

**Explorations of the Policy Drive to
Foster a Research Culture within the
University of the Highlands and Islands**

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Abstract

This study focuses on the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) modelled on a federal, collegiate university based on a number of existing and geographically dispersed Further Education (FE) colleges and research institutions. The inclusion of FE colleges and their geographical dispersal distinguishes it from most mainstream institutions. The UHI was heralded by its advocates as a distinctively radical enterprise designed to meet the fast-moving challenges of the twenty-first century by embracing new technologies and overcoming geographical barriers. After attaining Higher Education (HE) status in 2001, the policy goal of fostering a research culture emerged as a prominent concern for the UHI. This study explores the policy drive to foster such a research culture, focusing on the period from 2003 to 2008.

The study was informed by a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach and the data gathering included twenty-six semi-structured interviews to ascertain how this policy drive was received within the UHI partners. The study found that a unified research culture was not perceived to have embedded throughout the partners, with the exception of one or two research institutions where it can be said to have pre-existed. Against this backdrop, the study identified emerging discourses encapsulating how the policy drive was perceived by a wide spectrum of different actors throughout the UHI. Two different types of performativity discourses proved to be central in shaping the policy aspiration, namely a 'RAE performativity discourse' and a 'Further Education (FE) performativity discourse'. Both discourses can be seen to have influenced the trajectory of research expansionist policy within the UHI by setting up a normative space privileging certain identities, subjectivities and associated actions at the expense of others.

In highlighting both the structural and socio-cultural barriers to the policy of promoting research, the study aims to contribute to wider debates on institutional policies for building research capacity in a dual sector/hybrid institutional setting. In terms of offering direct benefits to the UHI, by analysing the different sort of assumptions and realities that shape the meaning of a research culture within the UHI, this study may help inform future policy making on research expansion within UHI partners. The study concludes by making a number of practical recommendations which the author believes will help move research from the periphery to a more central stage within the UHI partners.

Declaration

I declare the thesis has been composed by myself and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration with others included in the thesis.

Patrick O'Donnell

Certificate

This is to certify that Patrick O'Donnell has carried out research under my supervision; and that he has fulfilled the conditions of the relevant Ordinance and Regulations for the Completion of a Doctorate of Education.

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Introduction

Further and higher education (FE and HE) in Scotland have traditionally been divided into two sectors with different organisational cultures and operating structures. However, in the last decade the boundary between them has become more porous with FE increasingly delivering HE courses and collaborating more and more with universities on a range of access courses and degrees. Indeed, this transition has been reflected in a number of academic studies on colleges delivering both FE and HE, commonly referred to as ‘dual sector’ or hybrid institutions (see Bathmaker *et al.*, 2008; Bathmaker and Thomas, 2009; Garrod, and MacFarlane, 2007; and Smith *et al.*, 2007). By exploring how a number of FE colleges and research institutions have collaborated to form an HE institution – subsequently known as the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) – this study relates to the field of dual sector or hybrid institution research.¹ The main aim of the study is to explore how this newly emerging HE institution attempts to embed a research culture within its FE partner institutions.

Broadly speaking, the study is concerned with institutional transition in terms of both policy formation and interpretation. In considering policy formation and interpretation the study aims to identify the emerging discourses associated with the fostering of a research culture. With respect to research outcomes the study contributes towards two areas. Firstly, and more generally, the study is intended to contribute to the debates surrounding organisational transition within dual sector or

¹ The idea of the UHI being associated with the ‘dual sector’ can be seen in an article in *Times Higher Education Supplement* (TES): ‘There is increasing interest in blurring the divide between the two sectors [FE and HE] for the benefits of students. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee is clearly intrigued by the UHI Millennium Institute, the ‘Highlands and Islands’ high-tech federation of further education colleges and research institutes that has now won designation as a higher education institute.’ (19th October, 2001:16)

hybrid institutional settings. Secondly, in terms of offering direct benefits to the UHI, it is envisaged that the study may help inform future policy making on the expansion of research within the UHI partners. However, before providing a more detailed mapping of the main research question and research aims, it is important for conceptual clarity to first give a contextual backdrop as to why this study topic was of interest to the author.

Brief Historical Background

In 1993, Highlands and Islands Enterprise established the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Project which was heralded by its advocates as a distinctively radical enterprise. The UHI blueprint was developed by Professor Sir Graham Hills (former Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow) in a document commonly known as the *Hills Report* (1992). The UHI, modelled on a federal, collegiate university based on a number of existing further education colleges and research institutions (commonly referred to as academic partners) clearly abandoned the more conventional model of a single campus university housed in a single location.² In the autumn of 1996 the Millennium Commission awarded the UHI £33.35 million, one of the largest single awards in Scotland. This funding was for physical infrastructure, including a number of campus-based building projects. It was also used to form an area network for communications and information technology. This network allowed the all-important technological foundations for linking the various partner institutions. Significantly, this initial investment was seen as providing the initial communications infrastructure that would help alleviate the obstacles of space,

² Each academic partner has its own character; some are relatively large colleges in the urban centres of the region such as Perth, Elgin and Inverness. Others are smaller institutions, including some whose primary focus is on research.

distance and dispersal that had previously stifled educational and social development in the Highlands and Islands (Hills and Lingard, 2004). In 2001, the UHI was designated an HE institution formally known as the UHI Millennium Institute and more recently – in the summer of 2008 – the UHI was granted degree awarding powers, an important step towards attaining full university title.³ A sense of the UHI's overall trajectory in terms of future goals and aspirations can be detected in its current mission statement:

To be a distinctive and innovative regional university of national and international significance: a university with a pivotal role in the educational, economic, social, cultural and environmental infrastructure of its region and which reaches out to the people of the Highlands and Islands and the rest of the world through its research and teaching. (UHI website, 2010)

Despite utilising technological advances, the UHI can still be described as a somewhat dispersed community, a differentiated system of large and small colleges and research institutions. For individual FE partners, the structural and cultural changes associated with being part of a federal, collegiate HE institution have been significant. Some of these changes include the formation of new partnerships on specific HE delivery programmes, the introduction of new academic curriculum areas and associated quality control and accountability systems, changing and evolving job roles and responsibilities, the hiring of new staff and upgrading of the academic profile and qualifications of existing staff, the acquisition of new buildings, the expansion and re-configuration of staff development and human resource systems, and changes to the role of particular spaces and places resulting from the creation of HE-specific teaching environments and study areas. Of course, because of their size, individual histories, structural arrangements and, perhaps most significantly, their overall agility in absorbing new directives from the UHI

³ At the time of writing the UHI has not achieved the goal of university title, although it is widely expected to achieve it in spring 2011.

Executive Office, these changes have not impacted uniformly on the FE partners. Over time these changes have coalesced in their different ways, opening up a new and, in part, unpredictable educational landscape for the FE partners. Inevitably, this evolving university model can bring a number of organisational challenges as partner institutions attempt to balance their own individual institutional FE identity in terms of operating ethos and culture, positioning and defining themselves within a much wider institution. The potential difficulties associated with this should not be underestimated. Indeed, as earlier writings on the evolution of the UHI (notably Webster, 2003; Hills and Lingard, 2004) have highlighted, the transition to a federal collegiate arrangement was not without tension in terms of power struggles.⁴ Thus, it seems fair to say that any examination of the embedding of a research culture within the UHI – a dynamic closely aligned with the identity of HE – was going to be an interesting area of study in terms of developing understandings of organisational transitions where a number of separate institutions collaborate together to create an HE institution.

The Role of Research within the UHI

As the UHI evolved during the late 1990s, policy statements on the significance of building a research profile – commonly referred to as research capacity building – started to appear. The research focus can be traced back to 1997 with the appointment of the first Chief Executive of the UHI (Brian Duffield) who quickly set up the UHI Executive Office which included a director of research. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on research was in part a result of a change to the UHI

⁴ Indeed, the internal difficulties and power struggles escalated to such an extent that by the summer of 2000 they were firmly placed in the wider public domain with polemical essays such as ‘The dream of a university of the Highlands and Islands seems to be fading’ being published in the national press. (*The Herald*, 10 June, 2000: 15)

constitution in the summer of 1998. This constitutional change meant that the UHI would be working towards the quality control arrangements set out in the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* (1992). Essentially, this meant that the UHI would be following a more traditional route to the goal of HE status and as such would have to fall in line with the other Scottish HE institutions in terms of accountability and performance measures.

