;

They certainly avoided sinking and to some extent there was more coping than influencing policy, somewhere in between. The course team response was possibly mainly positive-pragmatic or pragmatic-positive – I think pragmatic is what I would say.

The positive also came through from A5;

I don't think I sunk. I swam quite a bit, I loved it.

When asked if the team has responded positively, negatively or pragmatically, the response from A5 was;

> *all of them*

A positive view came from A1;

> *I think we have adapted fairly well…I think we have embraced it* (online delivery) *fairly well.*

However A1 also shows the limits to personal observation;

> *I'm waffling, it's difficult to say.*

Some uncertainty about which element to favour came from B2 who said;

> *I don't think it is clear cut and direct. I think we are going to end up in a coping situation in 2010-11 because we have spread ourselves too thin. With the* (other) *degree we are going for a coping strategy.*

Several illuminating comments came from interviewees who developed the discussion to consider why the team response was the way it was. A4 shared the perception that the team has responded to change positively but felt the team could have done more;

> *I think the response has been mainly positive. I wouldn't say enthusiastic, and of course there has been reluctance* (to online) *because changes are always seen through the perspective of people's job security…people do need to feed their families and the employers are the colleges…people associate themselves primarily with their partner colleges. There are real stresses and strains to do with people's job security. People are under pressure but they do respond.*

A5 shared this view though with the emphasis more on the FE/HE divide;

> *We have two different cultures, FE and HE. FE colleges have a very
> stable culture while UHI is at the other extreme. The environment has
> changed, the team has to come to terms with this to the point where
> they can become autonomous again. Uncertainty? We've got bags of
> it.*

A5 revealed an interesting perspective on autonomy – 'you can be autonomous as long
as you conform'.

B2 also recognised that governance is a big problem and noted the need for two-way
communication in a network partnership. B2 felt that the colleges don't really know
what UHI course teams do.

> *I don't think the colleges know what we do. Not enough people know
> the structure and processes. Cascading up is a problem.*

A re-definition of one of Trowler's terms was noted by C2 who again expressed
scepticism about the move towards online methods;

> *I certainly never heard any academic discussions or debates about the
> merits of putting materials online. There was a lot of swimming with
> what the course team regarded as the flow. We don't act in collective
> interests but often act in self- interest, either college or individual.*

To C2 'swimming' was seen as a negative, as going along with a consensus which was
not agreed with.

22B. Responses – Typology – Reconstruction

When asked to talk about examples of reconstruction in the BASS case, four
interviewees (B1 B2 A6 A2) could give examples while four others (A4 A3 A5 C2)
thought there could have been more reconstructing than there was. Two (B1 C1)
decided to re-define the term 'reconstruction' while other views expressed included
the importance of job security (A4), the pragmatic adaptation to policy (E1), the need

for more top-down direction (A6) and the value of the BASS experience applied to other cases (A5).

B1 responded to the question on reconstruction;

> *Reconstruct – you mean make it work for yourself? I would say 're-configuring' it to make it work. I think we are quite ingenious and maybe a bit devious, we have had to make it work locally, because you are always doing this juggling act.*

When asked for an example B1 said "*don't know*" but went on to talk about the college team approach which is to get as many module leadership roles as possible.

> *as individuals we are ducking and diving and trying to survive.*

On the UHI curriculum architecture, B1 was not sure about the impact of the course team. But indicated a willingness to engage with it;

> *we are all up for it and we can survive quite well.*

The theme of the centrality of job security was made by other interviewees, such as E1 (on the adoption of the HNC model);

> *I think there was more adaptation but there was a two-way thing as well because things were happening as a practitioner model, this was more of an evolutionary process. The HNC-plus was an adaptation strategy, the whole thing about the delivery of the HNC across the institution, that was a huge issue that people just adapted to. The key is peoples' jobs.*

B2 also made the linkage between jobs and policy adaptation when noting that responses usually fall into one of two categories, 'let's-do-it' and 'how-can-we-fit-this-in';

> *what are we doing now that fits in, what do we not need to change?*
> *The manipulation of the situation.*

B2 gave as an example the decision to make the *Research Methods 2* module fit into four different degrees;

> *This is problematic but we manipulate it by selling it in different ways.*

B2 felt that the college management tends not to know what the team is doing. This is part of the problem of communication not being good.

Trying to achieve change when under pressure from both college and UHI is a theme also raised by A3.

> *Reconstruction is where I think we would like to be but I don't think we get there as often as we could and even revalidations don't seem to be capitalised on in terms of reconstruction. Revalidations often just revalidate the problems that we had before. I think we think reconstructively but we don't actually get a chance to implement it because of the constraints. In module teams, sometimes we discuss things and you are in a reconstructive intellectual place but we are still not very good at dealing with the pragmatic day to day life of being a tutor in a college.*

A2 felt the course team had been positive about responding;

> *even when they had negative feelings about changes which had been imposed, they have still adapted to those changes.*

A2 however saw the team as having become more fragmented as members have got involved in other teams. One interesting aside in this was;

> *impositions quite often come from people who have no involvement with students.*

The role of practical constraints was noted by A6 who felt that staff in BA (other course) who were dubious of online methods were won over;

> *There was reluctance to move away from face-to-face teaching but this is not a practical reality if you want to afford opportunity to all.*

A6 took a unique view in one respect, on the relationship between the team and college management; the view was that management sees BASS as

> *a bit maverick, ploughing its own furrow…there is not enough laying down of the law from the top. But we do have leeway on content, for example devising the 'Critical Inequalities' module with the external examiner and the team.*

This was the only occasion when this particular sentiment was expressed across the whole research exercise.

A1 was vaguely supportive of the chances of the team reconstructing things;

> *We are constrained by structure, but within that there are areas where we can influence things to a degree. You can make a suggestion, whether that changes policy is arguable.*

A5 took a different tack on the question of examples of reconstruction;

> *I took what I learned in BASS and used it in other areas. I don't know if that comes into reconstructing and using that to move on some other areas. I am not sure if I would call it reconstructing, it is just taking what you have learned and using it in a different way. With psychology, we basically said, 'everything we have learned' now put it into a new degree. Hopefully we are reconstructing what has gone before.*

On this question, A4 returned to an earlier theme, that the team has not done as much as it could have.

> *I think they could have responded a lot more creatively …there must be more scope for the team to register its interest more profoundly than they do. The team should play a much more innovatory, creative role…needs to be more proactive.*

A4 said on the online HNC;

> *Staff could have themselves promoted these ideas at a time when they were less inevitable…a proactive staff could have made a very big difference a lot earlier than was the case. Staff tend to associate with their own colleges. I wouldn't say the team does as much as it has the potential to do and it ought to be doing in terms of actually promoting policies. A lot depends on the programme leader. Very little comes from the programme team.*

A4 felt there were real stresses and strains on job security, but despite everything concluded;

> *but interestingly they do respond and they do rise to the occasion at the end of the day. The team has made things happen, without them (*academic staff) *nothing happens. But there is not a sense that management is on their side.*

A6's overall conclusion was that the Trowler thesis represents a *"rearguard action"* to try to prop up the team level, but nevertheless;

> *you are not as powerless as you think you are.*

C2 gave a mixed view of this theme;

> *at times I feel I am trapped. There are opportunities to shape events, you've got to seize the day. But UHI has led to 'upskilling'.*

Two novel perspectives were given by other interviewees. A5 felt that the team has lost autonomy over time. But;

> *regaining autonomy means going with the current flow.*

C2 again provided a more critical view of the team.

> *Re-constructing? De-constructing? I think you could probably find evidence of it. We operate on some levels as a team but we also operate on some levels in competition with each other. The team doesn't necessarily act in collective interests, we very often act in terms of the narrower interests of either the college or in some cases just an individual.*

24. Any other comments.

Interviewees were asked at the end of the interview if they would like to make any final comments in the light of the discussion so far.

B1 felt it was easy to focus on negatives and worries but wanted to emphasise;

> *but we're doing things better, and look at our graduates, I am very proud of our graduates…(we will do well) if we can keep on delivering what we deliver more ingeniously.*

C1 commented that BASS is *"a big successful degree"* yet at the time of the interview there was the prospect of student places being cut.

E1 said;

> *institutional structures are important, they set the parameters within which people operate, how people internalise that, how that is promoted is a different thing. I always felt that I don't let the*

> *institutional structures stop me from doing my research, so we all have some power, it is how we choose to exercise it, which spaces we choose to exercise it in.*

A4 concluded;

> *I would want to emphasise that I would like to see academic staff take more initiatives than they do…I would like to see more of a sense of academic community.*

Asked if BASS staff have 'missed the bus' A4 said;

> *I'm afraid that might be the case.*

On the question of why that might have happened the response was;

> *staff see themselves first and foremost as members of individual institutions, safeguarding their own positions. I was surprised at the resistance to the delivery of the online HNC to the region.*

Earlier in the interview A1 had referred to "*a sense of abandonment*". When asked whether this was 'a college thing or a UHI thing', the response was

> *I think it is a college thing.*

A2 had referred to staff having agendas. When asked about this, the response was;

> *I think often the modules that have been developed have been what people are interested in and what they want to get involved in, and what they have control and power over, rather than what the students need.*

Chapter Seven - Documentation Findings

7.1   Introduction

The documentary data was organised as a matrix into the eight 'moments' of Trowler's 'teaching and learning regime' and the four quadrants of the typology of responses to change. These 12 columns were then reviewed according to a number of themes expressed horizontally which emerged from the documents themselves. Some themes emerged frequently and others were raised on a few or even one occasion. The headings below refer to the eight 'moments' and the four responses identified in the Trowler typology. Some 260 references are made to the precise location in the documentation of quotations and points made. It was decided to make these references in the form of footnotes rather than in the main text where the volume would have interrupted the reading considerably.

7.2   Codes of Signification

44 items were noted in the documentary analysis which were categorised to this 'moment'. The three themes that emerged most from this were, first, FE terms and conditions; second, the sharing of modules with other teams; and third, perceived disparities between academic partners.

Terms and Conditions

Terms and conditions raised emotions and reflected the perceived status of both staff and the institution. This came through in an early course committee meeting[1];

There was a very long discussion about the terms and conditions under which staff are delivering a Higher Education service.

In this minute there was also concern about the course being over-dependent on a few individuals who were delivering several modules.

A specific example of this concerned marking loads. Concern was expressed about the "*time consuming and onerous marking loads*" in the context of the 'goodwill'

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[1] BASS Course Committee 29/1/99

and relatively low student numbers that it was noted had made it possible for UHI to progress thus far.[2]

Another specific example of terms and conditions related to what was usually called 'development time', very much an FE term. This came through in one of the first course committees[3] where there were *"major concerns"* about development time which was *"strongly requested"*. Related to this was discussion about variable amounts of development time being allocated to different individuals and teams.[4] The point was repeated on other occasions[5];

> *The overwhelming need of those in the course team doing higher degrees is time for study, the funding is Ok but the practicalities of finding time to study remain.*

The most emotive term in the course team is '24 hours' because it relates to the standard FE requirement that lecturers teach for 24 hours per week during term. This issue was raised periodically[6] and was seen as *"problematic"*.

The need for development time, or the need to *"free up people"* was still being raised much later and by other teams. By 2007 the idea of 'networked learning' was being justified partly on the grounds that it would do just that.[7] The wider issue of *"workloads"* was also coming up at later and at UHI events.[8] Through the documentation we can see references to workloads 'being dealt with', for example;

Workload issues are being addressed at institutional level.[9]

The FE-style focus on timetabled hours continued to come through even as the team moved up to develop and introduce honours level teaching.[10]

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[2] Chisholm College Sub-Committee 17/12/01
[3] BASS Course Committee 4/12/98
[4] Grant College Sub-Committee minutes 4/11/98
[5] BASS Course Committee 25/8/99
[6] For example BASS Course Committee minutes 7/6/02
[7] Arts Faculty Conference 11/12 Sept 2007
[8] Arts and Social Studies Subject Network Development day 17/5/07
[9] BASS Course Committee 4/6/04
[10] Joint BASS/BA Child and Youth Studies Honours meeting 14/5/07

The institutional recognition of different college approaches to 'staffing' and the need to address this was recognised at wider events by the Principal, Professor Bob Cormack.[11]

Another dimension of the terms and conditions issue was the pressure on the programme leader to fulfil a number of different functions at both FE and HE levels;

The course leader continued to have an extremely wide remit.[12]

'Disparities'

A theme that raised emotions and feelings was the perceived differences between partners. A particularly strong one came through in the first couple of years of the programme but thereafter disappeared and this was the sense from students that markers from 'the other college' were giving their 'own students' more marks. Student feedback raised such *"disparities"* between two colleges in the case of the *Enquiry Skills* module.[13] Ferguson College students noted a perceived disparity on a later occasion[14] though it has to be said that there was no evidence of such comments again. The need to achieve closer cooperation and consistency over modules across colleges was noted in the Annual Monitoring Report of August 1999 and appears to have been achieved.

Another example of this theme arises from perceived disparities between colleges over the 'ownership' of modules and allocations of module leadership. There was a call for;

A more equitable distribution of module leadership across the BA[15]

Perhaps as a late entrant to the programme, there was a sense in Chisholm College of differences within the team. There were comments about the fact that

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[11] Subject Network Leaders Forum 17/18 Aug 2004
[12] Annual Monitoring Report Aug 2001
[13] BASS Course Committee minutes 19/3/99
[14] BASS Course Committee minutes 1/2/00
[15] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 18/5/04

communications between colleges could be *"improved considerably"* and that there could be more standardisation on marking criteria and marking systems.[16]

'Sharing'

The notion of sharing had both positive and negative connotations. 'Sharing' of modules is to do with efficient delivery – more students per module achieved by more courses using the same modules.

The negative comes from the concern about the impact on jobs.

> *Questions arose about the implications of shared delivery for jobs.[17]*

Similar concerns were being expressed much later. There was a recognition of the 'problem' of a *"lack of shared practice"*. [18]Concerns were raised at a UHI Planning event at Nairn on 15/16 June 2008 about staff fears for jobs. This event talked about the need to overcome the perception that more networking and more sharing means job loss. There was recognition that module leaders need incentives to share modules.

The notion of a shared identity came through in student feedback where the desire for more of a *"university feeling"* was noted.[19]

A more positive view of the benefits of sharing was noted;

> *The team wishes to record and recognise the invaluable contribution provided by lecturers both within Chisholm College and at Ferguson and Grant in supporting Chisholm College students[20].*

Similarly,

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[16] Chisholm College Sub-committee minutes 29/5/01
[17] BASS Course Committee minutes 11/6/99
[18] Arts and Social Studies Subject Network Development Day 17/5/07
[19] BASS Course Committee minutes 30/11/99 and Annual Monitoring Report August 2000
[20] Chisholm College Sub-Committee 12/6/02

The new HNC has required considerable liaison and collaboration between the three academic partners[21]

A number of other examples of what might be termed 'codes of signification' can be noted from the documentation. These include:

1. a sense that we are not using statistical data reflectively enough[22]

2. awareness that there was a preference for 'blended learning' within UHI. This term was referred to for the first time in 2004[23] when it was noted that this actually fits in with what the course team wants to do

3. words indicating 'barriers' to network learning were evident. The term '*barriers to networking'* was the theme of a Conference session in 2005[24] while '*bottlenecks'* and '*obstacles*' to networking, growth and the sharing of modules was discussed in 2008.[25] One of these 'obstacles' was *"protectionism"*. One of these barriers was perhaps the recognition that students were *"not enthused by online provision.*[26]

4. the fact that the partnership has a sense of needing to be closer – the achievement of university title will *"cement the federation"*[27]

5. The course team saw itself and had confirmation from externals that it was characterised by *"high morale, open and healthy dialogue"* and was a group of *"dedicated professionals"* [28]

6. College management structure changes affected the course team several times and were usually seen as *"upheavals"*[29]

7. The growing self-confidence of the team led to some criticism of the role of external examiners especially where they were *"telling"* the team what to do and becoming *"advisers"* [30]

8. a positive set of feelings was recorded in 2003 when it was noted:

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[21] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 21/5/04
[22] UHI Programme Leader's Forum 1/6/07
[23] BASS Course Committee minutes 4/6/04
[24] UHI Conference at Aviemore 6-8 June 2005
[25] UHI Planning Event 15/16 June 2008
[26] Ferguson College student feedback at the BASS Course Committee, minutes of 9/1/04
[27] UHI Conference at Aviemore 6-8 June 2005
[28] External Examiner Report from EEA May 1999
[29] External Examiner Report by EEA Aug 2000
[30] Ferguson College Sub-Committee minutes 30/5/02

on reflecting on where we were in 1998, most staff would point to a considerable up-skilling ref assessment expertise, exam board practices, teaching and learning skills especially online, validation procedures, evaluation, student centred learning, ICT, research in teaching, and reflective practice. Several staff are now in the ILT.[31]

The QAA Review of 2002 had already noted that;

Staff have adapted well and sensitively to the challenge posed by the availability of new technology (VLE)[32].

7.3   Discursive Repertoires

This moment relates to the way that words are conceptualised and used to reflect dominant and multiple discourses. Particular words take on positive or negative connotations. 40 items in the documentation were noted relating to this moment and these can be categorised into three main themes. Firstly, 'further education, or FE'; secondly, 'equivalence'; and thirdly, 'network learning'.

FE

The FE discourse comes through in the use of terms such as 'development time' and 'preparation'. For example;

Major concerns about development time or the lack of it were raised, members of the team strongly requested that this situation be resolved.[33]

It was noted that the UHI staff development officer was present at this meeting and indicated that this kind issue would be addressed by Academic Council. Similarly,

UHI needs to develop a policy to enable staff developing curriculum, time to be found for development, we need to find time for preparation[34]

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[31] BASS Critical Review February 2003
[32] QAA Subject Review (Sociology) Report Dec 2002 p8 para 60
[33] BASS Course Committee minutes 4/12/98
[34] BASS Course Committee 11/6/99

The same issue came up at the previous meeting of the course committee;

The major issue about terms and conditions relate to recognition of the need for preparation time[35]

Another very FE-term is 'class contact hours' and this term and concern was raised about this at exam boards.[36] A further example of the FE culture being applied to UHI work is the use of the term "*handouts*" in student feedback.[37] Staff were still looking for an allowance of time at later meetings[38] and in later communications[39]. The notion that staff were "*overworked*" was raised by students on behalf of their student advisers[40].

Equivalence

The 'equivalence issue' came up in a number of ways but it was clearly a form of language that leant itself to the experiences of a networked partnership institutional model.   The fact that consistency of practice across colleges was noted in the first annual monitoring review (August 1999), which noted "*closer cooperation and consistency across colleges*" indicates the centrality of this discourse. The issue of equivalence of student experience did however recur and is referred to in external examiner reports, for example, "*issues of equity*" in student experience was noted though;

Every effort appears to be taken to standardise the experience of students[41]

However the issue recurred in several UHI forums over time. One academic partner college Principal noted;

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[35] BASS Course Committee 29/1/99
[36] BASS Exam Board minutes 11/2/00
[37] Annual Monitoring Report August 2000
[38] BASS Course Committee 22/8/02
[39] Memo from the Programme leader to the team on terms and conditions 11/11/02
[40] BASS Course Committee 14/1/01
[41] External Examiner Report EEF August 2005

> *On the network, we might say collegiate, not disparate…we have a*
> *great challenge on this point.* It was also noted that we have a *site*
> *consistency issue on teaching and learning*[42]

The 'problem' of the "*differential*" first year student experience was noted[43] as was the importance to the University Title objective of achieving "*equivalence*" of QA, data collection and curriculum development processes[44].