The Executive Office set up a research committee comprising members from the academic partners with the specific aim of advancing and co-ordinating any research activities. Of course, the increasing importance given to the fostering of a research profile within the UHI at this time and beyond is not surprising given that research and related activities had increasingly been perceived in performative terms as an important benchmark for a university's academic status, not to mention an essential source of revenue (Henkel, 2000 and Smith, 2001). As Smith notes:

Research is a core activity in higher education. It provides new knowledge [...]. This knowledge provides numerous benefits: it underpins teaching inside the university [...] it provides a pool of knowledge and expertise on which the economy can draw [...] it maintains access to broader reservoirs of international research fundings [...]. (Smith, 2001: 131)

However, because the UHI comprises largely FE institutions (with no such remit for performative benchmarks for research activities) the policy drive to advance research activities can be seen as particularly challenging in transformational terms. By mid-1998 the UHI announced its support for four research schools across the partnership.⁵ Throughout this expansion phase in the late 1990s, the UHI Executive Office articulated a range of declarations on the importance of establishing a

⁵ These early research schools were: Natural Systems Science based at Scottish Association for Marine Science Research Institute; Language, Culture & Heritage, Leirsinn, based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig on the Isle of Skye; Sustainable Rural Development based at Lews Castle College and Learning Environments & Technology based at Perth College.

research culture within the UHI partners. The desire to foster a research culture developed into an overarching theme in the first UHI Strategic Planning Framework document (1998–2001) and all subsequent planning documents. Encompassing the notion of a research culture, the first strategic planning document stated:

Research is central to the role of the UHI. As a provider of higher education one of its strategic aims is to expand UHI's research capability and imbue a self-sustaining research culture which will advance knowledge, support student learning and contribute to social and economic development.⁶ (UHI Strategic Planning Framework document, 1998–2001: 53)

The enormity and complexity of this undertaking was not under-estimated. The same Strategic Planning Framework went on to acknowledge this new policy goal as one of the *'major cultural and structural transformation and challenges for the UHI'* (*ibid*: 58). The ensuing years witnessed the introduction of a number of policies and initiatives geared towards the expansion of research. These included the provision of financial support and guidance (where appropriate) for existing and newly created research projects and institutions, the introduction of a sabbatical scheme for all UHI staff wishing to pursue research, the provision of financial support for staff development relating to research degrees and the creation of a number of staff development programmes on research methodology skills. At an institutional level, the UHI Executive Office required all academic partners to draw up their own research strategies, setting up research committees to encourage, co-ordinate and support research activities that both align broadly with the aims of the UHI research strategy and also reflect their own individual strengths, opportunities and interests. Significantly, encouraged by the new emphasis placed on research by the UHI Executive, a few FE partners went as far as setting up research units and

⁶ Interestingly, at the time of writing this statement can still be found in the UHI Research Policy documentation (2010).

centres with full-time researchers in an attempt to kick-start a research profile within their institutions.

Research expansion within the UHI was significant during the first decade of the new Millennium and much of this expansion has been strongly linked with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which takes place approximately every five years to assess research quality in all UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The results of the RAE are used by the Research Councils and the Funding Councils to apportion the amount of government funding each HEI receives. The RAE is widely seen as a barometer for research quality by superimposing a common framework of specific research output criteria to be met within a set time period. Perhaps more than any other initiative, it had become part of what Henkel (2000) terms 'academics' assumptive worlds' creating a new time frame for the production of research. For the HE sector it enacted a new kind of symbolic power and status and operated as an indicator to other funding bodies as to where the best research areas and institutes could be found. Applauding the pace of research expansion during this period, the current UHI Strategic Plan states:

We have been successful in attracting funding to develop our research capacity from the Scottish Funding Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, European structural funds and from private benefactors. Our submission to the 2007 research assessment exercise (RAE) achieved an increase of 400% in the number of academic staff compared with the 2001 submission. (UHI Strategic Plan, 2008–2011: 11)

In 2001, the UHI made submissions in only two disciplines for the RAE. In 2007, by contrast, the submissions increased to eight disciplines. Celebrating this expansion the UHI Principal Professor Bob Cormack stated: *'We can be proud of making considerable progress since becoming a higher education institution in 2001. Our research population has increased from 17 to 74 in seven years and is*

believed to be the fastest growth rate in Scotland' (UHI press release, 17 December, 2008). It is significant to note that the increase in UHI research population had been achieved through importing researchers from other universities/HE institutions to set up new research areas, increasing the capacity of existing research areas and absorbing or networking with other research institutions.⁷ As a result, UHI research has been promoted through various research centres and academic departments which include established research in environmental science, marine science, renewable energy and sustainability, health, history, archaeology and various developing research environments.⁸ Many of these institutions are part of the UHI network and although they operate with an independent mandate are often affiliated to UHI academic partners.

Research Expansion: The Contribution from Further Education Partners

Interestingly, despite the UHI introducing policies and initiatives aimed at embedding a self-sustaining research culture throughout the academic partners, the overall contribution from the FE academic partners has been thus far relatively limited, especially in developing research activities that would be included within the RAE. Although many FE academic partners have set up research centres they are generally seen as detached from the normative culture or structure of the rest of the FE college.⁹ The overall picture that emerges is one that suggests that the UHI ambition to create a research culture – perceived here as the creation and embedding

⁷ UHI Strategic Plan (2006-8).

⁸ The UHI research centres include: The Centre for Mountain Studies; The Agronomy Institute; The Centre for Interpretation Studies; Centre for Nordic Studies; The Centre for Rural Health; Environmental Research Institute; The North Atlantic Fisheries College Marine Centre; The Centre for Remote and Rural Studies; The Scottish Association for Marine Science and The UHI Centre for History. Research at academic partners include: Lews Castle College; Orkney College; Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Perth College.

⁹ These research centres employ researchers who previously worked as researchers in HE or research institutions, they operate under different contractual conditions from FE teaching staff delivering HE courses for the UHI.

of structures and norms that encourage and value research activities within and between the UHI partners – has not yet materialised across the UHI. The overwhelming majority of staff within the FE academic partners teaching on UHI degree level courses are not yet immersed in an institutional environment where research activities are a normative part of the working culture. In other words, the paradigmatic changes stimulated and orchestrated by the UHI's research strategy have not been fully internalised by its FE academic partners.

With respect to notions of a research culture, the UHI partnership can be described as a divergent and loosely interlaced community rather than one characterised by a tightly bound configuration. Given that the UHI policy statements also reflect the need for research to underpin teaching, this overall lack of research growth within the FE academic partners can be seen as particularly concerning. Indeed, the overall lack of progress in embedding a research culture within the FE academic partners raises questions on how UHI policy on research expansion has impacted on their institutional culture and operational structures. How far this lack of progress in embedding a research culture within the FE partners is an overall reflection of the interrelationship between the wider forces intrinsic to HE research (the external policy forces being played out within the research landscape) and the specific contextual circumstances associated with the trajectory of the UHI research expansion policy is an obvious area for consideration for this study. Although the potential challenges associated with the embedding of a research culture have been formally recognised by the UHI in strategic documents, what is less understood and less openly discussed are the dynamics of human agency in the interpretation and subsequent enactment of UHI policy on research expansion.

It is significant to note that the overall focus and relevance of this research – in terms of offering understandings into the impact of UHI research policies and, perhaps more generally, the potential contribution it offers to the field of ‘dual sector’ studies – has not materialised without insights developed from what Mercer (2007) describes as ‘insider’ experience.¹⁰ The author, being a long-serving member of the research committee at their institution – Perth College, the largest FE UHI partner – was able to gain certain insights into what sort of research-related policies were being developed by the UHI Executive Office and how research opportunities were being perceived, advanced and supported within the FE academic partner context. More specifically, the author was able to observe how policy makers, managers and teaching staff operating within the FE setting were orientating themselves towards the policy drive to foster a research culture. Drawing on this (insider) experience together with some insights gained from early research studies (taking place between 2001–2002, as part of a taught doctorate programme) a number of potential difficulties surrounding the policy goal of fostering a research culture within the FE setting emerged. The first difficulty related to the actual structural arrangements of the UHI. Given that the UHI is constituted by a number of FE institutions and research institutes – each exhibiting different organisational structures and practices, local histories and associated myths and rituals – UHI policy implementation was not likely to be absorbed and internalised in a smooth, monolithic or unitary fashion but inevitably subjected to some form of alteration. Thus, within the diverse community of stakeholders that constitute the UHI, the values and behaviours encouraged or underwritten by UHI policy makers and articulated in strategic planning documents are filtered through certain political,

¹⁰ Mercer describes the insider as: ‘*someone whose biography gives them a lived familiarity with the group being researched while the outsider is a researcher who does not have intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to entry into the group.*’ (2007: 3)

economic and social predispositions and thus, are open to what Scott refers to as interpretational slippage: *'Policy texts are not closed, their meanings are neither fixed nor clear, and the 'carry-over' of meanings from one policy arena and one educational site to another is subjected to interpretational slippage and contestation'* (Scott, 1996: 78).

The second difficulty in embedding a research culture within the FE partners is linked to the traditional cultural and operational culture of these organisations. Within this context it is important to note that FE academic partners have no history of carrying out research activities and no established operational orientation for research and related activities. In other words, research does not constitute part of the overall FE identity. Rather, FE colleges are organisationally and culturally orientated towards generating their income from the provision of a taught curriculum; it is teaching delivery that is the shared touchstone and not research activities.

Research Question

Informed in part by this insider perspective, this study explores the policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI. In doing so, it maps the types of discourses emerging around the value and role of research within the UHI focusing on the period between 2003 and 2008. The main research question asks:

What are the emerging discourses arising from the policy drive to foster a research culture within the University of the Highlands and Islands?

Discourses in the context of this study are seen in terms of their wider socio-cultural setting, as producing certain interpretative realities, hierarchical relations of power and identity. As Edwards *et al.* note: *'Discourses bring different categories and*

objects of knowledge into existence, making possible different ways of knowing the world and of acting within it' (2004: 114). Thus, in attempting to capture, delineate and specify the range of discourses that are emerging from the policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI, the study's aims are:

- To contribute to wider debates on institutional policies and change. More specifically, the study will lend insights into debates surrounding the strategies for building research capacity and the development of research cultures in a dual sector/hybrid institutional setting.
- In terms of offering direct benefits to the UHI, it is also envisaged that, by exposing the different sorts of assumptions and realities that shape and inform the meaning of a research culture within the UHI, the study may help to inform future policy making on the expansion of research within UHI partners.

As Scott (1996) highlights, institutional policies must be understood within wider socio-economic conditions. Within institutions, organisational cultures, multiple perspectives as well as stakeholders and emergent power relations are important. As touched upon earlier, policies themselves, whether as texts or in promotion and implementation, are subject to multiple interpretations and readings. In other words, policies do not enter an institutional vacuum; instead they enter existing socio-economic conditions, policy structures, organisational cultures and power relations. These constraints and complexities have the potential to distort and reconfigure the intended meanings and enactment of policy goals. Policy analysis needs to take

account of the fluid relationships between policy intentions, interpretations and enactments. As Taylor *et al.* state:

To analyse policies simply in terms of the words written in formal documents is to overlook the nuances and subtleties of the context which give policy texts meaning and significance. Policies are thus dynamic and interactive, and not merely a set of instructions or intentions. (1997: 15)

In order to take account of the potentially fluid relationships between policy intentions, interpretations, and enactments, the main research question was further broken down into five sub-questions:

Sub-Question	Purpose
1/ How is the idea of a research culture perceived within the context of the UHI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to tease out the meanings and conceptualisations of research within the UHI, how it compares to what is meant by research culture in other HE settings. – to provide insights on whether there is a unified or fragmented view on what is meant by research culture.
2/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the policy aspiration of creating a research culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to uncover how different actors perceive the policy aspiration in terms of it being realistic and achievable. – to reveal insights on a shared commitment to a shared purpose. – to provide understandings on how different actors perceive the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions.
3/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive both the barriers and driving forces in promoting a research culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to uncover understandings on constraint and agency, what dynamics enhance and decrease the levels of engagement in research. – to provide understandings on how policy imperatives might clash against and complement existing structures, arrangements and cultures.
4/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the impact of the Research Assessment Exercise on the organisation and structure of policy drivers aimed at expanding research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to give insights into how the RAE opens up a space for research expansion and how it might posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations within the context of UHI research. – to provide understandings on how the RAE shapes perceptions on research activities, biographical profiles of researchers.
5/ What are the emerging researcher identities within the UHI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to provide understandings on how the policy drive creates inclusive and exclusive structures/ attitudes and prejudices. – to gain insights of any ‘otherness’ and how it relates to power relations.

Drawing on the author's insider experience it is argued that these sub-questions help to give insights into what Taylor *et al.* (*ibid*) refer to as the 'nuances and subtleties' of policy meanings and significance within the UHI.

Setting the Scene: Considering the Wider Landscape

Exploring educational policy, Taylor *et al.* observe: '*The problem always remains that by focusing on the figures which move across the landscape we may neglect the geomorphology of the landscape itself and the changes in its terrain and substructure*' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997: 36). This cautionary note is worth considering when approaching questions surrounding the nature and identity of the UHI and how it approaches the policy goal of fostering a research culture. Although the literature on UHI identity and progress emphasises its perceived uniqueness vis-à-vis the rest of the HE sector, it is argued here that this ignores the changing landscape of HE generally. Therefore, to develop understandings on the emerging discourses and potential tensions arising from the policy drive to foster a research culture, it is argued that the first important step must be to consider the UHI in terms of its identity and policy trajectory on research capacity building within the context of the wider changes taking place within the topography of HE in the UK. Chapter one therefore, considers the changing landscape of HE in terms of its policy and practice as well as the structural changes that have taken place over the last two decades. The central aim here is to map the broad spectrum of changes within HE against which the overall genesis and evolution of the UHI can be considered. Space constraints make it impossible to consider all the changes which have been explored elsewhere in a proliferation of studies on the structural and cultural changes taking place in HE. Nevertheless, it is argued that the wider HE changes

addressed in chapter one are sufficiently broad to offer essential reference points for the themes and findings presented in later chapters. The main focus will be on the post-1992 years – a time not only contemporaneous with the conception of the UHI but also a period often perceived as a new epoch in which the internal characteristics of universities and the very meaning of HE have undergone major changes resulting in a highly differentiated system with more permeable boundaries, including collaboration with multiple outside agencies (Barnett, 2000; Scott, 1995, 2000). Themes such as globalisation, developments in communications technology and the increasingly dominant imperatives of accountability and performativity are considered. Given that the UHI is composed of a number of FE institutions it is informative to consider some of the political, social-cultural and economic developments visited upon the FE sector (Scotland) in the post-1992 period. This mapping highlights how the FE sector has experienced rapid and significant change as colleges have undergone substantial re-organisation in terms of structural and cultural developments following the policy process of ‘incorporation’ (put simply the policy process of moving away from local authority control and embracing private sector ethos and working practices). Significantly, the chapter will also explore the impact of the RAE, thus providing the essential wider contextual backdrop for framing and appraising the trajectory of UHI research policies. The discussions on performativity and the RAE have an important role here in that they also offer essential understandings for conceptualising the dominant discourses outlined in this study. Chapter two traces the overall evolution of the UHI. It considers how the perceived identity of the UHI relates to the wider debates on the changes taking place in HE and argues that the UHI is perhaps more of a sign of the times rather than a radical enterprise pushing new frontiers. It describes the

development of research expansion within the UHI and places it within a wider context of HE change, thus setting the scene for the more detailed discussions associated with the research expansion examined in later chapters. Chapter three outlines the research methodology adopted. In mapping the contours of the emerging discourses on the expansion of research within the UHI, the study is informed by what Charmaz (2006) refers to as a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach.¹¹ The data gathering includes semi-structured interviews involving a process of eliciting opinions, feelings, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes from a number of key informants involved in research within the UHI.

Chapter four analyses the interview data, using the coding approaches commonly associated with grounded theory. The coding process sets out different steps of interview phases and, more specifically, allows the crucial bond between collecting the data and developing an emerging theory to explain the data. The chapter organises and analyses the interview data by mapping the various accounts of the social, structural, economic, political and cultural dynamics relating to research expansion within five categories which are further sub-divided into broad political strategies and perspectives. It is argued that these categories capture the essence of participants' narratives while at the same time presenting those stories within an informative framework that elucidates how the aspiration to foster a research culture has been perceived by those affected by it. The chapter concludes by arguing that the fifth category – the 'Performance Imperative' – proved to be central in understanding the dynamic social power relations influencing and informing the fostering of a research culture within the UHI during the period under study.

¹¹ A reconfiguration of the original grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss, 1967.

Chapter five identifies the emerging discourses that can be said to underlie the five political strategies and perspectives. It focuses on the emerging dominant discourse – the ‘Performance Imperative’ – which comprises two interrelated performativity discourses influencing and informing the fostering of a research culture within the UHI, namely the ‘RAE performativity discourse’, and the ‘FE performativity discourse’. It is argued that these interlaced discourses proved to be the best conduit for understanding the perceived successes and tensions associated with UHI research expansion as they helped to illuminate the micro processes within the UHI. The study concludes by discussing how the performativity discourses identified by the author have influenced perceptions on researcher identity and, by doing so, hopes to make some broad recommendations that might inform future policy on research expansion within the UHI.

Chapter One

I. The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

Introduction

It is fair to say that the transformation in the nature and structure of universities as a sector had accelerated rapidly in the UK towards the end of the twentieth century (Coffield and Williamson, 1997). These developments must be viewed as part of a wide range of interconnected factors, including global, economic and political pressures. Irrespective of the interpretative frame in which it is placed, be it post-industrialism, globalisation, late capitalism, or postmodernity, the sector has been subjected to considerable social, economic, structural and cultural changes. In considering these wider elements shaping HE, David notes:

We have witnessed massive global social and economic change that has influenced all of our conceptualisations and understandings of higher education in relation to the economy, society, states, work or labour, markets and knowledge. (David, 2007: 676)

The following account attempts to map the changes within HE over the last two decades for the purposes of this study. The principal focus will be on the impact of the main developments emerging within the post-1992 expansion of HE, the time when the UHI evolved. As stated previously the intention is not to give a detailed history, but merely the necessary context for some of the significant themes and topics in later chapters. As such this mapping will be framed by questions surrounding the emergence and perceived distinctiveness of the UHI. The chapter will firstly chart the well documented economic imperatives which are claimed to have increasingly dominated discussions on the purpose and practice of HE and resulted in the post-1992 expansion of HE (Coffield, 1999; Land, 2004 and Field,

2006)¹² Importantly, this so-called second wave of rapid expansion not only coincided with the end of the binary divide between polytechnics and universities in the early 1990s (Mayhew, *et al.*, 2004) but also with the birth of the UHI.