Network Learning

On the network learning theme a number of different terms have been used to describe what we might call 'network learning'. A UHI learning and teaching expert commented on the subject of what 'blended learning' means;

> *There is a problem of terminology and a need for a shared vision for*
> *discussion, planning and policy. There are various combinations of terms –*
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *Learning* | *flexible* |
> | *Delivery* | *blended* |
> | *Curriculum* | *networked* |
>
> *The teaching, learning and assessment strategy requires a review of*
> *vocabulary – this is both a symptom of progress, and a symptom of our*
> *problem*[45]

The term 'networked course' was used to describe the BASS course in 2002[46] but at that time this meant simply that more than one college was delivering the degree in their own localities. Later 'network learning' referred to modules being delivered from one partner colleges to students in others and with an emphasis sometimes on the perceived cost implications.[47] The term 'network learning' also became associated with concerns about student isolation, the 'management of student expectations' and differential first year experiences. Network learning also became closely associated with two other terms, 'sharing of modules' and 'blended learning',

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[42] UHI External Examiners Forum 1/9/03
[43] UHI Conference 'Exploring the First Year' Inverness 31/5/07
[44] UHI Programme Leader's Forum 1/6/07
[45] Senior member of staff, Ferguson College, at UHI Aviemore Conference 6-8 June 2005
[46] BASS Evaluation by the LEARN Reflective Practice Unit, 2001-02
[47] Programme Leader's Forum 1/6/07

these also being assumed to be closely related to efficiency.[48]   The emphasis on network learning as crucial to institutional growth and efficiency came though strongly at later UHI meetings[49] where there was a lot of discussion about 'bottlenecks' to growth and 'obstacles' to networking. The issue was considered to be our delivery model especially in HNC/D courses. The idea of 'network learning' as meaning efficient delivery from one partner college to others was established though how to achieve it in practice was still to be realised. What was noticeable was that these issues had come up before;

UHI needs to develop a policy to enable staff to develop the curriculum, time needs to be found for development; shared delivery is one way of approaching this.[50]

The ongoing difficulty of coming to a shared definition of what terms meant can be seen in several documents, for example;

There is confusion between Ferguson College and Chisholm College over what is meant by 'online' with a one-hour tutorial support[51]

Other college committees were noting similar problems;

A clear and agreed definition of blended learning should be made available and adhered to. Uneven and inconsistent provision across the network will result in student complaints of unfairness.[52]

Other discourses emerge from the documentation though less frequently stated. Examples would include:

1.   Enhancement. This term emerged more in recent years featuring at UHI staff conferences[53]

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[48] UHI Aviemore Conference 6-8 June 2005
[49] UHI Planning Event at Nairn 15/16 Jan 2008
[50] BASS Course Committee 11/6/99
[51] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 18/5/04
[52] Ferguson College Sub-Committee 12/12/06

2.   Rationalisation. The idea of sharing modules as a way of achieving efficiency was noted in conferences in 2007 and 2008 but had also come up back in 1999;

UHI needs to rationalise the range of modules to control proliferation and duplication[54]

3.   Alignment. A discussion about a draft LTAS led to a recognition that the need to achieve alignment between policy, strategy and external sources was discussed.[55]

4.   Confidence. Or rather the lack of confidence was noted in the context of programme teams being willing to take a more proactive approach to UHI policy making[56]

5.   Collegiality. UHI has usually described itself as a 'federal, collegial, institution though interestingly the term 'collegial' or 'collegiality' does not feature much in the documentation. The need to promote collegial working and to achieve a managerial/collegial balance was noted on occasion[57]

7.4   Recurrent Practices

The documentation produced 30 occasions when this moment seemed appropriately to capture the sentiment being expressed. One concern has been over equivalence of experience for students and compliance with standardised protocols, or rather, it is the lack of these things that is the concern;

A major issue is variable compliance; there are horribly familiar problems[58].

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[53] For example the 'First Year Conference' 31/5/07
[54] BASS Course Committee minutes 25/8/99
[55] UHI Learning and Teaching Committee minutes 26/4/07
[56] Aviemore Conference June 2005
[57] Course Leader's Forum 4/2/05
[58] Programme leader for another programme at the Arts & Social Studies Subject Network Development Day 17/5/07

Relationships between colleges have led to a number of recurring practices for the team. One of the external examiners noted;

Improved calibration of work between the two colleges, I would encourage the course team to talk through issues and write them down into discussion papers for the course committee[59]

External comment sometimes indicated that the course team was establishing successful recurrent practices;

I was impressed by the care taken to try and ensure comparability of treatment of students and of teaching and learning practice across the various sectors?[60]

That this was a recurring issue is reflected in the external report for the following year;

One might be concerned that students from different sites are working within different cultures and their being assessed within the context of the peculiar culture of the site that 'owns' any particular module[61]

There was however a general 'coming together' of practices across colleges

Increasingly, the planning, pacing, timing and delivery of units is being done in association with colleagues in the other two colleges.[62]

This report noted that the widening of the team led to greater expertise and achieves a more efficient division of labour. The best specific example of this was close collaboration on the HNC Graded Unit which was noted as the most time consuming but useful case,

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[59] External Examiner Report EEB 11/2/00
[60] External Examiner Report EED August 2003
[61] External Examiner Report EEF August 2004
[62] Annual Monitoring Report for HNC Social Sciences at Grant College 2003-04

becoming embedded in the culture, considerable progress has been made on cross-college assessment and moderation.[63]

External reports noted improvement in college cooperation;

Course management has improved as different institutions became more familiar with each other's practices[64]

Sometimes the documentation reveals what was *not* a recurring practice. A senior member of UHI staff noted that the LTAS was not widely used at validations[65] while earlier documentation showed no reference to teaching and learning policy at all, for example there is no reference to it in the 2000-01 documentation. The role of site leader was variable, it was not recognised by Ferguson College with no time being allocated for administrative tasks. The team had to ask college management to look at the allocation of time for student advising and workloads generally. [66]

The documentation also reveals areas where practices had to be learned and became recurring during the lifespan of the course. One external examiner noted in 1999 that his role was *"more closely involved than usual"* and detailed arrangements on moderation, inter-college committees etc was discussed. Similarly the team recognised its own lack of experience in certain areas, for example *"the staff are generally not experienced in mitigating circumstances"*[67] while another example referred to the team having to learn about second marking.[68] A further example was the request to tighten up on submission and re-submission of course work assessments.[69] Later the team expressed frustration at this 'advisory' role the externals were undertaking, having established routine practices. By 2005 the team was getting reports such as;

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[63] Annual Monitoring Report HNC Social Sciences 2004-05
[64] External Examiner Report EEE August 2006
[65] Senior member of UHI staff, Arts Faculty Conference Nairn 11/12 Sept 2007
[66] BASS Course Committee minutes 6/6/03
[67] Mock Exam Board minutes 18/2/99
[68] BASS Course Committee 11/6/99
[69] External Examiners Report EEE August 2004

On the Integrative Assessment, a very good example of cross-centre internal moderation…a generally excellent and commendable system is in place[70].

One recurrent practice was the constant request for more time for 'development' though in later years this became 'scholarship' and 'research'. The discussions towards introducing honours raised this. Staff noted that there had to be an 'investment' to free up time for reading and the ongoing work required for honours.[71] This was also recognised by the management who requested support from EO to fund such time also noting that UHI was getting less funding than other institutions.[72] The QAA Subject review the previous year had noted a similar point but also identified another recurring practice, the willingness of the team to engage in scholarship activity despite the allocation of time;

The reviewers felt that UHI was relying too much on the willingness of staff to undertake research without adequate time provision and should continue to address the issue of workloads[73].

The pragmatic response of the team was to identify objectives to be pursued on a gradual basis whenever resources and opportunity allowed;

The intention of BASS has been to adopt a gradualist and progressive approach to bringing all modules 'online' by September 2007.[74]

One aspect of scholarship that became a routine practice was the introduction and use of sabbaticals. The documentation makes reference to staff going on sabbaticals on a routine basis by 2003-04.[75]

It was interesting to note in the documentation references to matters which were not mentioned in the interviews. Interviewees were unable to recall the team discussing

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[70] SQA External Moderation Report 15/6/05
[71] BASS Course Committee minutes 22/8/02
[72] External Validation Report 19/20 May 2003
[73] QAA Subject Review (Sociology) p6 para 41 Dec 2002
[74] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 18/5/04
[75] Annual Monitoring Report 2003-04

the UHI LTAS however the relationship between this and the specifics of the course was considered in detail on occasions.[76]

A final comment in this section is a reference to the routinisation of reflective and evaluative practice which became established in the team;

> *The programme team has shown a spirit of reflection and self-examination in every aspect of the way in which assessment is conducted and overseen*[77]

7.5   Identities in Interaction.

27 items of data were collected from the documents relevant to this 'moment'. The most frequently recurring theme was to do with further education terms and conditions of employment, this coming up at least 12 times. The next most recurring theme was to do with the alignment between the academic partner colleges and UHI, coming up 6 times. Several other themes came up once or twice though some of these were related to the two main themes such as concerns about a 'university feeling'.

FE Terms and Conditions

Some references to this came up in course committee meetings in the first year of delivery. A discussion about the terms and conditions under which staff are delivering HE took place.[78] Later, another minute states;

> *The team wants arrangements for payment and hours for development need to be standardised and written so that we are not all working to personal understandings or in a state of confusion*[79].

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[76] BASS Course Committee 3/6/05
[77] External Examiner Report EEF August 2007
[78] BASS Course Committee minutes 29/1/99
[79] BASS Course Committee minutes 11/6/99

The staff development plan constructed before the start of the second year of delivery noted the 'overwhelming need' for 'time'. Finding the time to study was noted and reveals a very FE cultural approach.

The FE theme was still coming through in later years. The '24 hours teaching' situation came up in 2002:

> *The 24 hours is problematic for staff teaching on HE modules, as it allows for limited research and scholarship. It is a problem that has been noted by external examiners. The issue can be caught between college and UHI interests.*[80]

It was decided to raise this issue with college Principals and UHI Executive Office. It was noted that this raises the issue of Service Level Agreements between colleges and UHI. This minute was the first time that the college – UHI relationship was discussed so openly.

The FE dimension comes through in references to the remit of the programme leader, described as an "extremely wide remit".[81] It also came through in the first serious review of the programme, the QAA subject review of 2002-03. It was noted that although the review awarded two commendable judgements and one 'approved' judgement, 9 issues were raised. The report noted that the scholarship needed for teaching and the quality of the student learning experience were being inhibited by;

> *The stresses and pressures of multi-level teaching, staff workload and FE conditions of service*[82].

The FE factor came up very explicitly in the QAA report, talking about the typical involvement in FE work and FE contracts:

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[80] BASS Course Committee minutes 7/6/02
[81] Annual Monitoring Report August 2001
[82] QAA Subject Review (Sociology) Report Dec 2002 and Annual Monitoring Report August 2003.

FE conditions of service under which staff are employed have a constraining impact on their ability to fully undertake research and other scholarly activity in support of their teaching[83].

The FE terms and conditions issue had been a concern for the team in the lead-up to the QAA Subject Review and resulted in a special paper being written by the programme leader to try to provide a balanced view of this, that FE terms were not entirely negative, for example FE staff are not obliged to publish research findings. Also to note that it is not just an issue for this term;

This is not primarily a course issue, but a general UHI and even a FE sector one.[84]

The FE terms issue came up in other ways around the same time. The internal validation panel which looked at the re-validation of the BA in March 2003 referred to the FE contract in the context of resource problems[85] while an external examiner noted that staff were;

…working in an environment that is quite difficult in various ways.[86]

However he went on to say that the staff still gave the students a very good learning experience. This report noted two limitations of the course, the lack of an honours year, and that research was not embedded in the academic context.

This theme was still coming up some time later. Lecturer feedback referred to workloads *verging on the unrealistic …*(team members) *face multiple demands and pressures on their time* "[87]

It was noted that this needs to be addressed by UHI. References to scholarship as a terms and conditions issue were made in 2005[88] while particular issues concerning

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[83] QAA Subject Review (Sociology) Review Dec 2002 p7 para 51
[84] Memo from Programme leader to course team 11/11/02
[85] Internal Validation Report 10/11 March 2003
[86] External Examiner Report EEC Summer 2003
[87] Annual Monitoring Report HNC 2004-05

allocation of hours for supervision for honours dissertations were big debating points later still in 2007.[89]

It is interesting to note the frequency of occasions when members of staff looked to UHI to resolve particular issues. Issues arising in 1999 were still not resolved in 2007 for example aspects of FE conditions. It is reasonable to conclude with hindsight that the team overestimated the maturity of UHI itself. The team tended to expect UHI to be able to act on its own independently of the colleges.

One of the features revealed in these documents is the continuing use of FE practices. An early example was that staff are still to be seen asking for the college's own SQA internal moderation system to be applied to OUVS validated degree modules[90] though the fact that SQA courses were being run contributed to this. A dual system of assessment has continued to be run as seen by the appearance of SQA external moderator's reports in the course documentation[91]

College/UHI Identity

A theme that comes through in the documentation is the relationship between academic partner colleges and UHI. This emerged early on with the application of Chisholm College to join the degree team in 2000. Two senior staff at Chisholm noted concerns about "fitting in" to UHI student support priorities.[92] There were also periodic clashes between UHI and College priorities. UHI was offering support to staff to attend conferences while colleges were turning down requests to join professional associations.[93] The point about external examiners and the team discussing research and scholarship while the college is talking about tertiary teaching levels has been noted but was a frequent issue. This was summarised on one occasion[94];

> *It was noted that this issue often takes up time at meetings.*

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[88] BASS Course Committee minutes 3/6/05
[89] BASS/BACYS Joint Meeting for Honours 14/5/07
[90] BASS Course Committee minutes 11/6/99
[91] SQA External Moderator Report (Psychology) May 2005
[92] BASS Special Meeting with Chisholm College 30/3/00
[93] Ferguson College Sub-Committee minutes 23.2.00 and the case of the Political Studies Association
[94] BASS Course Committee 7/6/02

There were occasions when the expectation levels perhaps at both team and UHI levels were unreasonable and did not sufficiently consider the college factor. For example the UHI 'Criteria for the Development of Honours provision' paper[95] does not mention academic partner college managers.

One feature of FE colleges that has been evident to practitioners is the tendency to re-structure the management periodically. This had an impact on the team and UHI. For example it was noted that programme leaders and site leaders;

> *Have been directly affected, sometimes in a protracted manner, by re-structuring within their colleges.[96]*

The issue of hours for supervision of honours dissertations has been noted. It is interesting that staff perhaps 'gave away' or 'gave off' their FE identities by asking for management to specify a number of hours so that this could be set down on timetables.

One issue which suggested an identity interest was the notion of a 'university feeling'. Staff feedback raised this in 2000 when it was noted that disruptions during the session had been caused by re-structuring in both Grant and Ferguson and indicated a "*lack of a university feeling*."[97] There was also recognition that the student sense of identity was an issue;

> *More needs to be done to stimulate a sense of UHI-ness amongst students[98]*

This issued had been noted in 1999 when students themselves raised the matter of a '*lack of a UHI student identity*'[99].

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[95] UHI paper AC99-55 and noted in the BASS Course Committee minutes of 18/1/02
[96] BASS Critical Review February 2003
[97] Annual Monitoring Report August 2000
[98] BASS Critical Review February 2003
[99] Grant Sub-Committee minutes 29/10/99

This persistent issue remains with the QAA decision to award UHI Teaching Degree Awarding Powers in 2008 noting the need to achieve 'university-ness' for the next step, of university title to be reached.

Some other identity issues came out of the documentation. In 2007 a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy was re-drafted. One of the discussion points was seen as an identity issue, what sense is there of what a UHI course feels like and looks like?[100] After this length of time, this was still a matter for consideration. A different aspect of UHI received attention during 2005 when the Principal noted the need for UHI to retain its community base and to embrace its identity as a tertiary institution;

> *It would be disastrous to forget our roots, but we do have to sort out FE/HE links[101]*

One of the perceived strengths of the academic partner colleges is their origins and roots in their local communities.

One other aspect of identity to note here is the place of 'remote' students on the programme who take modules from one of the numerous learning centres around the region. There are reports indicating the good quality of support for such students[102] but at the same time a recognition of the challenges involved in doing this;

> *The institution needs to think very hard about the tensions and anomalies which remote and multi-site working inevitably introduce and to rise to the staff development challenge inherent[103]*

7.6   Power Relations

The theme that comes through by far the most in the 37 items noted is the relationship between the course team and the senior management in the academic

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[100] UHI Learning and Teaching Committee Minutes 26/4/07
[101] UHI Principal at the Aviemore Staff Conference 6-8 June 2005
[102] Annual Monitoring Report 2001-02
[103] External Examiner Report EEF August 2004

partners. 25 of the items touched on this. Several other external drivers were picked up though not dwelt on in the documentation.

I will deal with the 'other' issues first. The fundamental driver behind the UHI project is Highlands and Islands Enterprise which sees a university as crucial for regional development. The realisation of this potential requires full university title to be achieved.[104] One of the general comments arising from the first year of delivery in 1998-99 was that the course team probably over-estimated the capacity of UHI Executive Office to deal with issues. Much later it was noted that

> *UHI has lots of policies telling us what to do but no strategies to help it to actually happen[105].*

Nevertheless EO did issue directives and the course team responded. It was noticeable that annual staff development plans stopped being written when EO stopped asking for them. The underlying need for institutional efficiency was also recognised by the course team. The team noted *"compelling reasons"* that is, economic ones for moving to online delivery as early as 2002[106]

It was noted that the underlying nature of the project required the achievement of more,

> *UHI-ness…UHI is still too much of a loose voluntary partnership…we have got to get our horizontal structures right[107]*

Power relations tended to involve a circle of academic partner college – UHI Executive Office discussions. For example a UHI attempt to reduce weekly teaching hours to 16 depended on college management implementing it, but this in turn was dependant on UHI;

> *If UHI agrees to fund partner colleges to allow for these revisions[108]*

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[104] UHI Conference Aviemore 6-8 June 2008
[105] Programme Leader for another programme, ,Arts Faculty Conference 11/12 September 2007
[106] BASS Course Committee minutes 18/1/02
[107] UHI Principal at Course Leader's Forum 4/2/05

The documentation revealed a couple of other potential sources of power. The role of external examiners and the extent of the authority given to them was noted[109] and examples of external examiner recommendations (always accepted) were noted, for example the decision to appoint a third external examiner.[110] Another potential source of power might have been thought to be the role of the UHI's sponsoring institutions however this kind of relationship featured only once in the documentation when another university department was referred to a *"Godfather partner".*[111]

The items noted in this section tended to focus mostly on the relationship between the team and the college managers though sometimes this became a three-way relationship with the EO. The significance of this issue was made clear in the QAA ELIR report [112] where it was reported that QAA can see horizontal relationships developing across the UHI partnership however there is still a question about authority; any development has got to have buy-in and alignment. The sense that the team and the partner management teams and EO were all waiting on each other to do something emerges from the specific development of the Honours year.