In terms of UHI identity and its perceived distinctiveness, it is also important to appreciate that it is predominantly made up of a number of FE institutions. Secondly, therefore, this section on the post-1992 changes will also chart the main changes within the FE sector during the time the UHI emerged. This will focus on how the sector was radically reconfigured by the policy of incorporation. This is of particular relevance here because it not only gives insights into why some FE colleges decided to join a collaborative venture such as the UHI but also helps to contextualise the respondents' views cited later. Thirdly, this chapter will analyse how the UHI evolved within the local context of a Scottish HE community undergoing major social, structural and cultural changes, resulting in a highly differentiated and more fluid system. This will include a discussion of the influence of the concept of lifelong learning on HE and, more specifically, of how the UHI has positioned itself in relation to the policy imperatives of lifelong learning. Fourthly, in an attempt to contextualise the findings of this study the chapter will provide an overview of how a discourse of performativity has arisen to occupy an increasingly dominant position in the debates on the general changes in HE. This mapping will consider claims that the pervasive emphasis on performance has had a bearing on professional culture and on significant shifts in the way the HE sector has justified its existence. In particular, it will consider claims that it has helped create new modes of regulation and forms of governmentality (Fejes and Nicoll *et*

¹² Framed in terms of meeting the unfolding global economic requirements which, to a large extent, have been dominated by a concern that technological advances in communications and production have ushered in more intense international competition.

al., 2008; Barnett, 2000, 2003; Jary and Parker *et al.*, 1998). Significantly, given the make-up of the UHI, this account will also cover the ideas, values and practices commonly associated with the concept of performativity within the FE sector. The mapping of performativity within both the HE and the FE sector is of particular relevance to this study because it offers understandings of the different dynamics seen to enhance and decrease the levels of engagement in research within the UHI.

In the context of this study the evolution and impact of the RAE – seen by many as an instrument of performativity – proved particularly significant as the study has shown that it has played a crucial role in shaping attitudes informing UHI policy on research (Henkel, 2000, 2005 and Land, 2004). As such the role of the RAE is viewed as paramount for any appraisal of the perceived successes and tensions associated with UHI research expansion in both its micro and macro dynamics. Therefore the section on performativity will be followed by a section mapping some of the broad dynamics of the RAE. Finally, the chapter will outline the influence of certain technological factors on the evolving structure and direction of the UHI. Given that the UHI has been hailed (not least through its own publicity) as a ‘radical, trailblazing enterprise¹³ harnessing communication technologies to academic advantage’, the arrival of information communications technology (ICT) within HE and the related processes of globalisation¹⁴ can be seen as particularly influential in shaping the development of UHI identity (an aspect discussed more

¹³ The UHI’s own press quoted the then First Minister Henry McLeish: ‘*The UHI is a superb trailblazing project, special even in European terms.*’ (UHI Millennium Institute News, summer, 2001: 1)

¹⁴ Globalisation is sometimes seen as a predominantly economic process, presented as the ongoing integration of national economies into the international economy whereby trade, manufacture, foreign investment and capital flows are increasingly interwoven. However, globalisation is also recognised as being driven by a combination of technological, social and cultural as well as economic factors.

fully in chapter two). This section on globalisation will also consider how recent economic, structural, social and cultural changes have in turn generated an upsurge of critical analysis and commentary on the changing roles and meanings of HE (Barnett, 2000, 2003; Delanty, 2001; Land, 2004 and Edwards and Usher, 2008). Therefore, this last section considers the way in which such changes raise new questions concerning the role and identity of HE in the wider world (Barnett, 2000).

I.i Higher Education Expansion in the 1990s

A fundamental question to consider is why the UHI evolved from a concept on paper to an actual entity in 1993. What were the wider dynamics, and policy changes and trends that have underpinned the development of the UHI during the early part of the 1990s? It is fair to say that during the last two decades of the twentieth century, economic concerns increasingly played a role in shaping education policy in the post-compulsory sectors. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s the emerging economic imperatives – which were increasingly dominated by a concern that technological advances in communications technology and production were reconfiguring global competition – acted as a significant prompt for the legitimisation for more expansionist reforms of the HE sector in the early 1990s – commonly referred to as the second wave expansion¹⁵ (Scott, 1995). In other words, HE in the sphere of economic policy assumed even greater political significance than in the past and the drive to expand the HE system was seen as having an essential part to play in advancing economic growth and social justice. Of course, in creating a legitimising discourse for the restructuring of HE, the sector came under closer scrutiny. By the start of the 1990s the critical probing of the

¹⁵ The first wave of expansion was started in 1968 with the *Robins Report*.

conceptual and operational structures of the university by the then Conservative government increasingly crystallised, focusing on what was seen as an overall lack of public accountability and outdated management practices (Hartley, 1995b and Halsey, *et al.* 2003). The prescribed “solution” for education is now well known in educational circles. The 1990s were increasingly characterised by the dominance of neo-liberalism, commonly known in educational discourse as ‘New Right ideology’ (from now on referred to as neo-liberal ideology). Central elements of this neo-liberal ideology constituted an unshakeable faith in the benefits of the free market, competition and individual freedom from what was considered to be overbearing state interference. ‘Markets’ and ‘choice’ became fashionable expressions in the rhetoric of the neo-liberal ideology. These expressions were accompanied by the implicit claim that more choice meant improvements in quality and standards. Moreover, in responding to government pressures to produce more and more graduates in a more cost-effective way, HE increasingly had to absorb the language and practices of private enterprise, becoming more business-like in its operation and outlook (Hartley, 1997; Jary and Parker *et al.*, 1998; Halsey, *et al.*, 2003; Barnett, 2000, 2005 and Lunt, 2008).

The so-called second wave of rapid expansion coincided with the end of what Mayhew *et al.*, (2004) refers to as the binary divide between polytechnics and universities in the early 1990s. This expansion process resulted in the UK acquiring what might be considered mass HE. Scott (1995) drawing on the work of Trow (1973) provides a useful quantifiable account of the progress from elite to mass HE defining ‘*elite systems as those which enrol up to 15 per cent of the age group [Age Participation Index]; mass systems as those enrolling between 15 and 40 per cent;*

and universal systems as those which enrol more than 40 per cent' (Scott, 1995: 2). Of course, Scott (*ibid*) was writing more than a decade ago and the sector has since moved very close to the universal system. Mayhew *et al.* (2004) drawing on the *Greenaway Report* (Greenaway and Haynes, 2000) also provide a helpful insight into the expansion of the sector during the last four decades. According to the *Report*, the expansion was rapid between 1960/61 and 1972/73 from five per cent to a peak of nearly 14 per cent. Thereafter the participation rate changed little until the steady growth of the early 1980s. By 1988/89, HE participation rate had reached 17 per cent, peaking at 34 per cent in 1997/98, but since then has changed little (Mayhew *et al.*, 2004).¹⁶ Between 1990/91 and 1995/96 the number of universities increased from 48 to 89 (Mayhew *et al.*, 2004). Within the Scottish context, under the *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992) a further five universities were created out of central institutions in 1992 (Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2004). Thus, from 1992 onwards the HE landscape evolved in new ways, creating in some instances a sharp departure from the once traditional defining features of HE, both structurally and culturally (Jary and Parker *et al.*, 1998). It was a time marked by increasing competition and the potential threat of institutional degeneration unless there was a vigilant drive for innovation and flexibility. Against the overall background of this expansionist drive, the proposal to set up a university servicing remote areas for the Highlands and Islands would not be in conflict with the overall trajectory of reforms for HE provision. As such, the UHI blueprint would likely be viewed with interest by the government of the time.

¹⁶ The figures given are based on the HE Age Participation Index (API).

I.ii Changes to Further Education in the 1990s: A New Entrepreneurial Age

Given that the UHI is composed of a number of FE institutions, it is informative in terms of its identity and distinctiveness to consider some of the political, socio-cultural and economic developments impacting upon the FE sector in Scotland in the post-1992 period. This is not only important for the appreciation of what makes the UHI distinctive but also helps to develop insights into why a number of FE institutions decided to buy into a collaborative venture such as the UHI. Significantly, this rendering of the changes taking place within the FE sector helps to contextualise the respondents' views cited later.

The birth of the UHI coincided with a time when the FE sector was undergoing considerable changes. Under the 1992 *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* the Scottish Executive took overall responsibility and control over colleges from local authorities. This process, commonly known as 'incorporation', ended almost five decades of local authority control, allowing individual colleges to become self-governing institutions managing their own affairs from April 1993. This included responsibility for their own institutional operational strategies and direct employment of their own staff. The post-incorporation arrangements created a national system of funding whereby colleges had to compete with each other, and as such, it can be seen to be rooted in an overarching neo-liberal agenda.¹⁷ Under the aegis of incorporation, colleges were said to be set free, liberated from the suffocating constraints of local authority – a relationship that was seen to stifle

¹⁷ Local authorities became a particular target for reform for this neo-liberal thinking and incorporation can be seen as part of an overall process and trajectory to dismantle their power and influence over education. During the 1990s, public utilities were increasingly privatised and opened up to market forces. However, more politically sensitive public services such as education could not so readily be sold off to private enterprise and thus, successive governments introduced so-called 'quasi-market' forces in education in order to reduce costs, raise standards and reproduce conditions similar to the private sector.

innovation in the FE sector – and had become independent corporate bodies in a competitive market-orientated environment. During the post-incorporation years, colleges' core mission was hence reconceptualised in terms of the market ethos. Strategic planning moved into the foreground as colleges increasingly became more business orientated.¹⁸ They also appointed their own Board of Governors and new senior management positions were created to support services previously provided by the local authorities such as human resources management, estate management and accounting functions. New funding arrangements designed to both reward and punish institutions according to their ability to meet certain pre-defined performance criteria were established, meaning that in many cases colleges confronted each other in a quasi-market where they were required to do more with less resources (Deem *et al.* 2000). Incorporation was unlike any other change visited upon FE in the past, and, with the importation of many non-contextualised business and commercial practices, it was inevitable that patterns of disharmony would emerge (Randell and Brady, 2000). Strategic planning increasingly focused on a formalised agenda wherein efficiency targets were prioritised at the cost of industrial relations. As the language of business penetrated more firmly into the lexicon of the FE sector, more hard edge strategic management frameworks took root. Throughout the literature on FE the term 'new managerialism'¹⁹ has been widely used (Robson, 1999; Hodkinson, 1998; Elliott, 1996a; Randell and Brady, 2000; Loots and Whelan, 2000 and Simmons, 2008 are but a few) to describe the structural, organisational and managerial changes that have taken place in the post-incorporation era. New managerialism is said to have forcefully embraced private sector style practices by

¹⁸ The strategic planning was initially informed and framed by the introduction of the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS, 1994) the development of performance indicators as a means of quality assurance (1994) and 'Investors In People' initiative (1993).

¹⁹ Mobilised here as an instrument that both encapsulates and advances the discourse of performativity.

demanding from institutions greater accountability both in their use of public funds and quality assessment. Underpinning this new managerialism are assumptions that so-called good management will deliver the three 'E's of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in public services, guaranteeing value for taxpayers' money and eliminating waste (Randle and Brady, 2000). Drawing on the work of Pollitt (1990), Randle and Brady (*ibid*) claim that new managerialism can be understood as a generic package of management techniques which include the following: strict financial management and devolved budgetary controls; efficient use of resources and the emphasis on productivity; extensive use of quantitative performance indicators; development of consumerism and the discipline of the market; creation of a disciplined, flexible workforce, using individualised contracts, staff appraisal systems and performance related pay and the assertion of managerial control and the manager's right to manage. However, it is important to stress that this list ignores the fact that strategic outcomes do not emerge from institutional *vacua*. Rather, they emerge from a clash of organisational vested interests, personal agendas and ambitions and, not least, the strength and utilisation of power wielded by individuals and groups. Therefore, new managerialism should not be seen as a fixed idea but as subject to change over time and space. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study the above does serve to encapsulate some of the broad elements and dynamics of new managerialism. Of course, new managerialism as an operational tool is not without its detractors, attracting considerable censure.²⁰ Although these criticisms vary in quality and stricture, they share the criticism that, despite new managerialism's commitment to cut down on bureaucracy, it has, paradoxically, introduced new layers of bureaucracy in the form of an increased emphasis on target

²⁰ There have been numerous writers who have explored the post-incorporation ethos of the FE sector: Ainley and Bailey, 1997; Randle and Brady, 2000; Elliott, 1996a; Clow, 2001; Gleeson *et al.*, 2005; Gleeson and James, 2007; Simmons, 2008 are but a few.

setting, audit performance procedures and ever-evolving surveillance and accountability. The managerial approaches within the FE sector have aroused disquiet among those within the sector itself. As one ex-college principal who has over twenty years service and is now an educational management consultant recently noted:

A new style of leadership now emerged, commonly known as transactional leadership. Another name for it is 'command and control' and in the college sector, many senior managers over-reacted to the new environment by becoming control-freaks, pouring down initiative-overloads, and ill-thought out control systems on middle managers and staff. (*Broadcast*, Issue 83, summer, 2009)

Although there have been concerns of excesses in surveillance and accountability, the post-incorporation era can be seen to have ushered in a new entrepreneurial spirit with FE increasingly delivering HE courses and collaborating more and more with universities on a range of access courses and degree delivery. In this sense the boundaries between FE and HE have become more porous, giving rise to the signifier 'dual sector' or hybrid institutions in the academic literature on institutional change on FE.

Within the context of assessing the overall appeal and likely realisation of the UHI blueprint, the post-incorporation entrepreneurial spirit can be seen as encouraging as it makes clear that the notion of FE delivering HE is conceivable. Indeed, colleges were already making a contribution to HE provision, supported by a number of related developments such as more flexible HNC/HND courses introduced in 1990 (Gallacher, 2006). At a time when governments were trying to expand HE provision in a cost-effective way, any blueprint proposing to widen access to HE provision by exploiting the potential contribution of the FE sector would be looked upon with favourable interest by officialdom. Also, the UHI blueprint was underpinned by the

idea of a seamless progression of the integration of FE and HE. Such an arrangement was seen to offer clear benefits for the colleges themselves. For the newly entrepreneurial Scottish colleges, the UHI collegiate federation arrangement could be seen as a potential route to a new market, an opportunity to expand their portfolio in terms of status and growth.²¹ Indeed, in an interview for this study one respondent - who was heavily involved in the early planning of the UHI - made clear that the post-incorporation period was an ideal opportunity for those enterprising and innovative college principals to expand their HE provision considerably and into new directions. For this respondent the UHI was seen as a unique opportunity for FE colleges to earn new prominence and, of course, revenue: *'The UHI was seen by some as a 'honey pot': colleges saw it as a potential resource for extra money.'* (Interview with author, April: 2004).

I.iii UHI: Impact within the Local Context

Different governments will emphasise different policy imperatives at different times. By the late 1990s the political rhetoric on education started to change with the election of New Labour in 1997 and its Third Way politics.²² While neo-liberalism rested on a belief in the benefits of the free market, competition, individual freedom and, significantly, a minimal role for state intervention, 'Third Wayism' was more interested in creating conditions where equity and social justice were re-invigorated and combined with competitiveness and market policies. New

²¹ As Gallacher notes when discussing the immediate pressures for colleges under post-incorporation climate: *'The necessity to secure an adequate flow of funds from a variety of sources, and through targeting a wide range of student groups became a major priority for many colleges as they struggled to maintain their financial security in this competitive economic climate. One impact of these changes has been the rapid growth in certain types of provision when it has been felt that the market will support this growth. The growth of new areas of higher education provision [...] has taken place within this context.'* (Gallacher, 2006: 46)

²² However, the extent to which 'Third Way politics' departed from the neo-liberal policies of the early to mid 1990s is much debated. As Ball notes there have been *'both significant continuities and decisive ruptures between neo-liberalism [...] and the Third Way.'* (Ball, 2007: 21)

Labour policy reflected the importance of HE contributing to Britain's competitive edge on the global market by producing and disseminating economically productive knowledge. There was also a continual commitment to increasing the total number of students attending HE, including a new impetus to widen participation and increase social inclusion. In addition, there was pressure on HE to compete with and stand among the world's top class universities, resulting in more focus and development on research capacity and output. Under New Labour there was also a renewed emphasis on the need for universities to become even more entrepreneurial, to continually forge new alliances and collaborative ventures or partnerships with business and other agencies, including other HE institutions. Collaboration with other HE institutions on research was seen as particularly important. Thus, collaboration and competition started to co-exist within HE in a rather complex and fluid way, all of which can be seen to reflect a desire for HE to become genuinely diverse. Also the importance of accountability, performance targets and measures, such as league tables for HE, became increasingly more prominent during this time, an aspect revisited later under the heading of performativity.²³ The significant point here is that the UHI can be seen to be shaped by these wider goals. From 2001 onwards the UHI started to expand its research capacity by forging new alliances and collaborative ventures or partnerships with other research institutes and Scottish universities. Moreover, its research policy started to become more focused, which can be seen as a reaction to the pressure of ever more accountability within HE. It is also significant to note that as the sector expanded throughout the 1990s and beyond, it became more diverse. Within the

²³ It is also significant to note that the New Labour government inherited an HE system which was suffering from a number of challenges. Firstly, there were significant financial issues as the expansion of HE was accompanied by serious fiscal challenges with a significant fall in the funding per student. Secondly, the perceived need to engage and compete in the global economy increasingly raised fundamental questions about the nature and role of HE.

Scottish HE context, any notion of the different institutions within the sector sharing the same values, structure and ethos would be misconceived (Gallacher, 2006).²⁴ Of course, the clearest divide is between those institutions given university status under the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* (1992) and those established before then.²⁵ For some, the new post-1992 universities ushered in new practices and institutional cultures that were different and in some cases sharply departed from those established in the pre-1992 universities. In terms of culture, ethos and pedagogy post-1992 universities were said to be closer to further education colleges than the older universities (Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2004 and Gallacher, 2006). Scott's (1996) claims that the meaning of HE was 'less exceptional' in the 1990s is relevant here particularly as FE colleges blurred the boundaries by starting to deliver HE courses.²⁶ This expansionist drive – which instigated unprecedented plurality and heterogeneity in the Scottish HE sector (as well as the rest of the UK) – was shored up and sustained by a number of policy initiatives introduced in the late 1990s and beyond. Within the Scottish context, Morgan-Klein and Murphy placed these broad policy initiatives into two distinct phases. The first phase can be recognised as appealing to the creation of a 'learning society'²⁷ which required the post-compulsory education system to be more responsive and flexible with respect to economic imperatives in order '*to improve individual employability and national*

²⁴ Since institutions have diverse histories, thus allowing them to react to emerging political, economic and social circumstances in differing ways.

²⁵ Highlighting the patterns of diversity within HE and the blurring of boundaries between FE and HE Gallacher (2006) suggests that the Scottish HE sector can be divided up into three categories. The ancient universities are the four oldest, dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and are the most prestigious. The next is the group described as the '1960s universities' following the first wave of expansion under the *Robins Report* (1963). The last group is the post-1992 universities and HE institutions designated under the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*.