> *Agreement to move to the delivery of honours will have to be agreed*
> *by management in individual colleges. UHI should centrally facilitate*
> *discussion with partners, on the move to delivery of the honours*
> *year.*[113]

There are several examples of the power of the college management including on the issue of honours. The first proposal to introduce an honours year was made at the re-validation of 2003. The internal validation panel decided not to support this and the team later concluded;

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[108] BASS Course Committee minutes 6/6/03 based on a statement by a PC manager
[109] Ferguson College Sub-Committee minutes 30/5/02
[110] External Examiner Report EEA August 2001
[111] Special Meeting; Psychology and HEA at Perth 18/11/05
[112] Reported to the Programme Leader's Forum 1/6/07
[113] Annual Monitoring Report 2005-06

The course team is of the view that such curriculum developments (honours) cannot take place without the constructive and involved participation of senior management and can only make limited progress on its own[114]

In this report the team also noted the need for "*institutional commitment*" to progress further. One outcome of this was that a Resource Plan was agreed with college Principals in the light of an external's comments about "*severe resource constraints.*" The clear message from this was that the team can only do so much[115]. There was progress on this issue but only in cooperation with college managers.[116] Although the honours year was validated in 2006 the management decided not to deliver it in 2006-07[117] and it was noted that the team would have to maintain momentum for the following year;

Responsibility lies with the team, but also with college managers.

There were other examples of the clear exercise of power by management. The Ferguson team were frustrated with staffing shortage problems in 2001 and complained about the "*tardiness*" of the management's response.[118] A more serious case was the decision in Chisholm College to continue to run the HNC/D in 2001-02 having previously agreed to move over to the BA1 and BA2.

The strategic and cost efficiency issues of running two separate courses in parallel resulted in a late decision to place all students on the HNC/D

This was also continued into 2002-03 following a decision in March 2002;

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[114] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[115] BASS Course Committee minutes 7/2/03
[116] Programme leader report to the Grant Social Science team 16/4/04
[117] Annual Monitoring Report 2005-06
[118] HNC/D Social Sciences Annual Report Ferguson College 2000-01

> *The course committee expressed concern that delaying the introduction of the revised HNC/D would not be in the best interests of the students[119]*

One of the college pressures was periodic re-structuring of the organisation. It was noted that;

> *Structural changes within the colleges have led to uncertainties and a cautious approach to changes in the curriculum[120]*

A major example of the power of management was the decision in 2003 to replace the BA1 by the HNC. There were indications of this in 2002;

> *It should be noted that Ferguson College want to make the HNC the basis of the BASS degree[121]*

The programme leader reported this decision to the other colleges[122] where it was noted that Ferguson College had made this decision in the previous few days.

The Internal Validation Report of 10/11 March 2003 contains more senior management input than any other documentary source looked at to this point. It was noted;

> *All managers said they were committed to achieving a reduction on pressure on staff. But this was difficult to address given the current FE environment. Class contact remains a major barrier in enabling staff time to undertake scholarship, research and course review.*

The panel felt that resource requirements were *"significant"* and *"could not be currently accrued"*.

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[119] Chisholm College HNC/D Meeting 20/21 March 2002
[120] BASS Course Committee 7/6/02
[121] Grant College Social Science Curriculum Review Nov 2002
[122] BASS Revalidation Review 17/11/02

During the preparations for the next re-validation in 2006 when honours was achieved, the course team had some;

> *Discussion about the idea of restoring the old BA1 though it was recognised that college managers are not going to support this[123]*

There are a few examples of the course team prevailing on certain issues. There was a case of management trying to reduce class contact but this was reversed after representations from the course team who pointed to student performance and equity issues.[124] A general observation from the documentation of 1998-2001 is that there was little if any management intervention at that stage. There was no particular strategic 'push' in any direction, more a system of 'benign neglect'. Interventions came later, in 2002-03. The team did make strong representations on issues which were largely in the hands of management;

> *The panel detected a tension relating to issues such as conditions of service, contractual issues and class contact time[125]*

One point the team learned was that raising resource issues at events such as validation could backfire – management could use such episodes to delay developments rather than to progress them faster. One effect of the internal validation event in March 2003 was for the Grant College Quality Committee to ask whether the existing degree was resourced properly never mind an honours year.[126] When Chisholm staff raised the issue of marking loads and the pool of expertise being "*spread thin*" the programme leader could only ask them to raise this with their own management.

Management had a general influence on the conduct of affairs. It was noted in 2000 that re-structurings at Ferguson and Grant had been disruptive for the team.[127] The

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[123] BASS Special Meeting at Birnam record 22/3/05
[124] Exam Board minutes 11/2/00
[125] Internal Validation Panel Report 10/11 March 2003
[126] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[127] Annual Monitoring Report 1999-2000

external examiner confirmed this perception, noting that some practical communication problems were;

> *caused by upheavals particularly at Grant College…staffing upheavals made this a difficult year*

But he commended the team's determination to

> *Protect the learning environment despite manifest difficulties[128]*

The ultimate power of the worker is the strike and there was in fact strike action at Ferguson in 2007 which it was feared might impact on marking. However in the event the staff, having been on strike for six days, still turned around the marking on time.[129]

A similar point was made in the context of Chisholm College where organisational issues raised questions about the introduction of the BA1 in 2001. Despite this the team noted;

> *Chisholm College was integrated into the team, good student results was a tribute to the integration achieved[130]*

This section concludes with a positive reference from the external examiner in the context of these re-structuring changes. He noted the value of a third Politics external examiner which would be important;

> *If its admirable start is to be maintained (and I hope it grows into an honours programme)…it is a very good course and team. I would like the senior management to hear this.[131]*

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[128] External Examiner Report August 2000 as reported in the Annual Monitoring Report August 2000
[129] Grant College Social Sciences Course Team meeting 16/5/07
[130] Annual Monitoring Report August 2001
[131] External Examiner Report EEA August 2001

7.7   Tacit Assumptions

This 'moment' is about assumptions that are shared collectively. It is about the process of normalisation and what is considered relevant.   The number of documentary items that seemed to relate to this moment was smaller than for most other moments – about 16. Perhaps the assumptions are spoken rather than written and therefore less prominent in the documentation.

The team did assume from a relatively early stage that the future direction of travel was towards online delivery. A paper on the subject was discussed by the course team and it was accepted that there was a need to move towards online delivery.[132] The same view was being expressed later;

> *Staff need to find opportunities to gain more confidence about the use*
> *of online material as part of a blended learning model[133]*

The team started to set out a detailed strategy for the implementation of an online approach incorporating weekly tutorials by 2005 in what had become established as a 'blended learning' model[134] while it was noted later still in 2007 that while the UHI LTAS was being drafted there was an acceptance of the term 'blended learning' but it was used without definition or explanation. The term was however being taken for granted and was routinely used.[135]

The assumption that blended learning was the way forward led to further debates about its impact in terms of fears about jobs, incentives to introduce it and the experience of students. It was noted that there is a confidence issue, staff were unsure about whether it could work successfully.[136]

It had been assumed for some years that somehow the curriculum had to be delivered around the geographical region. In 2001-02 discussions led to an agreement to form a 'faculty foundation course' where all students would take the same first year

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[132] BASS Course Committee paper SSCC01-11 15/6/01
[133] Annual Monitoring Report 2003-04
[134] BASS Course Committee minutes 3/6/05
[135] UHI Learning and Teaching Committee minutes 26/4/07
[136] UHI Planning Event at Nairn 15/16 January 2008

modules. Neither the term 'blended learning' nor 'network learning' was in use at the time but the concept was recognised.[137]

One issue that featured on occasion was that of identity and the lack of a sense of UHI-ness. This was raised early on by students.[138] The key to improvement for UHI was considered to be the student voice and excellent induction was taken to be an important way to address this though accepting that geography is a challenge. [139]

It is interesting to consider what the documentation was not covering. For example in the early years there are no references to research and scholarship, neither was there any reference to teaching and learning policies. There were lots of references to the FE features of the colleges and to fairly bureaucratic procedural and operational matters such as differences between college computer systems[140]. It is interesting that it tended to be assumed that funding requests went to EO rather than to partner colleges[141] and that the team felt it had to get back to the fundamentals of classroom practice on learning and teaching after having been somewhat dominated by bureaucratic requirements of validation, review and audit[142]

7.8   Rules of Appropriateness

This moment refers to what the team considers to be normal behaviour. One way of identifying this is to look at deviant behaviour. This translates into professional and social practices, expectations and sometimes codified requirements. Some 26 items in the documentation seemed to have some relevance to this moment, the most frequently occurring theme being to do with networking with 10 references. The next most frequently occurring references were to the FE factor (4).

The team did build up a set of professional expectations and practices to do with networking and the sharing of practices. When Chisholm College joined the team this was noted in their early inputs, they noted;

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[137] BASS Course Committee minutes 7/6/02
[138] Grant College Sub-Committee 29/10/99
[139] Arts Faculty Conference 11/12 Sept 2007 Dr Paddy Mayer, Vice-Principal
[140] External Examiner Report EEE 2003-04
[141] BASS Course Committee 30/6/06
[142] Grant College Social Science team minutes 24/8/06

…considerable support and lecture notes from (lecturer in another college) *to Chisholm College*[143]

The level of support and feedback given to students became a strong feature of the course team. One external examiner referred to staff support for students as;

…remarkable, the degree is under-resourced compared to the university sector…its success is dependent on the teaching staff's exceptional efforts[144]

The level of collegiate working among the staff was also noted by other externals;

There is a strong sense of shared responsibility among the staff…the team is clearly ready to begin work on development of an honours degree[145]

A later external noted the development of this support from the classroom to the online environment;

Developments in online learning in support of remote learners are a particularly positive example of …intervention[146]

The team tended to follow a consensual line on curriculum development. It was considered appropriate to aim for an honours level for example however there were examples of members of staff deviating from that line;

On honours, (lecturer) *noted a lot of structural issues here ref terms and conditions,* (lecturer) *argued against taking such proposals forward unless terms and conditions and recognition of teaching staff takes place.*[147]

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[143] BASS Course Committee minutes 4/5/01
[144] External Examiner Report EEA August 2002
[145] External Examiner Report EEC August 2002
[146] External Examiner Report EEF August 2006
[147] BASS Course Committee minutes 18/1/02 and Annual Monitoring Report 2001-02

Indeed during the 2002-03 session the documentary analysis reveals signs of division within the course team over honours and specifically over the resource infrastructure.

On another issue where there was a general consensus about the direction of travel, over online delivery, there were again signs of deviance. Chisholm College was less enthusiastic about online learning but did support it requesting staff development and opportunities;

> *To gain greater confidence in the use of online methods[148]*

The team generally related to each other well. It was fairly unusual for anyone to raise issues to do with personal conduct. However one example comes through in the documentation;

> *Issues of clarity of roles, responsibilities and staff conduct…I find it surprising that there is no code of conduct for how staff should relate and treat each other, especially to do with the relationship between tutors and student advisers[149]*

The norm of good working relationships did become established and is evident in one of the first programme leader reports to the Exam Board;

> *There are very positive benefits of working with colleagues in a partner institution; the design, development and delivery having all taken place quickly in 1998, a year of rapid development and on-the-job problem solving[150]*

An external examiner also commented on the norm of professional willingness to accept his recommendations.[151]

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[148] Annual Monitoring Report 2003-04
[149] BASS Course Committee minutes 9/1/04 input from PL
[150] Course Leader Report to the Exam Board July 1999
[151] Exam Board minutes 24/3/99

The FE factor comes up again with the team having to get by on an FE basis but with the aspiration towards HE terms being put forward at every opportunity. The team clearly wanted *"better conditions and facilities for lecturers"*[152] whilst;

> *I have great confidence in the present team...the team does however need full support to maintain this...but also in terms of appropriate teaching hours and staffing by which to deliver a university course*[153]

The term 'development time' is characteristic of FE colleges and was a request from the team not only in the early days but later as well.[154]

The team however became increasingly focused on HE terms such as scholarship and research, conferences and sabbaticals. Any refusal of management to support a conference request was strongly objected to at team events.[155]

An example of an area where deviant views were expressed was over the role of personal and professional capabilities (PPCs) and reflective logs in the early years. These were adopted by the course team in 1998 and were regarded as innovative however some lack of clarity about their operation emerged[156] and indeed some *"rancour"* over them was reported specifically over the use of learning logs in one module[157].

One of the areas that became a rule of appropriateness was standardisation of approach to a range of issues such as presentation of marks, marking schemes, setting papers, moderation, sending scripts to external examiners, referencing and anonymous marking.[158] Once established new attention moved to new practices but the issue of *"variable compliance"* and *"variable feedback"* still had to be raised some time later and across the institution.[159] The need for staff to address common

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[152] Annual Monitoring Report 1998-99
[153] External Examiner Report EEA Aug 2001
[154] BASS Course Committee minutes 7/2/03
[155] For example Ferguson College Sub-Committee 29/1/03
[156] BASS Course Committee minutes 19/3/99
[157] Ferguson College Sub-Committee minutes 23/2/00
[158] Special Meeting with EEA 25/3/99
[159] Arts and Social Studies Subject Network Review Development Day 17/5/07

approaches e.g. to feedback forms was being raised by external examiners in later years.[160]

7.9   Implicit Theories

This moment produced 19 items from the documentation which appeared to be relevant. This moment relates to learning theories and is to do with where our learning and teaching practices come from. They might be sociological in orientation or based on pedagogical perspectives. They may be rarely discussed yet they do shape the student and staff experience.

UHI produced a LTAS in 2003 with an update in 2007 however there was no indication of where the theoretical inputs to this process came from. The documentation from the early years of the course team does not make any reference at all to the UHI teaching and learning policy. One of the first major appearances of learning and teaching appears in 2005[161] and the first reference to the course team looking at the UHI LTAS was the next team meeting.[162]

The original design of the BA degree was influenced by the Dearing and Garrick Reports whose recommendations matched the strengths that the course team had at the time.

> *The interdisciplinary approach also represented a way of using the strengths of the staff involved*[163]

This suggested a pragmatic rather than a theoretical approach legitimised by major government reports at the time.

The idea of network learning features in the documentation. An early course committee noted;

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[160] External Examiner Reports EEG 2008 and 2009
[161] BASS Course Committee minutes section 5.2 10/1/05
[162] BASS Special Meeting at Birnam 22/3/05
[163] QAA Subject Review (Sociology) Dec 2002 p3 para 19

Students asked for more choice which stimulated discussion about network delivery and the physical and pedagogical limitations of video-conference[164]

The network theme was developed when the course team looked at the idea of online delivery but acknowledged the need for what it called a "*mixed mode of delivery*", that is, online materials with tutorial support.[165] At this time the teaching model was a system of 'parallel delivery' with tutors in each college teaching the same modules in conventional classes. This was described in the BASS Critical Review of February 2003. The practicalities of sharing modules on a network module was first referred to in 2003 when references can be found to BASS sharing with another course.[166] Most modules were still "*conventionally delivered*" in 2003-04 but the move towards online delivery was clear.[167] A lot of the discussion at this time reflected concerns about the maintenance of the integrity of modules where they are being used across sites in different programmes.[168] Pedagogically the degree was designed for parallel delivery and had to be readjusted later to an online scenario. The external examiner summarised the situation in 2001,

The degree is not designed for remote learners[169]

The theoretical underpinning of the degree in 1998 was inter-disciplinarity with an emphasis on personal and professional capabilities. The core modules in particular were designed to achieve both of these features though whether it did was a matter of discussion, this anticipating the move towards a more discipline-based degree in 2003.[170] An aspiration for the team was to develop honours at some point[171] but it was recognised that the only practicable way of doing this was to deliver fully networked, ie, online modules. [172] The PPCs became a matter of controversy within

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[164] BASS Course Committee minutes 30/11/99
[165] BASS Course Committee minutes 15/6/01
[166] BASS Course Committee minutes 22/8/03
[167] BASS Delivery Plan for 2003-04
[168] External Examiner Report EEF August 2004
[169] External Examiner Report EEA August 2001
[170] BASS Course Committee 11/6/99
[171] As stated in the Validation Documentation (AD2) August 1998
[172] BASS Course Committee minutes 11/6/99

the team and the underlying theoretical basis of them was much discussed. For example one external examiner noted;

Perhaps marks are being given for eloquence[173]

Another aspect of the PPCs that gave the team some difficulty was the assessment of group work.[174] These remained controversial until largely replaced by the QAA employability and transferable skills agenda in 2003, this being anticipated in team discussions during the preceding years.[175]

7.10 The Trowler Typology

Trowler's typology consists of four quadrants. The documentary analysis revealed as many as 70 references which can be categorised in the reconstruction section but far fewer in the other three sections especially the 'sinking' and 'swimming' sections. This perhaps indicates the nature of the experience of the course team as practitioners.

7.11 Sinking

The documentation gives five examples of this kind of experience though the limited number indicates that this was not the prevailing experience. The five examples are;

1. One early attempt to teach a module (Computer Information Systems in the Social Sciences) was unsuccessful and was dropped. Later the module was dropped from the programme;

    The open approach in Ferguson College did not work – conventional teaching had to be brought in.[176]

2. Another experiment at Ferguson to incorporate BA and HNC students in the same teaching classes was also dropped.

    Some issues have arisen over the decision to integrate HN students with the BA at Ferguson College[177]

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[173] External Examiner Report EEB August 1999
[174] Grant College Sub-Committee minutes 25/11/99
[175] For example BASS Course Committee minutes 18/1/02
[176] Mock Exam Board 18/2/99
[177] Student feedback at the BASS Course Committee 10/10/00

3. The outcome of the Internal Validation panel in March 2003 to halt progress on the honours development left the team feeling demoralised and momentarily the future of the BA seemed in doubt.

   It is clear that further curriculum progress requires some investment[178]

   The panel not only rejected the honours proposal but seemed to call into question the resource base of the existing general degree;

   Our resources are just good enough and no more[179]

4. Periodically the team became very anxious about marking loads and work loads generally which occasionally left individuals feeling very pressured.

   This issue needs to be urgently addressed by UHI[180]

5. The fifth example is not so much a significant problem as a reflection of how long it took for an issue to receive attention. There was a reference in 2005 to the course team contributing to the "*evolution*" of the UHI LTAS. This indicates that the LTAS was moving up the priority list but some two years after the first strategy was published.[181]

7.12 Swimming

A number of references indicate that despite the attention to 'issues' there was in fact a good deal of success in the team's professional performance. Six examples can be given;

1. It was noted at the end of the first year that the staff performed well despite multiple demands and limited time[182]

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[178] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[179] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[180] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 18/5/04
[181] BASS Course Committee minutes 3/6/05
[182] Course leader Report to BASS Course Committee 11/6/99

2. It is noticeable that the documentation in the first two years relates to routine addressing of curriculum and assessment issues and not to problems which could not be dealt with

3. External examiners were consistently positive, an example from the 2000-01 session being;

   Really significant progress has been made over the last two years…a really successful third year of delivery, overall the team have done a splendid job, the team is working extremely hard and achieving a level of performance for its students than other universities with more resources with which to achieve[183]

   However some positive reassurance given on occasion is not the same thing as professional practice day to day.