²⁶ However, at the same time, it is important to remember that the introduction of a single funding body introduced a powerful integrating force and as such a potential counterbalance to this increasing diversity.

²⁷ For Hughes and Tight: '*The Learning Society would be one in which all citizens acquire a high quality general education, appropriate vocational training and a job (or series of jobs) worthy of a human being while continuing to participate in education and training throughout their lives.*' (Hughes and Tight, 1995: 296)

economic competitiveness and to meet the demands of the knowledge economy by promoting lifelong learning' (Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2000: 46). 'Lifelong learning' policies such as *Opportunity Scotland* (1998) and *Opportunities and Choices* (1999) are said to be inextricably interconnected with the unfolding of a more diverse post-compulsory education sector in that they elicited far more structural and operational elasticity in terms of curricula, pedagogy, delivery mode, institutional ethos and governance as well as networking with other educational institutions and related bodies.

The UHI is well placed to realise many of the policy goals encapsulated by the concept of lifelong learning. Although it has been argued that with its growing popularity the concept of lifelong learning has become a loose wide-ranging term,²⁸ some unifying elements that have currency today have been identified. Morgan-Klein and Osborne (2007) cite the earlier work of Coffield (1999) suggesting that by the late 1990s there was a new consensus on lifelong learning in the UK. This included the following assumptions: the nation's competitiveness depended upon on the skills of the workforce; individuals had to take responsibility for up-skilling and re-skilling; globalisation compelled governments to respond; education institutions had to become more efficient, responsive and more in line with the UK business model. Thus, there was reasonable evidence to propose that the concept reflected a policy interest driven largely by economic concerns. However, as Field (2006) has

²⁸ Edwards also notes the fluid nature of the concept: *'For some it [lifelong learning] has been the ideological weapon of neo-liberalism. For others, it is a sham or an irrelevancy. For others, it has provided an opportunity to insert different practices into the framing of education. A lot of discussion [...] has focused on its political and ideological significance. Foucauldians and neo-marxists have each in their different ways explored the exercise of power within lifelong learning. Philosophers of education have attempted to frame lifelong learning as an aspect of, integral to, the good or worthwhile life. The terrain is therefore littered with a biodiversity of meanings.'* (Edwards, 2010: 12)

pointed out, over the last fifteen years the wider policy agenda of lifelong learning has sought to balance the demands of economic competitiveness with an emphasis on greater social cohesion. In this respect the rhetoric surrounding lifelong learning also highlights the wider benefits that learning might bring, including a sense of belonging and identity, social cohesion, inclusion and a sense of citizenship. Suffice to say that the actual impact of this emphasis on wider social benefits is not uncontested²⁹ (Burke and Jackson, 2007 and Field, 2006).

Within the context of HE, the overarching mission and rhetoric of lifelong learning policy forms part of the overall legitimising discourse of the requirement for the HE sector to expand learning opportunities and be more accessible to non-traditional learners, becoming more flexible in terms of developing qualification frameworks that meet the needs of individual learners, employers and industry (Field, 2006). In broad terms then, the concept of lifelong learning acts as a discursive lever to mobilise certain changes within HE or in some instances, underscore and buttress the trajectory of changes already evolving.³⁰ It also adds impetus to the already established trend of recasting the nature of the educational provision itself by allowing learners to exercise more freedom and choice over how learning programmes are taught (Field, 2006).

²⁹ Coffield (1999) and Tight (1998) claim that lifelong learning policies not only carried instrumental and utilitarian connotations, but also emphasised an element of compliance and compulsion, which for those who failed to embrace the ‘cradle to grave’ ideals would hold the possible threat of economic and social exclusion.

³⁰ Field (2001) asserted that lifelong learning policies have constituted a tool for the reform and modernisation of education and training as well being part of the larger transformation in the relationship between civil society and the state. Lifelong learning under this reading has become one dynamic, among other factors, that is transforming the governance of late modernity. It is part of the overall move towards a new settlement between state and the individual where the latter takes on more responsibility for their learning and employability against the background of changing economic circumstances.

The UHI, with its commitment to making HE available to all communities throughout the region had the potential of becoming a key player in the realisation of the positive socio-cultural as well as socio-economic benefits of HE to the Highlands and Islands. As such, its mission resonated strongly with the policy agenda of lifelong learning. Indeed, *Opportunity Scotland* (1998) specifically mentioned the UHI's potential to facilitate the achievement of key goals for government and the Scottish Executive stated that the UHI supported the key themes of the lifelong paper such as raising awareness, improving access, extending participation, tackling exclusion and encouraging progression. This was particularly significant given the strong educational commitment of the then recently inaugurated Scottish parliament.

Morgan-Klein and Murphy (2004) argue that the second phase which contributed to this increasing plurality and heterogeneity in the Scottish HE sector relates to the new policy-making process developed in the wake of newly acquired powers after Scottish devolution in 1999. They list a range of post-devolution inquiries and policy documents³¹ which they believe signalled the emergence of an interconnected cluster of policy, practice and agency.³² Whilst diversification was an emerging trend, the permeability of boundaries also featured and can be evidenced by the Scottish Executive merging the Scottish Further Education Funding Council

³¹ Morgan-Klein and Murphy state that devolution has been a 'watershed in the production of lifelong learning policy': '*Since devolution, two inquiries have been reported to the Scottish Executive including the independent Committee of Enquiry into Student Finance [2000] and the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee Enquiry into Lifelong Learning (ELLC, 2002). In addition, a Review of Higher Education was launched in 2001 and reported in 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003) and a new policy document Life through Learning Through Life (Scottish Executive, 2003) was published to replace and update Opportunity Scotland (Scottish Office, 1998).*' (Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2004: 47)

³² Mapping the interplay, they state: '*In the post compulsory sector, policy has increasingly been framed within discourses of lifelong learning which mobilises new networks of individuals, institutions and agencies which transcend traditional boundaries and have the potential to create greater fluidity and reflexivity in practice and policy making.*' (Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2004: 47)

(SFEFC) with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) in 2005. Promoting FE and HE in Scotland, the newly formed Council (Scottish Funding Council) set out to support colleges and universities through the delivery of high quality programmes, the investment in modern facilities for learning and research, and being flexible and responsive in allowing access to lifelong learning for all.

From the aforementioned it is fair to say that the UHI was embedded within a local climate where traditional notions of the meaning of HE were being challenged and subverted by newly emerging political, economic and social circumstances. As such, the Scottish HE sector was increasingly expected to be more open and receptive to innovations and ideas on delivering HE. Indeed, in this new creative environment where boundaries had become more permeable the notion of harnessing the FE sector to expand HE provision in Scotland would perhaps have been seen as a natural evolutionary path to follow (for a more comprehensive account see Gallacher, 2006). The previous pages point to the fact that radical changes have taken place in the shape, scale and nature of HE. These changes have also been accompanied by more external control over core elements of academic practice.³³ Against this backdrop, the discourse of performativity has grown to occupy a prominent position in the academic debate analysing how HE has been reconfigured. However, the discourse of performativity is not just coupled to the workings of HE, it is also at play within the FE sector, shaping its structure and culture. Given the UHI is an HE institution made up of FE colleges, the next section will map the main contours of performativity and consider how it has influenced both these sectors during the evolution of the UHI. This section is particularly

³³ Terms such as ‘value for money’, ‘cost-effectiveness’, ‘quality’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘strategic planning’ have become the dominant organising principles.

relevant to both the understanding of the UHI policy trajectory on research and the contextualising of respondents' views within this study.

I.iv Higher and Further Education: the Encroaching Discourse of Performativity

Over the past two decades the concept of 'performativity' has achieved increasing currency in literature debating HE reforms. Its prominence can largely be linked to the expansion and marketisation of HE within the national and global context (Shore and Selwyn, 1998; Barnett, 2000 and Strain, 2009). As touched upon previously 'value for money', 'cost-effectiveness', 'quality', 'efficiency' and 'strategic planning' are terms that have been increasingly associated with debates on the changes ushered in with the expansion of HE. These terms have become the dominant organising principles in HE, re-fashioning the structure, character and ethos of the sector and are commonly described as an integral part of the 'discourse of performativity' and its bureaucratic elaborations (Barnett, 2000 and Strain, 2009). Under the rigors of performativity, HE has become pressurised to produce knowledge and skills that are deemed essential to be competitive in the world market of globalised capital and as such privileges certain types of knowledge and skills which, in turn, raises important questions on the actual role of education.³⁴ Discussing the general effects of performativity on education, Ball notes that performativity not only creates competition, new structures and associated value systems but, also gives rise to certain tensions and struggles between individuals' values and frames of reference and those set by performativity criteria. His formulation is worth quoting at length:

³⁴ Performativity has come to denote the way education systems perform in meeting certain policy objectives, namely how education best serves the socio-economic interests.

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control [...] and change based on rewards and sanctions [...]. The performances [of individuals/organisations] serve as measures of productivity or outputs, or displays of 'quality' [...]. As such they stand for [...] or represent the worth or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. [...] One key aspect of the current educational reform movement may be seen as struggles over who controls the field of judgement and its values. [...] Who is it who determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid? (Ball, 2003: 216)

Although Ball's intervention refers to the secondary education sector, his underlying premise resonates with others considering the changes taking place within HE. Clouder *et al.* (2008) go as far as positing that performativity, with its attendant concerns of productivity and accountability, has become one of the most potent and pervading of discourses to operate within the university.³⁵ Thus, the so-called 'performativity paradigm' can be seen to be a pervasive discourse or, as Ball (1998) suggests, a 'sign system' representing the trajectory of changes being advanced under the expansion of HE and its accompanying quality control mechanisms. Seconding Ball (1998), Strain (2009) believes the realm of performativity also refers to the enactment of reform objectives, to how groups and individuals are inscribed in and respond to the officially sanctioned imperatives for change. In this sense, educational policy and performance indicators can be perceived as politically imposed norms, a script creating new roles, subjectivities and identities for the world of education. As such, performativity can be seen as Strain argues '*as a mode of identity construction in institutionalised social space*' (2009: 75). Within this context, there is an emphasis on the external imposition of

³⁵ Clouder *et al.* state: '*There is a common imperative within HE institutions to be entrepreneurial and engage more closely with business and the community, which results in pressure to perform in new ways that mean that universities are increasingly actively managed. Hence one of the most powerful and pervading of discourses is that of performativity with its attendant concerns of productivity and accountability.*' (Clouder *et al.*, 2008: 636)

targets and quantifiable outcomes as the means of improvement. Educational institutions are required to respond to the plethora of centrally prescribed policy directives designed to classify, monitor, inspect and judge their activities.³⁶

As Clouder *et al.* note: '*Performativity [in HE] is both socially constructed and socially constructing*' (2008: 648). Aligning itself to the performativity imperative, the HE system is said to have become much more managed and bureaucratic, permeated by notions of efficiency, performance monitoring, targets and private sector organisational models. It contributes to what Barnett (2000) calls the 'audit society' where academics within the HE sector are increasingly subject to external and internal evaluation. Their work is open to scrutiny, and the extent of their working patterns is subject to a monitoring process. These audit exercises focus on both the quality of the HE institution's activities as well as on the financial viability and cost-effectiveness of such activities. Some commentators, although recognising the potential need and benefits of performativity in the sense of supplying a framework for judging and making comparisons, nevertheless express concerns about how it can stifle opportunities to be creative, to consider alternative approaches and methods to those prescribed by the performance criteria system. On the question of how such scrutiny and self-evaluation can impact on creativity in teaching, Simmons and Thomson suggest that '*through such measures, performativity becomes embodied in a regime of truth that denies the legitimacy to alternative forms of good practice*' (2008: 610). This is a significant point as it underscores how in certain circumstances – and to differing degrees – performativity discourses cultivates belief systems that privilege some forms of

³⁶ Barnett (2000) utilises Lyotard's concept of performativity to argue that marketisation has become a new universal theme manifested in the trend towards the commodification of teaching and research and the various ways in which universities meet the new performative criteria.

activities and identities – constructed within an institutional space – over others. Such performativity-cultivated practices are less likely to be receptive to ideas or practices that are perceived to be out of line with the ‘regimes of truths’ embedded within the performativity script. Clouder *et al.* (2008) drawing on Avis (2005) lend support to this by suggesting that the performativity enculturation can inhibit consideration of anything outside the confines of cultural acceptance.³⁷

It is also fair to say that in the post-incorporation era FE colleges were also increasingly subject to an evolving discourse of performativity. Like other sectors of education, they have increasingly been subjected to successive waves of regulation and reform. Colleges have been working to meet the SFEFC/HMI Quality Framework (2004) and more recently have adopted the approaches set out in governmental guidance on new statutory duties (Weedon *et al.*, 2008). Over the years, colleges have endlessly been repositioning and re-imagining themselves in accordance with emerging policies and markets and, in turn, have become increasingly complex, servicing multiple constituencies. FE colleges, for instance, are key agents in developing the skills base of the economy by providing vocational programmes for new entrants to the labour market and by integrating with leading employee programmes, both of which help to modernise the skills of the current work force. Colleges have long been recognised as central and effective agents in the delivery of lifelong learning and social inclusion objectives. They also form a

³⁷ Ball warns of the subtle coercive dynamics of performativity: *‘Performativity is intimately intertwined with seductive possibilities of a particular kind of economic (rather than moral) autonomy [...] for both the institutions and in some cases individuals [...]. It facilitates the monitoring role of the state: ‘steering at a distance’ [...]. It allows the state to insert itself deeply into the culture, practices and subjectivities of public sector organisations and their workers without appearing to do so. [...] It changes meaning; it delivers, re-designs and ensures ‘alignment’.* (Ball, 2008: 27)

conduit between secondary education and the university sector. As noted earlier, as well as complementing the work of universities by providing access courses, they have increasingly been involved in the delivery of degree level qualifications, a move described by Woodrow (1993) as the ‘quiet revolution’. More recently, they have entered the international market, competing with HE for degree students. Moreover, throughout the post-incorporation years, the lexicon and practices of the business world have been absorbed by the sector. Within the complex and expansive rhetoric, terms and signifiers such as ‘transformation(al)’, ‘creativity’, ‘learning organisation’, ‘competitiveness’, ‘partnership’, ‘flexibility’, ‘collaboration and networking’, ‘global reach’, ‘enterprise and entrepreneurship’ have all found their way into the normative space of FE, deployed to describe and legitimise organisational activities or to mobilise new changes. As the sector has attuned itself to its business orientated identity, value for money and the need to see direct benefits to the organisation have become more acute. Such thinking will benefit or inhibit particular kinds of cultural, economic and social imperatives depending upon their relationship to the performativity script set for FE. Under existing forms of organisational performativity where the correlation between student numbers and income generation is transparent and therefore easily understood, anything that seems to be outside the normative performative script such as the long-term benefits of fostering a research culture among teaching staff may be seen by some within the FE institution as somewhat marginal to the core activities of the organisation. A salient point to consider here is that under performativity – with an emphasis on teaching and the aim to deliver an expanding curriculum in the most cost-effective way – research activities would seem to be peripheral to the main work of FE and therefore likely be accorded little value within the mindset of many within FE,

especially amongst those co-opted into managerial roles. Because strategic goals and management priorities are in this increasingly competitive arena concerned with institutional survival in the first instance and, arguably, profit and growth in terms of student numbers thereafter, they are unlikely to be too concerned about issues to do with expanding research. Moreover, some leaders and managers, due to their identities and professional skills and aptitudes being shaped in part by the FE culture and performativity, may feel they lack the necessary breadth of perspective, academic aptitude or confidence to engage in the unfamiliar landscape of research. Evidence of the lack of appreciation of those wider intellectual cultural dynamics associated with the HE landscape has been picked up by Young (2002) in her studies analysing those teaching HE in a FE setting. She notes perceptions that academic prowess and scholarship in general were not particularly valued by management.³⁸ According to Young (*ibid*) this was manifested by a predominant promotional structure that placed skills in human resource management above academic and scholarly abilities. This substantial difference between HE and FE is likely to create challenges for an organisation such as the UHI. Young's (*ibid*) findings seem to suggest that the promotional structures within the UHI's FE partners are unlikely to value research skills and activities above that of other dynamics of FE. As such, FE promotional structures may impede the embedding of a research culture because they offer few incentives for staff to carry out research in terms of promotional benefits.

³⁸ Drawing attention to what is seen as the cultivation of an anti-academic culture one of her interviewees' states: '*Management as an art form – has become really sort of reified in colleges [...] If you're ambitious, you rise to the top of the organisation through your skills as a manager and you see that as important. And as you look out on the hierarchy and assess individuals and teams and groups and departments [...] the template you lay over it is one which is based on management and organisation and not one of academic excellence at all [...]. I just don't think they [the management] see the [academic] skills, the expertise and those kinds of things as having particular value, compared to human resource management.*' (Young, 2002: 283)

One might submit that the capacity of the performativity discourse to continually control and manipulate individual agency may have been overstated. When mapping the perceived changes in academic identities in HE, Clegg suggests that we do not simply absorb but that we resist, manipulate and filter newly imposed rules and imperatives: *'Despite all the pressures of performativity, individuals have created spaces for the exercise of principled personal autonomy and agency'* (2008: 343). In other words, individuals attempt either directly or discursively to offset the consequence of any performativity dynamics that they perceive as compromising their own field of judgement, professional status and identity. Nevertheless, this degree of fluidity should not detract from the fact that performativity and its attendant discourse is a powerful and pervasive tool orientating and reconfiguring institutions and by implication impacting (with differing degrees) on the professional culture and practices of those working within them.