4. External examiners are asked to make concluding remarks at the end of their term and one example is, after four years;

   In that time, from a rushed start, the course has expanded in range, tested and consolidated its procedures, fine-tuned its content and assessment, and built up experience. Given the severe resource constraints, this achievement is really impressive, a tribute to the excellent staff and a credit to UHI. The course is now ready to move towards an honours degree[184]

5. The team progressed its objective of putting modules online and funds were secured regularly to achieve this[185]

6. A representative later external examiner report noted;

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[183] External Examiner EEA Aug 2001
[184] External Examiner Report EEA Aug 2002
[185] EO Letter confirming funding for three modules 12/1/06

> *No serious anxieties…true to say that progress is being made with some of the organisational challenges presented by a demanding programme presented to a highly diverse group of students across several campuses and using a range of different media[186]*

7.13 Coping

A larger number of references can be categorised under this heading, some 21. There are 8 references clearly focused on coping with some specified issue. Some examples can be given.

1. One problem the team confronted was student group work;

   > *Serious consideration is to be given to making reflective approaches and group assessment formative rather than summative[187]*

2. An early recommendation was the use of marking schemes designed to ease cross-college marking though they were only fully used later when recommended by the external examiner[188]

3. It was noted in 2000 that students who had entered third year from the HND had found the transition difficult;

   > *As a group their achievement was lower than would be expected from a conventional cohort…I strongly recommend a new procedure for setting and moderating assessments[189]*

4. A fairly big coping issue related to workloads. It was noted that the team could cope because of a combination of goodwill and low student numbers but that this would become a big issue later.[190] This point was addressed by an external examiner;

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[186] External Examiner Report EEF Aug 2007
[187] Grant College Sub-Committee 31/5/99
[188] BASS Course Committee 30/9/98
[189] External Examiner Report EEA Aug 2000
[190] BASS Course Committee minutes 14/11/01

> *An exceptionally heavy year for staff…this has raised concerns about*
> *workload and finding space for the research/scholarship agenda…after*
> *several years of hard labour for the team there is a need for an*
> *institutional commitment to progress this area further.[191]*

This issue had come up during the 2002-03 session;

> *The main continuing issue is finding time for scholarship activities and the*
> *enhancement of research[192]*

The issue was repeated with the added dimension of team involvement in other UHI degree programmes;

> *Workload is verging on the unrealistic…multiple demands and pressures*
> *due to involvement in other courses[193]*

5. The beginnings of the degree called for a lot of coping with short time scales and new experiences;

> *Team members had to go into delivery mode very quickly and in the*
> *context of various other aspects of their work[194]*

The problem of constantly working to short timescales and concern about over-dependence on key staff as well as the problem of line management relationships (or lack of them) between the course leader and staff in other colleges were raised at an early stage[195]

6. An issue several staff found difficult to deal with was the UHI policy on PPCs and the attendant reflective journals and learning logs.[196]

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[191] External Examiner Report EEC Aug 2003
[192] BASS Critical Review Feb 2003
[193] Annual Monitoring Report HNC Social Sciences 2004-05
[194] Mock Exam Board 18/2/99
[195] BASS Course Committee minutes 29/1/99
[196] Annual Monitoring Report 1999-2000

7. The context provided by colleges which had periodic financial problems and organisational structure changes,

Has forced staff to work hard to compensate for other difficulties[197]

It was such college contingencies that led to the decision of Chisholm College management to retain the HNC/D beyond the original plan.[198] It wasn't until September 2004 that the BA2 was delivered for the first time in Chisholm College having joined the programme in 2000.[199]

8. The honours issue was addressed by the External Validation panel in May 2003. Senior management again reiterated their concerns about honours. The team had to persevere with their aspirations and look to a longer time scale.[200] The External panel expressed surprise that the Internal panel had rejected honours but the fact remained that this represented a knock-back for the team[201]

9. The team had to deal with the question of how to make the course more efficient which meant how to offer the course to the full network. It was noted in 2004 that the team would adopt the COLEG open learning materials being developed nationally for the HNC and use them to offer the HNC to the network as from September 2005.[202] It was also decided to adopt a *"gradualist approach"* to the development of modules for online delivery – the BA2 to be fully on line in 2006 and the BA3 in 2007.[203] This paper also noted the need to be careful about what the current students had signed up for. It was noted that Chisholm College was less enthusiastic about online delivery at this time.[204]

7.14   Reconstruction

There were some 70 items relating to this theme in the documentation, by far the largest. A matrix was completed showing a number of themes:

[197] Annual Monitoring Report 2001-02
[198] Chisholm College HNC/D Annual Monitoring Report 2001-02
[199] Chisholm College Sub-Committee 18/5/04
[200] External Validation Report 19/20 May 2003
[201] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[202] Grant College Curriculum Review March 2004
[203] BASS Discussion paper for the Course Committee 27/4/04
[204] Annual Monitoring Report 2003-04

- Matters the team could deal with

- Matters the team could not deal with

- Matters where the team could make some contribution

These were set alongside issues that arose – assessment issues, the Honours issue, the HNC-plus and the online HNC issues, specific modules, teaching and learning strategy, and the move to online learning. This was used as an organising device to make some sense of the volume of documentary evidence available. The following is a description of what emerged and not a search for any particular perspective.

Assessment   At least 20 items concerned the broad theme of assessment issues, perhaps reflecting the fact that on this theme the team did have scope for decision making. The following examples can be noted;

1. The team very early in the delivery of the programme decided to set up a working group to look at marking schemes, specifically in the context of the module *Enquiry Skills* which *"hadn't really worked'*. It was written for another degree and its adoption by BASS had proved harder than first thought.[205]

2. An early example of a demarcation line being drawn in favour of the team was the view that assessment thresholds were a matter for the team

   I think it is a matter which belongs entirely to the team[206]

3. After one year of delivery it was decided to propose to make reflective journals optional[207]

4. Another early team decision was to introduce a student handbook[208]

5. Student group work was identified as an issue needing the attention of a working group[209] and the idea of the individual contribution to group work was considered[210]

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[205] BASS Course Committee minutes 19/3/99
[206] Memo from Exam Board Chair 2/8/99
[207] Annual Monitoring Report 1998-99
[208] BASS Moderation Meeting minutes 31/8/99

6. The use of reflective journals and learning logs was put under review while other assessment matters concerning severe penalties for late submissions were passed 'up the line'[211]

7. Periodic changes to assessment weightings and requirements were made in response to staff and student feedback.[212]

Honours

1. The team regularly discussed honours during 2001-02 and looked at a 'phased introduction' by which they meant that some disciplines could go forward to honours quicker than others.[213] However some staff did express concern about the workload issues to the extent that they felt honours could not go ahead

2. The prevailing view on honours for some time was about phasing in the honours level discipline by discipline;

> *The issue of honours would almost certainly have to be phased in, with a possible 2006 start.[214]*

3. The external validation panel in May 2003 wanted to encourage the team to pursue honours and to maintain momentum towards this but noted the internal validation panel's view that;

> *Resources and aspirations are not aligned[215]*

4. The course team did maintain momentum, devising a resources plan and meeting with management, always on the initiative of the team and/or programme leader.[216]

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[209] Grant College Sub-Committee minutes 25/11/99
[210] Exam Board minutes 16/2/01
[211] Exam Board minutes 29/6/01
[212] External Examiner Report EEE Aug 2006
[213] Annual Monitoring Report 2001-02
[214] BASS Course Committee minutes 22/8/02
[215] BASS External validation Report 19/20 May 2003
[216] Grant College Social Sciences team meeting – report from the Programme Leader

5. One consequence of this situation was for the course team to engage more closely with another UHI team also engaged in an honours development. It was decided that the two courses would have to share modules and start delivery at the same time.[217]

HNC

1. There was a decision to adopt the new version of the HNC programme as from 2003 and to work with UHI partner colleges in delivering it.[218]

2. The decision to adopt the HNC-plus approach to the degree originated as a unilateral decision by the management at Ferguson College.[219] The programme leader wrote a discussion paper in response to this and set out options for the team, HNC-plus, HND-plus, retain BA1 for some colleges, review the 'curriculum architecture', and phased introduction of honours.[220]

3. The team noted that on working together on the HNC, each college nevertheless had to maintain its own internal verification system. In practice the team standardised its own policies and protocols including network verification.[221]

4. The team had to grapple with the transition from HNC to BA2 which was noted as "*problematic*" [222]

Modules

1. The use of modules originating in other courses was noted early on as a source of difficulty;

> *The importation of modules designed for other courses has been problematic*[223]

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[217] BASS Course Committee minutes 30/5/06 and Joint BASS/BACYS Honours meeting Jan 2006
[218] Grant College Social Sciences Team minutes 21/8/02
[219] Annual Monitoring Report 2002-03
[220] BASS Revalidation Review paper by the Programme Leader 12/11/02
[221] BASS Development Day meeting at Perth Oct 2003
[222] Annual Monitoring Report 2005-06
[223] Grant College Sub-Committee minutes 31/5/99

2. One of the earliest examples of the course team taking action was in the subject of modules. The *Introduction to Economics* module was considered to be too heavy. The course team noted that the content was 'indicative' and so could be 'lightened' whereas the learning outcomes had to be retained.[224]

3. Other module changes included the team view that *Learning in the Social Sciences* needed to be replaced, and that changes would be needed to *Research Methods 1* and *Research Methods 2* in anticipation of the introduction of the replacement module, *Inter-disciplinary Project*[225]

4. Course committee meetings regularly involved discussions about changes to modules, the overall assessment strategy and the role of study skills[226]

5. Course team members started to contribute discussion papers for the course team[227]

6. The team considered 're-levelling' two modules, *Development Issues in the Highlands and Islands* and *The Highlands and Islands in the Contemporary North Atlantic Rim.* The team also decided to use the Business Studies version of the *Introduction to Economics* module. There were examples of actions concerning module content, assessment packages and assessment weightings.[228]

7. A review of the *Beliefs, Culture and Community* module took place and an earlier decision to use the Business Studies version of *Introduction to Economics* was reversed in 2002.[229]

8. At a special meeting in 2005 it was decided to replace a core module, *Empowering Communities,* and to adopt two research-based modules at each level.[230]

Teaching and Learning Strategies

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[224] BASS Course Committee 4/12/98
[225] BASS Course Committee 1/2/00
[226] Grant College Sub-Committee 27/1/00
[227] BASS Course Committee – Paper on Plagiarism
[228] BASS Course Committee 15/1/01
[229] BASS Course Committee 21/3/02
[230] BASS Special Meeting at Birnam 22/3/05

1. One of Chisholm College's inputs in their first year of involvement in the team was to comment that there was too much emphasis on research methodology in course design at the expense of discrete academic disciplines.[231] Interestingly this is the way the course was re-designed and re-validated in 2003.

2. The first reference found in the documentation to the course team looking at the design of the UHI LTAS came in 2004 just after it had been introduced.[232]

3. The team recorded a decision to move decisively towards online delivery in 2004 and also noted some discussion about whether the team should adopt a purely online or a VC-based delivery model.[233]

4. The team had to grapple with the consequences of the HNC-plus decision as is recorded here;

   The team gave considerable thought to the relationship between online teaching and class-based teaching at two special meetings, the team agreed that since the HNC is entirely class-based, a wholesale move to online approaches in BA2 would potentially cause retention and progression problems. Hence the decision to embrace the blended learning concept by retaining a tutorial element.[234]

This approach was considered to be consistent with UHI LTAS.[235]

5. The team had a clear view of its way forward by 2005, to get the course delivered around the region by using COLEG open learning materials for the HNC and online modules for the BA, preferably in line with the video-conference-based blended approach used by some teams. This was considered to be consistent with the UHI blended learning approach.[236]

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[231] Chisholm College Sub-Committee minutes 29/30 May 2001
[232] BASS Course Committee minutes 9/1/04
[233] BASS Discussion Paper 27/4/04
[234] Annual Monitoring Report 2004-05. The two special meetings took place at Birnam and Dalwhinnie in March and May of 2005.
[235] BASS Course Committee minutes 3/6/05
[236] BASS Course Committee 22/8/05

6. The team teaching and learning strategy was set out in the validation documentation for 2006 which noted the diminishing tutorial time as students moved up from BA2 – BA4, noted the shared modules with another course at level 4 and noted the intention to use video-conference tutorials for L4 Politics modules, though this never happened.[237]

7. One of the key tools in the area of teaching and learning strategy is the LTAS. The process of updating this led to the statement that the previous version of 2003 was not widely used or owned. The 'priority goals' were "*not widely owned.*"[238]

Online Learning

1. The economic imperatives behind moving to online learning were recognised by the team during 2002. Concern was expressed about the viability of the programme in Perth unless the team commits to online delivery. The team agreed to pursue this.[239]

Issues the course team could not deal with

1. An example is the decision of Chisholm College management to retain the HNC/D in 2001-02[240]

2. It was noted in 2002 that despite the decisions to pursue online delivery and the fact that most of the BA1 modules were available for online delivery, that Ferguson College management appeared to plan to switch to the HNC for the first year. The team noted the contradiction between its strategy and the management line;

> *Any prospect of widening access to the BASS around the network means doing it online.*[241]

3. Coming through in the documentation in 2002-03 is the terms and conditions issue. In earlier years staff seemed to be happy to be able to move away from the SQA

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[237] BA (Hons) Social Sciences: A Quick Guide March 2006
[238] UHI Learning and Teaching Committee 26/4/07
[239] BASS Course Committee minutes 18/1/02
[240] Letter of 24/11/99 from Chisholm College
[241] Grant College Social Science Curriculum Review Nov 2002

system and this was one advantage of taking on the OUVS/UHI degree but by 2003 the terms and conditions were coming to the fore.

4. The team took the view in the summer of 2003 that some onus now lay with management to address resource questions relating to the development of honours;

> *There is a clear signal here to college and UHI institutional levels of management. The team is doing what it can and cannot progress in these directions on its own.*[242]

5. The team continued to grapple with terms and conditions issues. An example was the allocation of timetabled hours to dissertation supervision. A review of the sector tried to establish how this works. The team sought 15 hours per student from the management and got an agreement for 12.[243]

Issues the course team could deal with

1. The earliest example in the documentation of a comprehensive review of issues the team could act on, or make representations about, was found in 2001 at the end of the third year of delivery.[244] This paper recorded a decision to go for re-validation a year earlier than necessary, in 2002-03. It noted the idea of an online first year CertHE course which would be delivered online using a *"mixed mode of delivery"* to reach a wider geographical network. This paper also noted a number of issues that kept coming up which the team could not deal with independently, the sharing of modules with another course, research and scholarship for staff, and preparations for honours level development.

2. During 2001-02 the team regularly discussed the future re-validation and became increasingly critical and self-reflective. Some staff did express concerns about workload.

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[242] Programme Leader response to external examiners August 2003
[243] BASS/BACYS Joint Meeting on Honours 30/4/07
[244] BASS Course Committee Paper SSCC01-11 15/6/01

3. The decision to go ahead with a re-validation a year early was recorded in June 2002 and that this was to include honours proposals for Sociology and Psychology.[245] It was noted;

    > *Re-validation is an opportunity to seriously consider the fundamental nature of the architecture of the degree.*

4. The team made some decisions in late 2002 and early 2003 relating to the move from an inter-disciplinary to a discipline-based approach for the overall course design, switching existing core modules to optional, and introducing a new core module. It was also noted that one college might retain the BA1 with the other two going over to the HNC-plus[246]

5. UHI Regulations did not prescribe assessment tariffs until 2008-09. Until then;

    > *The amount of work required of the students is within the discretion of the course team.[247]*

6. The team adopted a 'rolling induction' programme in 2006 to deal with the transition issues arising from HNC students coming on to online modules.[248]

External Confirmation of Team-led changes

A number of examples can be given to indicate support for this;

1. An external examiner felt that "*valuable steps*" had been taken in response to the points he raised in the first year.[249]

2. A similar point was made by the other external:

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[245] BASS Course Committee minutes 7/6/02
[246] Special Meeting notes 13/12/02 referred to in BASS Course Committee minutes 7/2/03
[247] QAA Subject Review report Dec 2002 p4 para 32
[248] BASS Course Committee minutes 21/8/06
[249] External Examiner Report EEA Aug 2000

> *Staff are keen to identify improvements. I have been asked to approve significant changes. Staff are responsive and enthusiastic. They respond to advice and are keen to implement improvements.[250]*

3. In 2001 it was noted that module teams are meeting more frequently and are becoming more assertive.[251] It was also noted that;

> *A degree of collaboration and self-confidence in the team is very evident.[252]*

The same report talked about *"re-tuning"* assessment weightings.

4. The other external backed this view:

> *The curriculum is well designed and under constant review and amendment.[253]*

5. In 2002 we hear that modules have been *"sensibly refined"*[254]

<u>Issues the course team could contribute to</u>

1. The first staff development plan for the team noted;

> *Consideration is needed for the concept of study leave[255]*

UHI was able to adopt a sabbatical policy later supported by HIE. A later staff development plan specified that all staff were to have online teaching and learning training by 2002.[256]

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[250] External Examiner Report EEB Aug 2000
[251] Annual Monitoring Report 24/8/01
[252] External Examiner Report EEA Aug 2001
[253] External Examiner EEB Aug 2001
[254] External Examiner Report EEA 2002
[255] Course Staff Development Plan agreed at Course Committee 25/8/99
[256] Staff Development Plan 24/8/01

1. A number of issues were coming up at course committee which eventually found their way into the UHI Academic Regulations[257]

2. An issue which was passed on to the course team to consider was English as a Foreign Language[258]

3. The team started to look at developing the disciplines further with Psychology noted as a future development in its own right[259]. Funding for a psychology degree was secured in 2008.

4. The team contributed to the production of a UHI ethics policy and to an extended availability of the SPSS package[260]

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[257] BASS Course Committee minutes 8/6/00
[258] Exam Board minutes 11/2/00
[259] Psychology Moderation Meeting 12/6/01
[260] Annual Monitoring Report HNC August 2004. These issues had been raised at the external validation in May 2003

Chapter 8 - Discussion

8.1 Introduction to the Discussion

In this section I will use the findings of both the interview and the documentary data analysis to address the questions set in chapter 1. These questions are:

1. Using the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime', what are the cultural characteristics of a programme team which has delivered an undergraduate degree for the past 11 years in the UHI Millennium Institute?

2. how has this programme team responded to the UHI teaching and learning policy?

3. what are the implications of this case study for Trowler's sociocultural theory as elaborated by social practice theory and the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime?

I will address the first question in sections 8.2 to 8.9 of this chapter. Each section deals with one of the eight moments Trowler and Cooper (2002) used to define the concept of the teaching and learning regime. I will address question 2 in sections 8.9 to 8.13 which deal with the four component parts of the typology of responses by academics to change proposed by Trowler (1998). I will address question 3 in the process of these sections since the teaching and learning regime and the typology are based on a socio-cultural analysis, in particular social practice theory, and in some summary comments at the end of this chapter in section 8.14. I will consider some features of the research methodology in section 8.15.

The headings of the sections in this chapter are phrases used either by interviewees or found in the documentation and have relevance to the theme being discussed. Where my own status as an insider researcher, my background knowledge of the case, my access to documentation, and the opportunity to do 'close-up' research has informed my thinking and observations, I have tried to make that clear.   To avoid repetition I have not included quotations again already used in chapters 6 and 7. I have tried to

capture the main outcomes of the data analysis here in relation to the questions and the underling theoretical approach.

8.2 "…the elephant in the room…"

The first moment, codes of signification, refers to matters which raise emotional feelings among the workgroup, the BA Social Sciences programme team, and which are given status and standing collectively. Words and practices which signify positive or negative perceptions, opportunities or threats to autonomy may be regarded as codes of signification.

The documentary evidence suggests that there were three main themes relevant to this 'moment'. The interview data confirms all three and adds a fourth and touches on a fifth. The three shared themes were firstly and most importantly, the FE terms and conditions that staff are employed under. The documentation has references to words such as 'development time', 'preparation time' and the need for less 'contact time' than the '24 hours' teaching per week which is part of the requirements of the FE contract. The team showed 'major concerns' about this and 'strongly' requested action from 'the top'. Words such as 'overwhelmed' and 'oppressive' feature in the interview data. This issue came up particularly in the early years of the team's existence but it was still appearing later, in 2007. The documentation indicates that the team tended to expect UHI Executive Office to resolve this issue. This may be an example of the "attribution of certainty" (Taylor 1999:143), the assumption that UHI was in a stronger position at the time than it actually was. In the later years, proposals to increase the amount of 'networked online learning' were justified on the grounds that they would 'free up time' for scholarship and research. Another feature that came through was the competing pressures of both FE and HE in the same colleges. The notion that the interests of FE and HE staff are different clearly came through in the data. The idea that FE might have been in some sense disadvantaged by the development of HE was noted though with no clear agreement that this was the case.

The second theme is the 'sharing' of modules across the team. This is a reference to members of staff in different colleges working together on modules, sharing not only the same materials and assessment instruments, but also delivering modules from one college to students in others. There were both positive and negative signifiers here.

The development of an academic community, the chance to work with colleagues in other colleges, to be part of a bigger team and to have more of an 'academic community', to pool expertise and create a sense of 'UHI-ness' were positive features welcomed by the team. Interviews indicated that staff really appreciated the opportunity to work with colleagues in other colleges and noted the advantages of a large multi-disciplinary team over smaller discipline-based teams. There were clear social practice elements to these features. The negative emotions came with fears of job loss and the sense that there are no incentives to 'share'. It was also clear that support for policy directions was influenced by the calculation that it would be good for jobs and careers.

The third theme is to do with the relationships between the colleges and between colleges and the UHI Executive Office. 'Disparities' were noted by students in the first two years when there were perceived differences in student performance between colleges suggesting preferences by markers. The team worked to overcome this and it was never raised again suggesting that this fear was dissipated. The bigger aspect of this is the relationship between the colleges and UHI. Staff found themselves working in one sense on UHI programmes and subject to UHI quality controls, but still employed by the colleges. The notion of 'serving two masters' is the elephant in the room. A major factor in the lives of team members was having to accommodate what they sometimes saw as competing and contradictory pressures. Interview data indicated that staff were 'acutely' aware of a potential 'them and us' situation which was 'frustrating' and a source of 'tension'. Team members clearly noticed that college managers and UHI were not necessarily singing from the hymn sheet in unison or in harmony. This was seen as 'problematic' and something that needed to be 'disentangled'. Some team members regarded UHI as a distant entity and perhaps 'remote' from their day to day experiences.

The fourth theme that came through much more clearly in the interviews than in the documentation was a strong connection with the mission of UHI. Interviewees spoke about feeling 'passionate' about the mission of UHI, about access and widening participation in the region. Although the 'elaborate machine' of the UHI in itself did not necessarily inspire commitment, the mission of taking HE to the region clearly did. Perhaps for this reason interviewees were able to identify what they saw as 'obstacles'

and 'barriers' to the faster development of UHI. One of these was noted as the 'protectionism' of some college managers. It was noticeable that such words with their negative connotations were used to refer to anything which seemed to make the UHI mission harder to achieve.

A number of other issues raised emotions though were much less uniformly raised in the data. The idea of 'blended learning' first appears in the documentation in 2004 and was seen as being 'bandied about'. Changes in college management structures were seen as 'upheavals' as far as their impact on the BA Social Sciences was concerned and was certainly a source of difficulty for staff who ended up uncertain about jobs and roles, or who had changed roles or multiple roles. The role of external examiners was generally regarded as developmental and helpful but a couple of team members started to note that they should not be 'telling' the team what to do. This was an indication of the growing sense of identity with the team across the network, that even external examiners could and should be challenged. One other positive point raised by an interviewee was the sense that UHI had led to an 'up-skilling' for the staff involved which confirms the view that Trowler and others take, that implementing policy can lead to re-professionalisation and not to a decline in standing.

On words that signify emotions it can be noted that Taylor (2002) talked about 'glorifying' words. It has to be said that the most striking words found in the data tended to be somewhat negative ones such as 'rumpus', 'grief' and 'rancour'. On the advantages of network delivery and blended learning there was a more modest use of words such as 'sharing' and 'pragmatic' indicating that whist the direction of travel indicated in the LTAS is broadly being worked with, it is out of pragmatic reasons of efficiency. It is not exiting or innovative but necessary.

8.3 "…a problem with terminology "

The second moment is the idea of discursive repertoires, the way words are used to represent dominant or multiple discourses, with varying positive or negative connotations. The use of key words or 'in-words' can be seen as sources of legitimacy and authority. Again the data indicates three main themes arising with a number of other points being made.

The first theme is the prevalence of the FE discourse. The language of the FE college tended to dominate the early years of the programme. The terms already noted in section 8.2 reflect a dominant FE mindset. Staff were much more likely to talk about 'development time' than 'scholarship' in the early years, from 1998 to around 2003/4. Later, terms such as 'scholarship', 'research-teaching links' and 'sabbaticals' did enter the language but only several years in to the time span being covered. This reflects perhaps a move from an FE discourse to a combined FE/HE discourse. The data also contains references to teaching materials as 'handouts' and other references to such as 'terms and conditions' and 'timetables' all of which point to a managerial and hierarchical FE culture. Interview data did confirm this and noted the tensions involved in serving both college employers and UHI systems. This probably forms an aspect of a managerial discourse.

A second discourse to emerge is to do with equivalence, a particular concept of relevance to the UHI case where there are networks of academic partner colleges. Both positive and negative uses of words can be found. Staff spoke about 'cooperation' and 'collaboration' invariably in a positive sense noting for example the benefits to one college of receiving materials from a colleague in another. They also commented on the need for students to have the same or 'equivalent' student experience in different partner colleges, this requiring standardisation of various practices such as the moderation of assessment instruments, marking procedures and feedback. In this way there was a sense that UHI's LTAS was saying what people were doing anyway. This is probably a reference to a quality discourse

The third theme is what we might call a 'network discourse'. The problem with terminology is the fact that in UHI several terms have been used but without clearl definition. Terms such as 'network delivery', 'blended learning', 'flexible delivery', and 'networked curriculum' have all been used. The fact that such terms are 'bandied about' might explain why interviewees were able to describe what the UHI teaching and learning policy was broadly about without being able to articulate a clearly specified language and identified document. Academic partners tended to have different interpretations of what was meant by 'online learning' at least until around 2006/7. There was very widespread use of such terms indicating that UHI had made progress in its basic mission of developing curriculum for delivery on a network basis

but at the same time the problem was a need to tighten up on shared definitions. This has been the subject of a lot of work in more recent years. All this points to a discourse predicated on the reality of a network organisation. Interviewees acknowledged commitment to geographically scattered populations and also felt strongly that they did provide a good quality service.

The reality of the BA Social Sciences teaching and learning regime is that a 'bilingual' combination of discourses is in operation, an idea acknowledged by Bamber et al (2009:50). Team members have to be skilled at the various aspects of FE as well as HE, at working closely with network partners, and delivering in an innovative way to the quality required.

The data produced a smaller number of references to other aspects of these discourses. A commitment to enhancement comes through which may be seen as part of the quality discourse. Evidence on the issue of the confidence of staff to achieve all this may be seen as part of the network discourse. References to the need to align UHI and college policy, strategy and resources may be seen as part of the managerial discourse. The need for the team to operate in a collegial way horizontally across a network partnership whilst also working within vertical college management structures perhaps combines the managerial and the network discourses and provides a challenge to the capacity to 'work with others'. An interesting point of detail is the fact that the BA Social Sciences started off as an OUVS-validated 'course' with a 'course leader' and a 'course team'. At some point which is not clear from the documentation it became a 'programme' with a 'programme leader' and a 'programme team'. The significance of this is that UHI changed the terminology when courses started to 'share' modules with each other more commonly and the idea of 'modularisation' became the direction of travel. The terminology came from 'the top' but course leaders in fact were able to see for themselves the advantages of sharing modules from an early stage. The term 'programme' indicated a move towards a network mindset rather than a more conventional 'course' one.

What the data does show is a clear movement from a FE towards an HE discourse for those staff involved in the teaching and learning regime, though with very strong continuing FE aspects. There is a mismatch with those colleagues in the colleges who

are still operating in the FE culture. Perhaps for UHI's academic partner colleges there is a growing difficulty in coping with multiple cultures and multiple identities pulling apart yet within the same continuing institutions.

8.4 "…horribly familiar problems…"

The recurrent practices moment refers to those routine practices that become 'hardened' and part of the scene and easily missed by established team members but perhaps more evident to newcomers. In 1998 the team not only had to design and deliver a degree course from an FE base but also do this on a network basis. A whole range of routine HE practices such as moderation of assessments, marking and feedback practices, development of materials for online delivery and annual reporting processes all had to be established. The documentary evidence notes significant progress in this yet the need to keep working to enhance and reinforce practices especially as a partner college joined in and new degree programmes were introduced led to the observation that we had 'horribly familiar problems' though this was a reflection on UHI as a whole and not specifically the BASS team. The network scenario made the consolidation of recurrent practices harder than it would otherwise have been. Similarly the "original tension" for the team was the FE base and this was an additional and constant complication. By 2003/04 there were good examples of practices gaining external commendation for network operation.   A number of recurrent practices did become well established such as exam board processes, self-evaluation practices and use of student evaluation. The data does support the view that a team approach to HE work does contribute to enhancement, improved quality and professionalism.

One interesting observation in this section is that whilst interviewees found it hard to recall exactly what the UHI Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy was saying in specific terms, there is documentary evidence that it was discussed at course events, for example at a course committee on 3 June 2005. What is clear is that the programme team did embrace the need to work towards online delivery for the course and started working towards this objective as far back as 2001/02. It may be that the team was following economic and pragmatic imperatives rather than the LTAS, it is just that they were saying the same thing. It may be suggested that the LTAS was following the realities of the situation rather than leading it.

Some aspects of the team's work that would intuitively appear to be important nevertheless did not become routinised to the extent of becoming a recurrent practice. The 'up-front' use of the LTAS would be an example. Perceived difficulties with workloads and teaching hours were a recurrent practice in the sense that they were continuously identified as an issue.

It may be noted that the 'discursive repertoires' and 'rules of appropriateness' moments tended to overlap and some points made in one category could also be made in the other.

8.5 "…a different set of realities…"

Two main themes emerge from a consideration of the identities in interaction moment. Firstly, the course team has its base in FE and this is an important aspect of its identity. Secondly there is the relationship between the academic partners and the UHI itself. The FE terms and conditions have been a big preoccupation of the team as has been noted above. The effect of FE terms and the ongoing continuation of FE work alongside the degree work were noted by the QAA subject reviewers in 2002/03. It was noted that this is a challenge for developing scholarship and research opportunities. It also had a bearing on the wide remit of the programme leader's role as well as team member's commitments. It should however be noted that such issues are common to any FE staff delivering HE programmes. The BASS team experience in this respect is in common with many others. The experience of the BASS team would not really support the idea of Young (2006) that a blurring of FE and HE is going on. The experience of HE practitioners inside FE colleges seems to be mixed. Some staff certainly welcomed the chance to do HE and wanted to embrace a HE identity. At least one member of the team however retreated from HE and concluded that a purely FE role was preferable and could achieve more in terms of student access and participation. There was also a recognition that a sense of competition in the colleges has developed between those who are primarily doing HE and those still doing FE. The perception among some of the latter was that there was a culture clash between FE and HE within colleges and that FE was 'losing out' because of HE. One interviewee noted the assumption that staff make that HE terms of employment are a kind of 'gold standard' to aspire to.

Staff gave varying responses to the question of what they most identified with. Some said UHI while others went for the partner college. Some interviewees wanted to relate enthusiastically to UHI but one or two did not. A few preferred the college seeing it as ultimately more important to their educational values. The existence of a tension between two masters was widely recognised, hence the "different set of realities" that they had to work with. The perceived clash between HE aspirations and FE realities was noted several times by interviewees and it comes through in the documentation. This reflects the federal nature of UHI as a network organisation made up of still autonomous partner institutions.

A particular theme that came through was the notion of 'UHI-ness' or the idea of a 'university feeling'. There was a sense of frustration from some interviewees that there should be more progress on this. One thing that did not come through strongly in the data was any sense of identity being primarily related to a discipline although there were references to it and some staff did find themselves 'going back' to their disciplines as new programmes emerged and the BASS team seemed to lose some of its early coherence. Trowler tends to argue against the epistemological dominance of the discipline but it can be detected surviving and perhaps extending in to the FE world when the opportunity presents itself. There was a recognition that discipline-identity could become more marked as the number of programme teams increased and UHI moved towards 'modularisation' however no interviewee identified primarily with the discipline. There was a 'positioning' process (Fanghanel 2005) with FE in general, HE in general, the academic partner college, UHI, the notion of tertiary-ness, the idea of local community and that of regionality, all playing a part in this. The main continuum however was one's 'own college' on one side and UHI on the other. The historical background of the individual interviewee was a factor in this, something recognised more by Fanghanel than by Trowler and probably a weakness in the teaching and learning regime concept.

We can say that the documentation revealed that there was recognition from the beginning that the FE base was likely to be a problem for UHI as was the relationship between academic partner senior managements and 'UHI' in the shape of Executive Office (Hills and Lingard 2004:127). The data in this case study certainly bears out that this was no underestimation.

8.6 "…little choices…"

The 'power' moment in the teaching and learning regime considers the autonomy available to the workgroup and whether people feel empowered. Most of the documentary data relating to this moment deals with the relationship between the programme team and the management in the academic partner colleges. The vertical line management structures operate in the colleges rather than through UHI. There are examples of college management shaping the response to UHI policy. The two major examples of this are the decision to replace the BA1 with the HNC, thereby creating the HNC-plus degree in 2003, brought about very much by a decision in Ferguson College, and the decision to hold back the introduction of an honours year from 2003 when it was proposed by the team to 2006, in fact it was introduced in 2007. In the latter case the initiative for honours came from the programme team and its eventual introduction owed much to the persistence of the team in working towards this objective. In this case the management delayed but did not stop it.

There are other cases of the programme team making decisions usually concerning which options to offer, which modules to run or to drop, what assessment weightings to allocate. In the grand scheme of things these are the 'little choices' referred to by one of the interviewees. There is recognition that power does come from 'above' and that there are constraints within which the team must operate. 'Above' refers to both college management and UHI leadership though there is a complex relationship between these two. There were examples of management reversing decisions after representations from the team, an example being over the allocation of teaching hours at Ferguson. This was perhaps another example though of a little choice.

Interviewees tended to note that power comes from above and there was a sense of things being 'imposed'. But there was also recognition that the team does have some decision making capacity, that 'power moves around'. One interview referred to the role of the programme leader whose position is based on having a general knowledge of the whole situation. There was also recognition that some decisions just have to be accepted. There was a clear structural element in the data, that staff could see the inevitability of decisions because of the financial context. Again perhaps the structural needs more space than Trowler wants to concede.

One interesting feature of the documentation was that the course team made a decision to go towards online delivery in 2002, this was a year or more before the UHI LTAS was first written. This indicates that the team was able to recognise economic realities and moved on that basis without having to be 'told'. A theme that comes through strongly in the interviews was that self-preservation was a powerful motivator and that going along with change was partly related to jobs and survival.

The data on the power moment indicates that the team certainly has 'power' over a variety of 'little choices' and that although 'the top' only used its power in a couple of major events such as the HNC-plus decision and the Honours delay, both in 2003, there is little doubt that there is power at the top. The interesting point for future research is the clear finding that in the UHI case 'the top' is not a singular but a plural concept. There are two 'tops', the academic partner colleges internally and vertically hierarchical, and UHI horizontally and organised as a network.

8.7 "…I'm not up to speed on that…."

The 'implicit theories' moment concerns views about how students should be taught. These views are often assumptions that are rarely discussed. Yet it is clear from the documentation that the team did relate to teaching and learning theories. It is clear in the early days of the course that the interdisciplinary focus on the BA degree was the result of a combination of pragmatic recognition of what the team was capable of doing and the support given to three-year general degrees in the Dearing and Garrick Reports. The emphasis on personal and professional capabilities came partly from the same sources and partly from the enthusiasm of a couple of key members of the programme team. By 2001 the team was beginning to talk about a 'mixed mode of delivery' and was being influenced by a sense of economic viability which was associated with 'getting the course out' to the wider UHI network, hence the move towards online learning. The course started with a system of 'parallel delivery' where modules were replicated in two or three colleges and moved to an online situation where students accessed the same online materials supported by college-based tutorials. The team however never really achieved a consensus on capabilities, on inter-disciplinarity or on 'innovative' assessments such as reflective journals and learning logs. By 2003 the team was using more 'innovative' teaching and learning technologies but what was actually being taught was more discipline-based and more conventionally assessed. So

in 1998 an innovative course conventionally delivered, became by 2004 a conventional course innovatively delivered. The delivery was based on the team's own interpretation of the UHI learning and teaching strategy but it was also influenced by team members own interests and epistemological origins in the disciplines. The departure from the team of enthusiasts for capabilities and reflection probably made it easier to coalesce into a new but conventional consensus.

The interviews showed that the team did engage quite a lot with learning and teaching issues and particularly the practicalities of online learning yet, when asked, could not locate this clearly in any particular document. Some team members associated the UHI LTAS with a model which had gained currency in the institution which saw delivery methods in a 7-stage typology from traditional class delivery (stage 1) to entirely online (stage 7). This model made it possible for the team to come up with a strategy that won consensus and combined online teaching materials with class based, short tutorials. It was argued that this was necessary to enable students who were conventionally taught in the HNC to achieve a transition to more independent learning. By fourth year they would be learning entirely online. The interviews indicated that the team were 'doing' it but found it hard to articulate it, at least in the organisational sense of policy and strategy documents. There was however a pragmatic recognition that the team could 'turn it on' when required in validation and approval events, it was possible to 'play the game'. This seems to suggest also that what the LTAS was proposing was what the team was pragmatically doing anyway. Many aspects of teaching and learning that the team readily absorbed were part of the FE culture; the use of learning outcomes, the idea of student-centred learning, the alignment between outcomes and assessment, were all part of the FE scene by 1998, probably more so than in HE and so many aspects of the validation process required by OUVS were already familiar recurrent practices. Working from an FE base was not all disadvantage, in this sense staff were already professionalised in the way things were going in the HE world.

It is clear that the team did engage with the UHI learning and teaching policy and the LTAS albeit on a gradualist and progressive basis. There was no effort to undermine the policy though there was a caution leading to a slow embrace. There were one or two interviewees who did prefer the traditional class and one in particular had quite strong views about the lack of pedagogical 'proof' that online delivery did in fact have

benefits for teaching and learning other than the geographical access point. Overall the team seemed to evolve a view of future delivery methods influenced largely by a pragmatic recognition of economic pressures that was consistent with UHI policy. It is perhaps surprising how little pedagogical theories came through in the case study. There was an evolutionary development out of pragmatic necessity, and then the pedagogy was brought in to legitimise it.

8.8 "…things are iterative, they are messy…"

The moment concerning 'rules of appropriateness' is about what is regarded as 'normal' behaviour, sometimes demonstrated by 'deviant' behaviour. The team did develop a whole range of practices which became the routine thing. Holding regular and formal course committees, seeking student evaluation, taking part in reflective self-evaluation annual reports, working together in the design of assessment instruments, first and second marking protocols, giving high quality student feedback, considering future planning for the course on a collegiate basis, aiming towards major objectives such as honours provision and pursuing these over several years, taking part in re-validation and review processes, working with partner colleges, working with external examiners, having a wider network team to work with, all these became established over time though with occasional compliance issues. The team gradually embedded such practices through its own reflections and with the constructive support of external examiners and other external processes such as re-validation panels.

It is interesting to note that some aspects of the FE culture turned out to be positive advantages because they meant that the team was already familiar with aspects of teaching and learning that were less familiar in HE. Examples would include the established practice of using modules, working to achieve learning outcomes, the use of continuous assessment and the established use of student advising processes. As noted above, some of these may also feature in the 'recurrent practices' moment.

There were however some matters where the 'dissident' element was more widespread and more protracted. The use of personal and professional capabilities and learning logs is one already noted. The ongoing FE terms and conditions issue was regularly raised but never resolved, except perhaps that the team learned to work around it and some institutional innovations did help such as the UHI sabbatical scheme. There was

also an ongoing sense that academic partner college interests and UHI interests were not the same and the team found itself having to accommodate this all the time. The normal rule of appropriateness became living with this, and with the FE/HE issue, whilst not letting it disrupt the broad development of the programme over time. One fairly strongly stated 'dissident' view was expressed in the interviews concerning the compliance of the team in the move towards online delivery. This view however was much less forcefully put in team meetings so it did not appear so much in the documentation. This was then more a private view rather than a dissident view within the team although it probably did contribute to the cautious and gradual approach to adopting more online methods. This was probably part of the 'messiness' of the policy process, recognised by another interviewee. It also indicates the social dimensions of the team, the collective was put before the individualistic.

8.9 "…sometimes you just have to accept things…"

The 'tacit assumptions' moment concerns the way the team collectively tends to create taken-for-granted and normalised ways of seeing the world and categorising things. A number of clear examples of this can be identified. Examples would include the persistent move from 2001 towards a more online approach to teaching and learning. The team embarked on this process before the term 'blended learning' came into being and before the first LTAS came out in 2003. The team however also assumed that this direction of travel might lead to job losses and there was a lack of confidence that online learning would 'work'. There were concerns about pass rates, progression, the attractiveness of the course, and the student experience.

A second example is the 'them and us' factor which appeared in two senses, the FE/HE factor and the academic partner/UHI factor. The team tended to assume that the FE base was a disadvantage while HE was the 'gold standard' though this was occasionally questioned for example in a paper written by the programme leader in 2003 on the advantages of the FE contract. The team assumed itself to be in a 'middle position' between academic partners and UHI. The further complication for the former was the fact that there were three main academic partners and these were not all the same in terms of their own management and departmental structures.

The early documentation assumes an FE world and this is evident from the discourse referred to above. It was in later years that terms such as 'research', 'scholarship' and 'sabbaticals' started to become much more prevalent. One interesting feature to emerge from the interviews was the team's collective capacity to project a positive image at validation and other events. This was linked to the survival instinct and the preservation of jobs. This also came through in the tendency to 'get on with things' as long as there was a sense that it safeguarded jobs. The team probably accepted things as long as they were not so radical as to cause a perception of threat to jobs. A good example of the latter came through in interviews concerning discussions in 2009 to offer the HNC on an online basis. In the end one partner college went ahead with this on a pilot basis while the others took longer to come to terms with the idea as an opportunity rather than a threat. This indicates that the team had three component 'sub-teams' and that they could act separately in certain circumstances although this is fairly unusual. Generally the team assumed collegiality. The capabilities point mentioned earlier did not have this consensus, there was a sense of some staff being "dragged along" and this led to one interviewee reflecting on this situation that "nobody is powerless".

An important assumption the team tended to make was that the top really was powerful and by implication 'the bottom' was not. This came through strongly in the interview with A4 who felt that the team badly underestimated its own ability to shape things. The team tended to identity problems as stemming from the top and therefore assumed that the solution would also come from the top.

8.10 Missing Moments

The above discussion allows us to reflect on the first of my research questions. This questions asks 'what are the cultural characteristics of the programme team' in this particular case study. The question stems from a sociocultural perspective and specifically social practice theory which draws attention to the meso level of analysis and which sees the workgroup as a social entity through which policy is filtered and adapted. To examine how workgroups respond to institutional policy the first key question arising is how to come to an understanding of the cultural characteristics of the workgroup. The notion of the 'teaching and learning regime' is used to do this. The teaching and learning regime consists of eight categories or 'moments'. These are used

by Trowler and Cooper (2002) and by Trowler elsewhere (2005, 2008) to conduct an analysis of the 'messiness' and social practice of a work group so that we can come to a clearer picture of what it looks like. Or to use another analogy, a review of these moments gives us a 'flavour' of the regime. These eight moments are analytical and not ontological or epistemological devices.

I have identified the programme team in UHI as the appropriate workgroup to which these moments can be applied. I have also used teaching and learning policy and its associated Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy as a particular policy area because it is so important to the success of UHI's mission. Sections 8.2 – 8.9 above address the eight 'moments' used in the teaching and learning regime in the specific case of the UHI BA Social Sciences programme team. This approach provides a very useful analytical device to try to gauge the cultural characteristics of a workgroup at the meso-level. It does not explain why the workgroup takes on a particular flavour but it does describe what we have. Having applied the TLR concept in this case study a number of observations can be made:

a) the use of the eight moments does provide a useful analytical device without which it would have been exceptionally difficult to 'make sense' of a fairly substantial volume of data, with the combined documentation and interview transcripts being probably over 100,000 words.

b) The moments provide a very feasible device for comparative analysis across UHI programme teams

c) Some of the moments do overlap. I found that points made in the 'recurrent practices' and 'rules of appropriateness' moments overlap. 'Implicit theories' and 'tacit assumptions' also overlap. There is perhaps a three-way overlap with the first two mentioned here plus 'tacit assumptions'.

d) On the other hand some of the moments are exceptionally useful and revealing concepts to apply to a case. 'Codes of signification', 'discursive repertoires', 'identities in interaction' and 'power relations' were helpful in disentangling social aspects of practitioner experience from the individual or the institutional.

e) The interview data in particular indicates that the cultural characteristics of a programme team are influenced by other moments which appear to be

missing from the TLR. These are 'biographical histories', 'personal values' and 'membership of other TLRs'. The first two of these perhaps overlap but the interviews did show that prior experiences in other institutions and professions clearly affected perceptions and outlooks.

f) To condense the cultural characteristics of the BASS team using the TLR we would note that it is a team which pragmatically accepts the direction of the UHI LTAS without showing great enthusiasm for it; which has a strong and ongoing FE base which has been altered substantially by its movement into HE over 10 years; that the movement into HE has been embraced as an opportunity to gain professional status albeit with much concern about FE conditions; that it has multiple identities which are occasionally in conflict but which are generally complementary; which uses the power it has but is lacking in confidence to use it more or is unable to see how much scope for adaptation it really has; which has come to accept as the norm many HE practices and routine activities; which has a pragmatic rationale for survival rather than a pedagogically-rooted one.

8.11 "…Uncertainty? We've got bags of it…"

This section now turns to my research question 2 and discusses the four categories of response identified by Trowler (1998). This section will offer some discussion on the 'sinking' category. Sinking implies major and serious problems. The team certainly identified problems, the most persistent being the FE base, workloads, and others including academic partner/UHI tensions. However none of these stopped the course from being validated and re-validated and running to the satisfaction of the external examiners, the quality assurance managers and the students.

The examples given of sinking were to do with specific modules which caused problems but in every case a solution was found fairly quickly. The event that demoralised the team most was the decision at the internal validation event in March 2003 not to progress with an honours proposal, however the team proved to be persistent and in the end honours was delivered to students in 2007-08 for the first time with five students gaining a first. This indicates that the initiative for development came from the team though the final decision to go ahead had to come from the top academic partner college management.

The interview data suggests that the team felt that they definitely did not sink although there was the occasional example of a difficult module. The pilot interview revealed that the typology possibly has to be more fluid than it is with the view expressed that positioning in terms of the four quadrants could vary from time to time and from issue to issue. Another interviewee raised the interesting idea of 'raising' a module from a sinking to a 'coping' situation. One interviewee did reveal the kind of 'sense of loss' used in the 'sensemaking' concept, that online learning meant a loss of student – tutor interaction and that traditional teaching had much to commend it (Taylor 1999:15). The statement in the heading above which came from one of the interviewees represented a recognition that the team sees itself living with uncertainty all the way through but prevailing and not sinking in the process of responding to this. Taylor (Ibid: 58) notes that much of the literature on HE tends to emphasise sinking too much and my project would tend to support this more optimistic perspective. The characteristics of 'sinking' in Trowler's model, deskilling, fatalism, disillusion, personal damage, is not evident in the data gathered except a single example of disillusionment in the interviews and one or two cases where modules were considered to be failing but they were fairly quickly changed.

8.12 "…I swam quite a bit, I loved it…"

'Swimming' implies that things are going really well. The documentation demonstrates that the team was successful. It did achieve its objectives and has been one of UHI's largest suppliers of graduates. External examiner reports indicate that the team successfully "fine tuned" its processes and had some "impressive" achievements. The team gained two 'commendable' judgements in the 2002-03 QAA subject review and has successfully delivered honours years since 2007. It is easy to miss the successes when there is a tendency to focus on problems and 'issues'.

The interviewees were more cautious in their assessment of this point. One interviewee made the statement given as the heading to this section and clearly enjoyed and gained great professional satisfaction from involvement in the team. On the other hand another interviewee felt that the team did not swim at all. Another made the interesting observation that some disciplines had achieved 'swimming' status while others had not. A further interesting interview comment was that swimming actually meant 'swimming

with the flow', in other words going along with institutional pressures which were not necessarily in the interests of the team at all. This is another reflection perhaps on the typology, that there is scope for professional staff to reflect on this and provide new definitions that had not been anticipated. This interviewee turned 'swimming' from a positive to a negative connotation. Overall the characteristics of 'swimming'; accepting change, seeing the benefits, recognising rewards, development of the new; was in evidence in both interviews and documentation but more so in the latter. This indicates that the practitioners were perhaps quite demanding on themselves and their colleagues.

8.13 "…the original tension…"

There were far more documentary examples of reflection on the 'coping' theme. Three of the interviewees thought that coping was the best way to describe the team's response to its situation. One definition of coping from A3 was that the team can see what needs to be done but can't do it because of pressure of time. Another view was that the team does respond to institutional policies but without enthusiasm and that whilst the team will respond, job security is crucial. Another interviewee took the view that this represents a kind of compromise between positive and pragmatic responses. Another interviewee perspective was that the team actually plans for a 'coping strategy' at times. A lot of coping seemed to go on with several interviewees noting the dependence on key individuals at times.

A number of specific examples of coping with problems come through in the documentation. The marking of groupwork, coping with FE commitments at the same time as developing HE, dealing with "unrealistic" workloads, finding time for scholarship, would all be examples. A review of the documentation reminded me of some frustrations that had been forgotten such as the decision of the management in Chisholm College to continue to run the HND programme longer than originally planned, this is an example of coping perhaps at the academic partner level. The documentation also revealed that the team started talking about using COLEG materials for online delivery of the HNC as far back as 2005 though only a pilot run in one college had been achieved by 2009. The pilot reflected an element of resistance. During 2009 the team appeared to have lost its collective memory of these discussions. These two examples indicate that sheer persistence towards a goal was one response to institutional pressures.

A continuing theme is the sense of aspiring to high HE standards from an FE base. One of the interviewees described this as "the original tension". Another interviewee regarded FE as having a stable culture while HE was unstable and more prone to change. The meaning here was that FE as practiced in the academic partner colleges was long-established and settled into a routine pattern whereas HE was new and being established. This might explain why the interview data suggests coping while the documentary data indicates something more successful than this implies. The characteristics of 'coping' are in evidence; retreat at least from rapid innovation, finding opportunities to cope with workloads, finding pragmatic solutions, are all in evidence.

8.14 "…a rearguard action…"

Trowler regarded 'reconstructing' as the most interesting of the four possible responses to change and it featured by far the most in the documentation. Reconstructing has a number of sub-themes as outlined in chapter sections 4.13 and 7.10. But it has to be said that on certain major issues there clearly was a top-down decision that the team simply had to live with. The main example of this was the decision of Ferguson College management to adopt the HNC-plus. The team however did draw up a teaching and learning strategy to deal with this which was within the UHI LTAS but took its own distinctive approach. The second example was the delay to honours in 2003. Again however the team responded to this by persisting with the objective, drawing up a resource plan and getting it agreed with college managers, and basically maintaining a momentum which culminated in the achievement of honours. Another response was to forge links with at least one other UHI programme team to devise common or 'shared' fourth year modules. So although there are examples of management 'impositions', the team was able to adapt to these in its own way though it has to be said 'the way' was still going in the same direction as the overall UHI strategy.

One of the things that make adaptation strategies possible is the 'low fidelity' of the policy itself (Saunders 2009:98). The UHI teaching and learning policy and the LTAS is not highly prescriptive. It has been accused of being a 'motherhood and apple pie' kind of document. This leaves scope for the team to 'do its own thing' yet still be

consistent with the overall direction of policy. The policy and strategy are essentially moving towards a blended learning model which makes it possible for students across the region to access HE opportunity within a financially viable model. The team started talking about 'mixed modes' of delivery in 2001. There was an evolutionary and gradualist approach to moving in an online direction and the use of college tutorials after 2006 was a clear example of the team responding in its own way to its own circumstances yet this was within the parameters of the policy/strategy. One interviewee described this as an adaptation strategy, a 'practitioner-evolutionary model'. Management appears to have been content to let the team move in this evolutionary and slightly protracted manner.

One interviewee defined reconstruction as 'reconfiguring' and noted the need to "duck and dive" in order to survive. Another talked about the "manipulation of the situation", for example 'selling' modules in different ways according to the market. Another defined reconstruction as taking what has been learned in the BASS team and applying it in new curriculum areas. The idea of 'up-skilling' was also noted by the interviewees and this is recognised in the documentation, that team members learned many new skills and developed others; that the team welcomed the opportunity to work at HE level in a situation where they had more scope for decision making than was the case in SQA awards. These are examples confirming Trowler's definition of reconstruction. The data confirms the view noted above of Shackleton (1995) that FE staff often welcome the chance to engage in HE work. Robson (2006) defined FE as a "thin profession" and this might explain why for FE staff doing HE represents an increase in professional status and autonomy considering where they start from. The Trowler typology is very much framed in terms of HE though this case study applies in a clear FE setting.

The documentation in particular revealed a large number of the "little choices" one interviewee referred to; many examples of modules being adjusted, dropped, replaced and altered in response to evaluation from staff or student feedback. The external examiners noted this, on one occasion it was referred to as "sensible refinement". There were examples of modules being adopted for the purposes of 'sharing' with other teams, though this was not always successful and further changes were made. An example is the dropping of an inter-disciplinary core module to be replaced by

Empowering Communities which was itself replaced two years later. These were examples of autonomous decision making but they were not evidence of a re-interpretation of the LTAS, more an adaptation to local circumstances and more than 'rhetorical compliance'. The approach of the team was to set out to achieve the objectives of UHI's LTAS though in its own way. It did not undermine or reconfigure the intentions. We cannot say there was evidence of evasion, avoidance or resistance.

Some alternative perspectives were noted by interviewees. One view was that the team needed to embrace online delivery more enthusiastically and more urgently; this would be the way to gain more autonomy. This suggested that the road to greater autonomy is through greater compliance to the institutional line. The other alternative perspective was that the team had not taken advantage of the potential autonomy it had during the period when certain policy decisions were "less inevitable" from the top, in other words economic pressures were less intense. This interviewee felt that the team was in fact undermined as a single entity by the attachment of staff to their "own colleges". It was perhaps now too late for the team to reconstruct in a bigger way because management from the top was more necessary in the circumstances of reduced funding. In this respect Trowler's perspective was seen as a "rearguard action", trying to defend what was left and fighting very much against the grain of the funding and national policy context we are now in.

Overall the evidence would support the notion that reconstruction took place. There were perhaps a few examples of evasion and avoidance but 'delay' is a better word. There were elements of manipulation at least in terms of 'selling' modules to other teams. The team interpreted the LTAS in its own way and within its own timing. There was a strong view in both documentation and interviews that an up-skilling process had taken place and staff generally welcomed the chance to do HE work. There was however no sense of reconfiguring the intended ultimate effects of policy.

8.15 '…a reconstructive intellectual place…'

Sections 8.11 to 8.14 address the second of my research questions, 'how has the programme team responded to the UHI learning and teaching policy?' Again using a sociocultural perspective and social practice theory, Trowler developed this typology in 1997 and used it in later works as a way of categorising responses to change brought

about by institutional policies. The theoretical approach is supported by several writers such as Taylor (1999) who supports research at the team level and Young (2001) who notes the 'institutional logic' of studies which take into account the social, economic and political culture of teams. Other such as Reynolds and Saunders (1987) indicated that tensions are to be expected between the different levels on the 'implementation staircase'. Having applied the Trowler typology to the UHI case I would offer the following observations:

a) the categorisation into four quadrants is an analytical rather than an ontological device.

b) the typology does provide a useful analytical model from which the researcher can make sense of a large amount of data which addresses the theme of how academic staff respond to changing situations

c) my study indicated that the team avoided sinking and probably did better than coping. The documentary data supports this view more than the interview data perhaps because of the caution or aspiration levels of the team. There was a lot of reconstructing but a key point is that the team did not fundamentally object to the 'direction of travel' of the UHI learning and teaching policy and strategy. The team essentially embraced the UHI policy but did interpret it in its own way and with its own timing. The main example of this was the adoption of a programme teaching and learning strategy which was consistent with the UHI policy but adopted unusual features, mainly the blend of online learning materials with short class-based tutorials in each partner college. The reasoning behind this was partly to provide students with the support levels the team believed was necessary, partly to be seen to move in the direction UHI was pushing, and partly to safeguard timetables. There was also a sense that the team was moving in the direction of UHI policy anyway because of the pragmatic realities of the situation. In this sense the case study confirms Trowler's thesis that teams adapt policy in the process of implementation.

d) a key finding in the interviews and indeed evident immediately in the pilot interview is that the typology model is too static implying that the response of a teaching and learning regime to a teaching and learning policy for example can be categorised in one of four ways. In fact interviewees indicated that a more fluid situation prevails. The programme team tended to identify different aspects of their work in more than one quadrant. They might be moving from a sinking to a coping situation in one module while swimming in one discipline and coping in another at the same time. Reconstruction can come in a number of different ways. Another finding is that the team can adapt in the 'little choices' but have less room for manoeuvre in the major decisions, also that reconstructive opportunities are identified but not always acted upon because of constraints hence the heading of this section. What they can do is adapt within the broad parameters and to some extent at their own pace. The latter point confirms the finding of Clegg (2003) who noted the capacity of a team to work to its own time frame. My case also confirms the point found by Newton (2003) that 'organic evolution' is what is happening rather than some more mechanistic implementation.

e) the four quadrant boxes are of equal size on paper though 'reconstruction' is described as the most interesting though with various defining features. In my case it produced by far the largest number of data items in both interviews and documentation. The reconstruction category is perhaps too big and could usefully be sub-divided into only three main sub-themes dealing with re-professionalisation, adaptation, and resistance.

f) Fanghanel's (2005) concept of 'positioning' would be a useful additional feature in Trowler's typology because it recognises that academic staff position themselves differently according to issue and time. Fanghanel also recognises the importance of the prior experience of the practitioner, the experiential filter, a point my case study revealed and I alluded to in section 8.10.

g) The typology is designed for the HE scenario although my study has applied it to a 'dual activity' FE/HE scenario. An important factor is that responses

to change will be influenced by where the academic starts from, so what looks like 'proletarianisation' in HE may represent 're-professionalisation' in FE. For example, the use of modules and learning outcomes might feel like a loss of autonomy in HE but is a recurrent practice and tacit assumption in FE, hardly worth noticing.

8.16 "…nobody is powerless…"

…while all theories are wrong, some are more practical than others…

(Bamber et al 2009:6)

In this section I would like to discuss some aspects of the theoretical approach taken in this project, thus addressing my third question which asked what the implications of my case study would be for Trowler's sociocultural perspective and social practice theory and in its elaboration in the teaching and learning regime. The basic approach can be summarised as follows:

…things are received, understood and implemented in unique ways due to the particularities of the social context…

(Trowler 2009: 7)

The application of this approach to the BA Social Sciences programme team in UHI was achieved by using a socio-cultural perspective an elaboration of which is social practice theory (Trowler and Turner 2002:241 whose basic idea is that the unit of analysis is the social practice of the workgroup rather than the work itself or individual agency. There are two aspects of this theoretical approach that have been applied, the notion of the teaching and learning regime where the culture of a group can be specified using eight 'moments' which give the 'flavour' of the regime; this plays a role in shaping the second aspect, Trowler's typology of academic responses to change. An analysis using this approach takes an interpretivist approach as found in 'policy scholarship' rather than the more positivist stance of 'policy science' (Trowler 1998:153).

Social practice theory has been applied to help make sense of the meso-level. Its premises are that to change learning and teaching is a social phenomenon rather than a pedagogical one where policy is filtered and adapted through the cultural characteristics of the team. The focus is neither on 'the top' nor 'the bottom' but on social relations particularly at the workgroup level. Social practice theory draws attention to the contexts in which academics work and focuses attention on the "cultural traffic" that is unique to each situation.

The data analysed in this case study drew attention to these social relations. Without repeating points already made in earlier sections I would note that interview data clearly showed that academic staff clearly enjoyed being part of the enlarged team that the UHI network involved. They could see the benefits and took advantage of them. There was a sense that the team grew to trust each other as they got to know each other better. There was also a recognition that a 'mental distance' could result from staff who are physically distant and don't get a chance to meet very often. Staff identities were multi-layered and mixed with some staff wanting to identify with UHI and others looking to their own partner colleges. Team members also readily recognised tensions particularly between UHI and partner college management but also on occasion within the team. Interviewees were easily able to identify 'them and us' situations and saw tensions that clearly had some impact on their practice. A major feature to become clear was tensions between the FE base of the colleges and the HE outcomes being pursued by UHI. The pressures this placed on staff were clearly prevalent. There was a clear recognition that people learn from each other, from meetings, from personal contacts, from other teams, rather than from policy documents. This was clearly a social phenomenon. It was interesting that staff were able to talk about the broad nature of UHI teaching and learning policy and referred to 'playing the game' by being very positive at validation events, yet could not locate the policy precisely in documentary terms. There were socially based outcomes on occasions when management did 'impose' decisions. There was a lot of interview and documentary evidence that the team was badly demoralised by the HNC-plus decision in 2003. Staff also had a strong sense of whether the team was moving together or apart at different stages in its history. There was some opposition to the move towards online delivery and blended learning but attitudes were based partly on views about the student experience and partly on the team members own prior experience.

My study does tend to confirm some aspects of the social practice theory. We can say that there is a 'messiness' to policy implementation (Trowler 2002:1). We can validate the view of Haslum (1994:109) who talked about "inventing the wheel as we are using it". There is indeed a connection between the 'top' and the 'bottom', that academics at the bottom are both free and constrained, as structuration suggests (Trowler 1998 and Elmore 1989:254). We can also say that academics are "not powerless" (Trowler 1997:302). It would appear that ground level staff do have room for manoeuvre (Bamber et al 2009:1). One of the reasons for this is that in the UHI case the overall institutional goals are probably to some extent "contested…ambiguous" (Bourgeois 1999: 360), or at least ambiguous and this leaves at least some room available for manoeuvre. The UHI policy is also broad and 'low fidelity' enough to allow teams some discretion but still within the broad parameters.

The 'social' in the practice of the team is clearly seen in the concern about jobs, the survival instinct to maintain the programme over time, and the feelings about changing teaching practices where sometimes change was lamented and sometimes embraced depending on previous experience and perceptions of the impact on both staff and students. It has to be said that the eight moments enables the analyst to capture both social relationships and the affective domain but less so the historical background and prior experience of team members.

It is too much to say that policy is "made, contested and re-made" during implementation (Scott 2000). My study shows a case where the workgroup did not really contest or re-make the policy but aimed towards the same basic objectives as set out in the UHI learning and teaching strategies of 2003 and 2007 albeit in their own way and at their own pace. We can also agree with Webster (2003: 63) that it is possible to over-state the bottom-up case; that the top does indeed set the ground rules, agenda and direction. We can see examples of clear top-down power.

Pressman and Wildavsky talked about 'implementation failure'. My study is rather an example of 'implementation getting there', policy objectives have been progressed over time, probably more time than anticipated but nevertheless the direction of travel is the same.

The case study confirmed the value of the teaching and learning regime and its eight moments as an analytical device for specifying what cultural characteristics are. It can be argued that some moments overlap as indicated in section 8.10 above and that other moments can be adopted. The regime concept had a big advantage over the idea of 'community of practice' by noting the fragmentary nature of the latter and its omission of power relations. My study would suggest that the 'moments' of value are; codes of signification, discursive repertoires, identities in interaction, power relations, a combined implicit theories/tacit assumptions; a combined rules of appropriateness/recurrent practices; and additional moments, 'biographical history/personal values' and 'membership of other regimes'.

The Trowler typology is also confirmed as a valuable analytical model. Whether team members were sinking or coping or reconstructing can be clearly related back to the pressures they were under as noted above, the FE terms and conditions factor, the 'them and us' tensions, the adaptation of blended learning objectives, the professionalization and up-skilling of staff. The model is however static whereas the case study reveals how fluid the situation is and how variable one team's position can be according to module, issue and time. The 'positioning' concept developed by Fanghanel who used more of a continuum model is potentially of value. A modified typology is indicated below. The numbered points represent the positioning of specific issues.

Accept Status Quo   Work Around or Change

Swimming   .1   Re-professionalise

Content   .2   Adaptation

                                                   Resistance

                                          .3

Discontent

                              .6   .4

Sinking   .5   Coping

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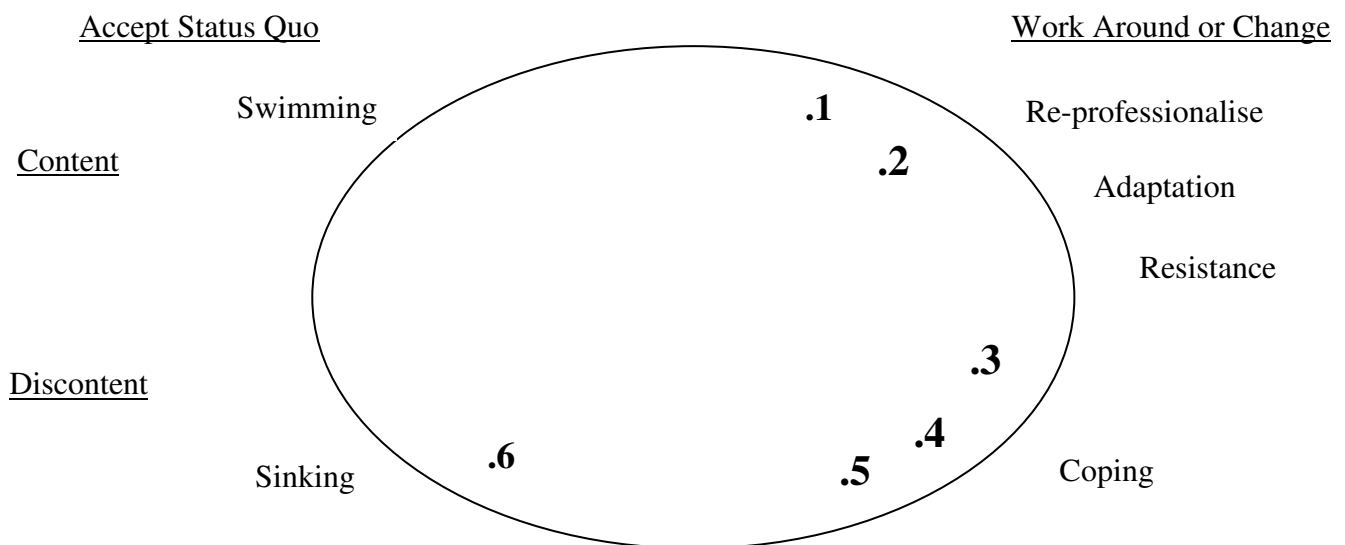
8.17 Research Methodology

The role of practitioner-as-researcher provides both advantages and disadvantages. An insider account might provide a "more subtle understanding" (Trowler 1998: 148) but on the other it might lead to bias, self-justification and an absence of value-neutrality. I found an advantage was that I already knew the 'story' of the BASS team and knew where to find both documents and interviewees. I could understand what interviewees were 'getting at' and was able to devote the available time to interpreting evidence rather than having to understand the setting. A possible disadvantage is that I did not pursue any questions concerning the role of the programme leader though it did come up occasionally in interviews. An outsider researcher might have spent more time on this aspect of the case study and so to that extent there might be a reliability question about the case study. Perhaps no one else could have done the same research in the same time as me and that is also the very advantage of the insider-practitioner as researcher.

The project involved qualitative research and a case study approach Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) talk about the qualitative researcher as 'bricoleur', the multi-skilled practitioner. On this I felt that the research design played to my own strengths having done a lot of interview work, documentary analysis and self-evaluation writings in a number of contexts. I was able to look at actual practice in situ and tried to ensure that all perspectives were reported in the findings chapters with an indication of quantification in terms of the frequency with which particular points came up. In terms of the quality of the qualitative research I considered Silverman's (2000) criteria and would say that there was a degree of analytical depth provided by the theoretical underpinnings. The usefulness of the research is apparent in the UHI case where there is a strong regional commitment to this project. It is an inherently difficult project to achieve, and there is a sense in the community that it has got to work. The rigour of the research was provided by a review of all the documentation there is on the case from 1998 to early 2008, and by a significant number of interviews. Silverman (2001) indicated some scepticism about the 'interview society' and has argued (2000) that too much use is made of them. My analysis was based on documentation as well as interviews, the two findings chapters being of a similar size. The interviews were semi-structured so that interviewees had a chance to range as they saw appropriate whilst at the same time avoiding 'sprawling' interviews. The theoretical approach described

above made it possible to analyse the substantial amount of data that came out of the collection process.

Bauer and Gaskell (2000) argued that qualitative research needs credibility and the way to achieve this was through both 'confidence' and 'relevance' criteria. Confidence can be gained through the triangulation made possible by a significant number of interviews as well as the parallel documentary research process. There needs to be a procedural clarity and transparency which is achieved by having available interview transcripts and the full set of documentation (all to be found in white ring-binders on shelves in room D8b in one of the buildings of Grant College). The relevance criteria are satisfied by noting the practical significance of the research to UHI and to other FE/HE partnerships, but also to the application of a theoretical approach.

The main source for case study guidance was Yin (2003) who noted that four broad principles need to be satisfied. The case study needs to use all the evidence, use major rival interpretations, include significant aspects of the case, and include the researchers own prior knowledge. In my case I used all the documentation there is on the BA Social Sciences programme. I also completed 12 interviews which I felt gave me all I was likely to get. It would have been possible to conduct a handful more but I felt they would not really add any new perspectives except perhaps for one ex-member of the team however it would have been difficult in practical terms to arrange an interview. I did complete an interview with another ex-member who had the same kind of involvement at the same time. I judged that the evidence used was comprehensive. All the matrices, transcripts and documentation used are available for inspection in the kind of 'databox' Yin proposed. On rival interpretations, I did include all cases of interviewees expressing an interesting, novel or individual perspective. I did not apply a rival theory such as a structural theory the main reason being to fully apply the one used. I did find however that Fanghanel's approach to the filtering processes involved in 'positioning' responses to change was a useful alternative model. The study included all the significant aspects of the case partly because I had prior knowledge of what these were. The one possible exception to this was the role of the programme leader which could have been explored more fully as I have indicated above. I was able to use my prior knowledge as a practitioner in this team and indeed the study as designed could probably not have been done in quite the same way except for this. To assist in

my preparations for embarking upon the data collection I wrote a self-reflective statement about the course and my views of it. I did not use this in the findings chapter but only to sharpen my senses to more readily pick up signals from interviewees. I have included this as Appendix 3.

Taking Yin as a guide I also wanted to establish the boundaries of the case study and after much thought decided to address a single programme team. I had thought about a multiple unit of analysis approach using a comparative study of perhaps four UHI programme teams. I decided against this partly because I did not have the same insider knowledge of the other teams and partly because there was a trade off between depth of coverage and width. I went for the advantages of the insider perspective which meant a deeper rather than a wider study. The narrower but deeper strategy made a 'close-up', 'thick description' and 'fine-grained' approach more feasible. It also had more of an opportunity to achieve the "wholeness" of the system revealed by a case study (Gaither 1999:147). The lengthy findings chapters tried to set out the full range of perspectives uncovered and so tried to avoid anecdotalism and personalisation on my part.

Silverman asked researchers to demonstrate why we should believe what they say and also asked whether the research has any theoretical or practical significance. The first point I hope I have addressed in the discussion above. The significance of this work is that it is a contribution to research at the meso-level, an area where little has been done (Trowler et al 2005) and where there have been calls for this kind of work (Trowler and Cooper 2002: 144). There is the danger that was pointed out by Elmore (1989:244) that most implementation research is case study based and that little guidance has come out of it. The generalisability of this project comes out of its theoretical and analytical approach, but also its practical significance to those of us practitioners who are still engaged in the day to day construction of what we hope will become the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Chapter Nine - Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this case study was to understand the way that programme teams have responded to UHI policy demands, especially the BA Social Sciences programme team and its response to the institution's teaching and learning policy and its associated learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

The case study is relevant for several reasons:

a) UHI has enormous topical relevance. It is a major innovation in Scottish Further and Higher Education, if it achieves its mission of creating a University of the Highlands and Islands it will be the culmination of a huge collective effort.

b) It has massive regional importance for the Highlands and Islands and is seen as vital to the long term social, cultural and economic development of this large and sparsely populated region.

c) The case study is relevant for other reasons; it is a partnership and network model which has interest for similar developments in the sector and may even be a tertiary prototype for future FE/HE links in an age of severe financial constraints.

d) For UHI to achieve is aim of bringing HE opportunity throughout its region, it is essential that the curriculum can be delivered in a way that meets a triple challenge; of widening access to high quality programmes and at sustainable cost. This puts the programme teams that design and deliver the curriculum in a key position. Their ability to implement UHI's teaching and learning policy, to embrace blended learning and use it to deliver its curriculum to the whole region, becomes critical.

e) An understanding of how programme teams implement policy is therefore a significant requirement, relevant to all practitioners across UHI and probably of interest to a sector that needs examples of networking.

f) The case study has applied social practice theory and the notion of the teaching and learning regime to a UHI programme team. As a case study it can be generalised to other situations in analytical and theoretical terms.

g) The analytical and theoretical understanding gained in this case study will assist practitioners in their work towards the achievement of the UHI mission.

9.2 Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. Using the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime', what are the cultural characteristics of a programme team which has delivered an undergraduate degree in the UHI Millennium Institute?

2. how has this programme team responded to the UHI teaching and learning policy?

3. what are the implications of this case study for Trowler's sociocultural theory as elaborated by social practice theory and the notion of the 'teaching and learning regime?

On Question 1 the case study used the eight 'moments' of the TLR as an analytical device to make sense of the significant amount of data collected to establish what the cultural characteristics of the BASS team are. It was proposed that four of these moments could usefully be combined and two new moments added. The study of the meso-level in UHI revealed that this is a case study where a top-bottom relationship is complicated by there being 'two tops', the academic partner colleges and UHI itself.

On Question 2 it was found that the team has indeed reconstructed policy although the main opportunities to do this are in the 'little choices' and that whilst there is scope to reconstruct policy in major areas this is possible largely because the programme team has in fact embraced the objectives of the policy.

On Question 3 it was noted that the implications are that the theory is indeed a valuable model which is appropriate for application to cases of a networking and partnership basis. However it was proposed that the identification of 'moments' could be amended. It was also noted that the idea of the social relations of the team as a unit of analysis is appropriate and applicable, but the typology used by Trowler is overly static when the case study suggests a much more fluid and dynamic process of positioning is going on. A proposal to amend the typology was therefore offered.

9.3 Contribution to Theory and Practice

The case study is a contribution to knowledge given the identification of the meso-level topic area as under-theorised and to calls from researchers to "trawl deeper" (Smyth

1995). The case study is a direct response to calls for 'close-up' insider-practitioner research at the meso-level.

The case study applies existing theory to a setting of significance to the sector and indeed the country. UHI has been the subject of very little published research so far. The theoretical application is to a different scenario in that there is a strong FE/HE link whereas the main relevant literature looks at HE. It has proved to be a workable and useful way of defining the cultural characteristics of a team which is representative of a range of UHI programme teams. The application of the theoretical approach and proposals to amend this in some respects offers a contribution to knowledge about the implementation of policy in institutions.

UHI is significant as a partnership of FE colleges without an existing Higher Education Institution in membership which makes it unusual and possibly unique in the UK. For practitioners the case study offers a conceptual approach to identifying the cultural characteristics of programme teams and to categorising responses to policy demands which will increase understanding and make possible comparative analysis. This will enhance the prospects of achieving the difficult and ambitious mission UHI has set itself.

9.4 Limitations of the Research

A number of points can be noted here;

a) this was a case study and there may be an argument that there is no similar case in the UK, unless we count other UHI programme teams.

b) as an insider practitioner study there may be criticism that the researcher had some personal point of view to get across, was unable to 'see' the significance of certain points having been too close to them, or has missed questions and issues a more independent researcher might ask.

c) the study did not pay any particular attention to the role of the programme leader. That is the role I had as a participant and so I left it out except insofar as it arose in perhaps three of the interviews.

d) as a case study there may be criticism that it is a single-case when Yin prefers the multiple-case. However Yin does accept the validity of the single case in some cases.

e) the emphasis on the meso-level and the socio-cultural approach has left other areas largely untouched such as more structural, managerial, bureaucratic and financial models, also individualistic agency models.

9.5 Further Research

A number of points can be noted:

a) an embedded design involving a multiple-case along the lines preferred by Yin made up of other UHI programme teams would be a valuable further project and would make possible a comparative cultural analysis. With the idea of the multiple cultural configuration and the nature of UHI as such an example this would appear to be a fruitful subject.

b) a project with more focus on the role of the programme leader could be considered

c) a further project might also examine in more detail the relationship between the programme team and the role of the 'top' in more detail.

d) the identification in this case study of a 'plural top' with both UHI and partner college involvement in policy making and implementation with one set of network programme teams 'underneath' lends itself to a study of the 'top' in the UHI context though that would be an interesting ethical challenge for the researcher given the inevitable 'political' connotations of such a study.

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Appendix 2 Brian Boag EdD Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interview schedule
Expected time – 50-60 minutess

I would like to ask you some questions about the UHI BA Social Sciences course team and its characteristics from the time of the original validation in 1998 to the present particularly in relation to its response to the UHI teaching and learning policy and strategies

1. Can you tell me something about your personal background and your role(s) in the course team?   **Q1 M2**

2. Can you say something about your sense of commitment to the institution and the academic values you hold? **Q1 M8**

3. Do you feel any sense of emotional commitment to UHI? **Q1 M6 M4**

4. What is it that you value most about your involvement in the course team and the institution? **Q1 M1 M4 M6**

5. Are your values, those of the course team and those of the institution, the same? **Q1 M5 M8 M4**

6. UHI is described as a 'collegiate, federal institution with a regional mission'. Which aspects of this complex organisation do you most identify with? **Q1 M4 M1**

7. Do you feel that there are any status differences within this institution? **Q1 M5 M8 M1**

8. What do you understand the UHI teaching and learning policy to be? **Q1 Q2 M2 M3**

9. **How did the course team respond to the teaching and learning needs of UHI?** **Q2 T1-4**

10. **How did the course team respond to the new teaching and learning strategies of 2003 and 2007?** **Q2 T1-4**

11. **How would you describe the nature of the team's response? You may compare it to other teams** **Q1 Q2 M1 M2 T 4**

12. **How would you describe the BA Social Sciences team compared to other UHI course teams you have been involved with?** **Q1 M1 M2 M3 M4**

13. **(For newer members). Was there anything about the way the BASS team works that struck you as noticeable but which everyone else took for granted? Was there anything that everyone else accepted that struck you as odd?** **Q1 M6 M7**

14. **How have decisions been taken within the team?** **Q1 Q2 M5 T4 T 3**

15. **Where does power lie, within the team or where else does power lie that affects the team?** **Q1 M5**

16. **Can you give any examples of contentious issues that have arisen in the team?** **Q1 M1-8**

17. **Can you reflect on any examples of individuals finding it difficult to conform to the team?** **Q1 M3 M4 M5**

18. **Can you give any examples of good practice within the team?** **Q2 T3 T4 M7**

19. **What is it that makes it possible for the team to achieve these examples?** **Q1 Q2 M1 M2 M3**

20. **What observations would you make about any critical incidents in the lifespan of the course?** Q1 Q2 T4 M2 M5

21. **How would you describe the way the team and its members responded to the teaching and learning policy and strategy of UHI over the period since 1998?** Q2 T1-4

22. **Can you give examples of positive, negative, and pragmatic responses? What kinds of feelings were evoked?** Q2 T1-4

23. **In practical terms, what did the team do to deliver the course to students? Can you give particular examples? How did team members feel about this?** Q1 Q2 M7

24. **Having discussed these questions, is there anything else you would like to say?**

Supplementary Questions will take the form of:
- **tell me more about…**
- **could you explain that further…**
- **what do you mean by that?**
- **could you give me an example?**

Key – indicates relevant to:

Q1   **Question 1**
Q2   **Question 2**
T1   **Typology 'sinking'**
T2   **Typology 'swimming'**
T3   **Typology 'coping'**
T4   **Typology 'reconstructing'**
M1   **Moment 'codes of signification'**
M2   **Moment 'discursive repertoires'**
M3   **Moment 'recurrent practices'**
M4   **Moment 'identities in interaction'**
M5   **Moment 'power relations'**

M6   Moment 'tacit assumptions'

M7   Moment 'rules of appropriation'

M8   Moment 'implicit theories'

Refers to Trowler's typology on academics' responses to change and to his categorisation of eight 'moments' which constitute the culture of the teaching and learning regime

Appendix 3

Reflective Personal Statement – Written in Sept 2008

This paper was written to help me to clarify important events and to reflect on these.

The development of the social sciences in Grant College pre-UHI

Until the early 1990s Further Education colleges taught a thing called 'General Studies'. Students taking technical/vocational courses would take one or two modules in social/economic studies with an emphasis on organisational behaviour and management styles. General Studies staff were usually people who had studied social science disciplines and often taught Highers such as Modern Studies as well. It became clear c.1990 that such provision had little future and so staff began to consider ways of running 'our own' full time courses. This coincided with the development of the Access concept and around this time a number of consortia were created in Scotland. We joined the North of Scotland Wider Access Programme (Norswap) and began to get involved in running Access to Higher Education courses designed in association with the University of Aberdeen. The first Access to Social Science course ran in 1991-92 and was very successful. For the first time staff were able to work with their own full-time course and could teach their 'original' subjects such as sociology, psychology and politics.

In the summer of 1992 I received a phone call at home from one of the recently qualified Access students who asked me if I knew anything about the new HNC Social Sciences course at Chisholm College. I had to admit that I did not. Somehow news of a new development at HNC level had not got through to us in Grant. However I thereafter took an interest in this and by the summer of 1993 we had gained approval to run the HNC in Grant College and we ran the first cohort of 15 students in 1993-94. I started to look into opening up the curriculum further to HND level and we gained approval to do this in the summer of 1994. The first HNC cohort was therefore able to go straight through to the HND.

One of my memories of this period was the opposition we had from our own line manager who saw the college as a FE entity and was not keen on pushing up to HE. This I found exasperating. I had always been ambitious to move up to higher levels although this was not always shared by others. Some colleagues however did share the excitement at being able to teach 'real' academic subjects to students who wanted to study them. I had also tutored for

the Open University since 1985 including summer schools. The staff development I and a few others had gained through the OU was a very important part of our capacity to deliver at higher levels.

A major initiative in 1991 was the Academic Association formed by Grant College and one of Scotland's universities. A number of university-validated programmes were introduced in Grant, this being the college's first degree level experience. This Association was popular with the staff and simple to operate with Grant staff dealing directly with their opposite numbers at the university. In May 1994 it was agreed that the university evening degree programme would start at Grant College. However in practice only social science staff were prepared to undertake this work and so it became in effect an evening social science degree. By the latter part of 1994 we were running an Access course, an HNC and HND and an evening degree programme which was a fair curriculum from the 1991 start.

In 1996 we proposed a university-validated HND-plus social science degree and this was in fact approved by the university. However in the meantime UHI had started up. From 1991-96 UHI was seen by many as a glorified PR campaign and Grant management were seemed fairly unimpressed by it. Scottish Office strategy seemed to be all in favour of the university arrangement. UHI seemed to be running out of steam when unexpectedly the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, announced his support for it in 1996. This opened up the prospect of UHI gaining Millennium Commission funding which it duly did. The whole strategic thrust of the college quickly changed from the university to UHI. The widespread view is that this was imposed from above. It certainly wasn't supported by the staff who regretted what now became a forced transition from university to UHI-OUVS validated awards. The university-validated social science degree never actually ran.

By 1997 UHI proposed a social sciences degree and much to our consternation handed over the leadership to Chisholm College. They had their own Access, HNC/D and degree links with another Scottish University. However in the summer of 1997 an attempted social sciences degree failed at external validation and a hiatus of several months took place when there seemed to be no progress while both Grant and Ferguson Colleges were anxious to move to degree level.

In March 1998 I was Head of Faculty of Arts and Humanities but was concerned that no one in the college had a clear view of how the college-UHI relationship was working out. I heard about a UHI Research conference in Orkney and decided to attend to try to get some idea of what was going on. At that conference I met the Depute Principal of Ferguson College and the Chair of the UHI Academic Development Committee and we talked about social sciences. A few days later moves were made to transfer the leadership of social sciences from Chisholm to Grant.

The appointment as course leader – March 1998

At this time I was head of faculty with a wide range of curriculum management responsibilities. I had six colleagues working with me as programme area managers, one of these covering social sciences and languages. The Acting Principal at the time received a phone call from Executive Office asking if we would take over responsibility for social sciences. He spoke to the programme area manager who agreed to do it and she phoned me at home that evening to tell me what had happened. The next day we met and she made it clear that she wanted to me to head up the degree development. At the time the college was about to re-structure itself and it was clear that the head of faculty position was to disappear. In the circumstances I decided to run with it. It was another opportunity to get degree level social sciences up and running in Inverness. I went home that evening with some OU and other materials and started making notes on the aims of social sciences courses. For the first time in a fair while I felt as if I was enjoying something to do with work.

The initial design and development of the BA Social Sciences

It was clear from the beginning of the development process that UHI needed a successful validation very quickly. The target was to get a degree up and running by September so we were looking at an internal validation by July and an external validation by early September. It was now March. It was quickly established that the 'network' in this case would be two colleges – Grant and Ferguson. Chisholm had another year or two to run of their existing Scottish university-validated degree and so stayed out. An inner team of five people was established – myself as course leader, a colleague who was programme area manager for social sciences at Grant, another colleague, her opposite number at Ferguson, a retired Director of another institution in Scotland who had become involved in UHI through Ferguson College, and a researcher based at one of the other UHI academic partner colleges which did not become part of the BASS degree. The wider team included everyone who

would be involved in the development and delivery of modules. This included two external academics who lived in the Inverness area and who worked for the OU.

There are certain clear themes that emerged at this time. First, the team members were delighted to get the opportunity to design a degree and they looked forward to being able to deliver it. They were used to have curriculum design, content, assessment and marking decisions imposed on them from the Scottish Qualifications Authority HNC/D courses. The UHI degree was widely seen as a way of gaining freedom from SQA and autonomous decision making. Second, a team spirit quickly developed perhaps because of the urgency of the development. The general mood was one of 'going for it' and 'making the most' of what was generally regarded as an unusual opportunity. Staff were conscious of the lack of such opportunity in the FE sector in general. There was a recognition that UHI was creating an opportunity for us. Most people were keen to teach at higher levels. At this stage issues such as FE contracts of employment barely arose.

The inner team met several times and worked on the aims, objectives and overall 'shape' of the degree. It was considered important to design a degree that formed a coherent whole, which gave some recognition to the nature of the region, but which also allowed for 'standard' coverage of core disciplines. This was before the days of QAA subject benchmarks. A general three-year degree was designed along the lines proposed by the Dearing/Garrick Committees. The other major issue we faced was to do with the learning and teaching model to be deployed. It was known that UHI had a teaching and learning policy. This was a slim document agreed in 1998. The general notion of delivering the curriculum to the proverbial crofter on Benbecula was recognised but it was also known to be practically impossible for us. In essence, for us the teaching and learning model was conventional classroom delivery in both colleges. The curriculum was networked only insofar as we had worked together to design the degree, to set the learning outcomes and the module content and assessment requirements. We would also be able to second mark each other's work. There wasn't really any 'networked' learning involved, rather it was a 'parallel delivery' system.

Early Stages
The team showed their enthusiasm by a full turnout for the internal validation event which took place in the middle of the July holidays. This successfully negotiated, we moved to the

external validation in September and started delivery two weeks later. In 1998-99 we recruited a first year and we allowed some HND students to proceed straight into the third year. So we ran the BA1 and BA3 levels immediately. Having worked intensively and quickly it was a relief to get started and things went smoothly until we realised that we needed to run formal boards of examiners and the work involved began to become clear. UHI had put huge investment into staff development for validation work but hardly anything went into routine running of courses. This was generally recognised by about January 1999 and a big switch in staff development emphasis quickly followed. Our first exam board became a staff development event and the 'real thing' was delayed for one month. The June 1999 exam board went very well.

Teaching and learning proceeded on a conventional basis in cooperation with our partners in Ferguson.

The inclusion of Chisholm College

In 1999 communications opened up with Chisholm College with a view to their inclusion in the UHI degree. Their own degree was coming up for re-validation and it was decided that this was the time for them to join the UHI network. A series of meetings between myself, the leaders in Grant and Ferguson and staff in Chisholm took place and a validation event was held at Chisholm. This was successful and so in September 2000 Chisholm joined the network which now had three members. On the whole this went well although there was some concern from Chisholm about being 'left out' or being regarded as partial partners by the other colleges. I tried hard to avoid this kind of thing. Chisholm continued to run their HND for a year or two and so they only ran BA3 – this scenario went on for longer than originally anticipated and may explain the sense of separateness that continued for some while. The parallel delivery system went on.

The first re-validation – Feb 2003

By about 2001 there were concerns in Ferguson about student numbers and the site leader increasingly argued that the teaching and learning model had to move to a more online system in order to achieve greater viability. The online development of Child and Youth Studies and Culture Studies a year of two after the Social Science development gradually increased confidence that this could be done. One problem was finding funds to move over to online delivery. Gradually funds were found and by 2003 all of the first year modules

were online. A second problem was that not all staff liked the idea of the online route. There were concerns about 'jobs' and about the quality of student experience. I was not confident myself that we could rely on the online systems to run a whole degree. Nevertheless experience gradually built up as team members were drawn into other teams and there was a development of 'know-how' and experience.

In 2002-03 we underwent a QAA Subject Review for which a huge amount of work was done. The team gained 'commendable' judgements for two of the three criteria – progression, and teaching and learning. We were 'approved' on resources.

The course was due for re-validation in 2004 however we had always had it in mind to move to honours provision. I was keen to move to honours as quickly as possible, partly because I thought it increased student choice, and would attract more recruits, but also because I was keen to be one of the first honours degrees in UHI. I also felt that a QAA Review and a re-validation in the same year would mean two achievements for the price of one. I argued for an early re-validation and wanted to include Honours. External examiners had indicated that the team was ready to go for honours. The team went along with this though perhaps privately concerned about the capacity to deliver at this level.

In February 2003 I was off work for a while with a back problem and the result was that the documentation for the internal validation was not as good as it should have been. The proposal was to introduce honours modules in sociology and psychology with politics moving up at a later date. Modules in these disciplines had been designed as a contribution to the Child and Youth Studies Honours development, also moving on. A complication at this time was the unilateral decision of Ferguson management to stop delivering the BA1 (just at the moment when it was online) and to concentrate the first year students in to the HNC. This de facto created an HNC-plus degree. My immediate reaction to this was to propose that we keep the BA1 in Grant but recognise the HNC as equivalent. It all became a bit messy and the internal validation panel rejected the honours proposal (though asking for it to come back at a later time). They felt it was not a good idea to leave out politics, that the resource base was uncertain, and that the proposed fourth year was just a 'bolt-on' to the degree. (This last point was exceptionally annoying since it was not at all how we saw it).

The team came out of that event feeling quite demoralised, I certainly was. Some members privately may have been relieved not to have to work to honours, perhaps feeling they were already working at the maximum capacity. Having had an excellent QAA report we felt very down about the internal validation just a few weeks later. I quickly arranged a course team event over two days in one of the local hotels and we had a lengthy session late into the night. By the next morning my own mind was starting to clear and we adopted a number of clear decisions:

1. Honours would be pursued at a later date but only with the full and prior support of management

2. We would adopt a clear HNC-plus strategy, this abandoning BA1 (though most of the modules continued to be delivered as they were picked up by other course teams)

3. The BA2 and BA3 would be re-designed to allow progression from the HNC and to fit with a future BA4. We built in clearly the idea of an integrated four-year curriculum.

4. We would start immediate work putting together a resource plan with managers to build up the case for honours over time.

I made sure the documents were in good order and the external re-validation in May 2003 went very well. Much to my delight, the external panel said they could not see why the internal panel had held back honours!

In teaching and learning terms, the conventional parallel delivery model continued except that more and more modules were gradually being adopted for on line use. However the abandonment of the BA1 clearly held back the evolution of the course into one deliverable to the full network.

Preparations for the 2nd re-validation and Honours 2006

The May 2003 re-validation restored the morale and confidence of the team and we went into 2003-04 looking forward to movement on honours although in that session we had to put a certain amount of effort into the conventionally-delivered HNC.

I met with managers and continued to pursue the resource plan, seeking funding for online development at every opportunity. I encouraged staff to apply for staff development opportunities. In 2004-05 I had a sabbatical to visit politics departments around the country with a view to designing an honours curriculum, thus dealing with one of the weaknesses of March 2003.

An important event took place in November 2003 when the UHI invited Professor Graham Gibbs to do a workshop on teaching and learning strategies. Up until that point UHI had worked with the 1998 policy. At the event he seemed stumped by the number of fundamental issues facing UHI all at once. He was used to going into institutions and focusing on one or two key problems. However in UHI there was the issue of how to get a curriculum delivered to a scattered population in a way that was not a replication of the OU. This event did however start focusing attention on teaching and learning strategies at programme level though of course everyone knew that a variety of models were in use. UHI came up with the idea of 'blended learning' which felt a bit like 'do what you can'.

Two important social science meetings took place in March and May 2005 when the ground work was laid for the next re-validation and honours validation. At these it was decided to adopt a blended learning strategy that would start with a conventional HNC and move to online with local tutorials at levels 2 and 3 and then move to purely online at level 4. It was considered that this was consistent with the UHI teaching and learning strategy adopted in 2004 and appropriate to the characteristics of the course.

The honours validation was achieved in March 2006. The first year of delivery was delayed until September 2007 because management decided to delay the inauguration of Child and Youth Studies and since some of the modules are 'shared' it was considered not viable to run one course on its own.

The first year of honours was successfully delivered in 2007-08.

In 2008-09 moves are afoot to introduce a new History and Politics degree and a single subject Psychology degree is in preparation. Preliminary discussions about taught postgraduate level study is also underway.

The UHI Millennium Institute

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