I.v Research Assessment Exercise: Evolution and Impact

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of research to both the university as an institution and humanity at large. In discussing its overall significance Smith notes:

Research is a core activity in higher education. It provides new knowledge in the sciences, technology, arts and humanities. This provides numerous benefits: it underpins teaching inside the universities; it contributes to the knowledge and expertise on which the economy can draw; it maintains access to broader reservoirs of international research findings; and not insignificantly, it is critical to the maintenance of international economic competitiveness and a civilised society. (Smith, 2001: 131)

Research within universities has over the last two decades been increasingly subject to complex changes (Smith, 2001; Barnett, 2000; and Land, 2004). Until the mid-1980s, UK universities took the funding of their research for granted. According to Henkel (2000) the principle of universality, whereby all universities would be

helped to maintain their research base in the funding formula, underpinned this arrangement.³⁹ The 1980s proved to be a significant milestone in the funding of university research. As touched upon elsewhere, the 1980s inaugurated a new order in the launch of a policy drive introducing unprecedented changes for the HE sector both epistemologically and structurally. It was a time when government ministers increasingly began to affirm their authority by interfering with and exerting pressure on areas previously understood to be solely under academic control. The overall policy drive in HE for stricter fiscal constraints, more accountability, cost-effectiveness and stronger contribution to the economy did not leave funding arrangements for research unaffected. During the early 1980s, government pushed for a major reappraisal of the purpose that research should serve and the conceptual and structural frameworks in which investments in research should be made.⁴⁰ There was a distinct shift in emphasis placed on the value of research. This emphasis stressed a move away from individual “bluesky” research projects pushing the frontiers of knowledge towards research that would yield clear economic and social benefits. In particular, there was a growing desire by government to encourage more collaboration between government, academia and industry for the planning, funding and execution of research. By 1985/6, the first Research Assessment Exercise

³⁹ As Gilroy and McNamara note: ‘Prior to 1986, every university in the UK received a research grant as part of block formula from the University Grants Committee (UGC) funded in relation to their student numbers, irrespective of the volume or quality of its research. Obviously, the larger the university the greater its block grant, regardless of its research quality.’ (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009: 321)

⁴⁰ For Henkel these developments contributed to the wider debate surrounding the identity, structure and role of the HE sector: ‘In the early 1980s the ministers and treasury were raising more insistent questions about the value for money represented by the public funding of research. The treasury was behind the demand for concentration because of the black hole of money being spent on research. Moreover, as the polytechnics were establishing themselves more securely as national HEIs, and the claims of some to be accorded university status were being taken seriously, it became possible to question how essential research was to the definition of an HEI or even a university’. (Henkel, 2000: 113)

(RAE)⁴¹ took place and its structure reflected some of these wider imperatives.⁴² Under the RAE arrangements, the HE sector was increasingly asked to give details of its research plans and priorities. These accounts included details on the number of individual staff and postgraduate students carrying out research. Although academic membership and evaluative criteria predominated, there was a growing emphasis on industrial applicability as more funding councils were chaired by industrialists (Henkel, 2000). Over the years, the RAE evolved in response to the perceived needs of government policy and advice from those within the RAE panel. According to Henkel (*ibid*) by the mid-1990s the RAE was fully institutionalised. Henkel (*ibid*) saw it as a successful response of a ‘co-opted academic elite’ to a blend of both external and domestic pressures for more accountable and rationalised resources. In the view of its advocates, the RAE fulfilled the government drive for more public accountability and created a climate which stressed research excellence and success in generating research income from sources other than the funding council. To the outside world the RAE was sold as introducing a new structure within which academic values and influence were sustained. Within the sector, however, the RAE was soon seen as creating tensions precisely because it challenged certain traditional structures and academic roles (Edwards *et al.*, 2004). Perhaps, the most notable way in which the RAE was making its presence felt was in the management of the RAE itself. A central responsibility of senior managers for research in the university was to advise, support and monitor submissions for the RAE from individual units within departments. As time passed, this role increasingly extended to reviewing departmental performance in the RAE and determining with heads of departments how departmental grading could be improved. For all the claims of sustaining

⁴¹ Known then as the ‘Research Selectivity Exercise’ (RSE), it changed to RAE by the early 1990s.

⁴² As Gilroy and McNamara note: ‘*The emergence of the RAEs has to be placed in the context of the increased political scrutiny of higher education.*’ (2009: 322)

academic values and influence, the RAE brought forth a new kind of appraisal: what had previously been a largely implicit and unceremonious process of peer judgement – for the most part invisible to the outside world – was now honed and translated into a comprehensive national assessment. The latter was associated with a highly public event and linked by formula to the allocation of research funding for the following five years. With regards to individual HE institutions' ability to attract funding from alternative sources to governmental funding, the RAE enacted a new kind of symbolic power and status which operated as an indicator to other funding bodies and to a range of markets, including overseas, as to where the best research departments could be found. As Morely notes: *'A high RAE grade has actual cash value and operates as a kite mark to reassure research agencies and potential research students. Hence, organisations comply and conform because the penalties are so high'* (2002: 186).⁴³ Significantly, the RAE initiated the change from research as a matter of individual professional responsibility to one of collective interest to institutions and departments. It could be argued that in some cases it reduced academics to a mere resource, dehumanising the researcher by replacing personal relationships with a devotion to systems thinking. This introduced unease as academics struggled to reconcile the demands of ensuring departmental survival in terms of securing necessary RAE funding and the impulse to assert their own autonomy. The RAE agenda exposed considerable weakness on the part of some academics to meet contractual obligations which in the pre-RAE years had been loosely defined. Within the university, the RAE produced a new bipolar typology of the academic, namely the 'research active' and 'research inactive', with the latter

⁴³ According to Henkel: *'As the RAE became established, it, perhaps more than anything else, had forced the institutions to face, albeit in differing degrees, a range of strategic decisions about their goals, structures, staffing and the allocation of funds between the basic units. Old universities, as well as new, had to review that balance between teaching and research in their institutions and to determine of what level their ambitions would be.'* (Henkel, 2000: 120)

being increasingly seen as being of less value to the organisation. Henkel (2000, 2005) notes how the RAE was a prompt for university leaders to assume more explicit responsibility for academic development, including the introduction of new research-centred staffing policies and redrawing the boundaries of what had in the past been seen as undisputed departmental territory. Edwards and Usher provide a useful insight into some of the consequences of performativity within the RAE:

Interestingly, as universities lose their position as the only site of valid knowledge production, the accountability of academics, and thus also of ourselves as academics, is heightened. Research assessment regimes are now not only a means for rewarding outputs but also an instrument of the performativity that the state in globalised conditions demands of the universities. These regimes are a technology that responds to accountability and transparency [...] the need ‘to tell and show what you do’. [...] Research has to be demonstrated in terms of the relevance of its quality outcomes and impact, whether this be in terms of research assessment regimes or in terms of collaborative projects with organisations in the ‘real world’. (Edwards and Usher, 2008: 112)

If we accept Edwards’s and Usher’s (*ibid*) assertions, the performativity paradigm simultaneously creates, interacts and in many ways encapsulates the wider epistemological changes taking place in the university. Knowledge is increasingly judged not by its capacity to describe the world but by its value as a “consumable” product which has to have a “pay-off” (Barnett, 2000). Edwards and Usher go on to explain: *‘With performativity the questions asked of knowledge are no longer ‘is it true?’ or ‘does it contribute to human progress?’ but ‘how will it enhance the performance of people and organisations?’ (ibid: 98)*. Linking this epistemological change to the way research funding mechanisms have evolved, Edwards and Usher note:

Research assessment regimes then are not simply about stimulating and rewarding excellence as the public rhetoric proclaims. Knowledge is now a commodity tradeable in the market and, as a commodity in a consumer culture it has a sign value as well as a substantive value, therefore, that assessment process is now a matter of producing signs to be consumed by target

audiences. These audiences are increasingly global in scope and to a large extent located outside the academic community. (*ibid*: 98)

The concept of commodification is interesting here as it refers to the development of a product or process valued specifically for the exchange on the market rather than for its intrinsic value alone.⁴⁴ For Edwards and Usher (*ibid*) the pressures of commodification can reconfigure the nature of rewards and sanctions operating within HE. Within this overall context, research(er) success is measured more and more according to financial criteria, namely income generation. Thus, the RAE is, so the argument follows, more than an evaluation instrument: it is not neutral in its effects (Henkel, 2000, 2005). Rather, it can be seen as an instrument of performativity directing research activities and as such, it can be seen to be playing a role in the trend towards the so-called commodification of knowledge. However, although the RAE certainly ushered in new changes and reconfigured traditional systems and perceptions, it would be wrong to think that it departed completely from certain long-held ideals associated with the academy. Delmont and Atkinson suggest that on certain levels the RAE has kept ties with elements of the academic culture that pre-date current fashions of accountability and surveillance: *'It [RAE] captures the kind of snobbery and competitiveness that informs the British culture of intellectual life, [...]. For those individuals and institutions that can do so, the exercise permits 'top' people to have their elite status confirmed'* (2004: 164). For Delmont and Atkinson the RAE holds out for the hard working and enterprising academic the prospect of opening up a space of upward mobility: *'It [RAE] satisfies two pervasive value systems of the academy – elitism and meritocracy'* (*ibid*).

⁴⁴ It is a term that captures the overall wider changes taking place in HE as Hughes notes with the pressures of the commodification: *'Education is likely to be reconceptualized as a 'commercial transaction', the lecturer as a 'commodity producer' and the student as a 'consumer.'* (Hughes, 2005: 29)

When discussing how research is reformulated around the RAE, Beckman and Cooper are more disparaging in their analysis:

In Foucauldian terms, the RAE creates ‘conditions of domination’ within the ‘life-worlds’ of HE through funding mechanisms that serve to ensure compliance in the guise of ‘assessment’. This disciplinary logic is profoundly worrying for it ritualises ‘normalisation’ within the education system and obstructs development of alternative perspectives, practices and possibilities. (Beckman and Cooper, 2004: 8)

Thus, for some there is a real sense of restriction, as if intellectual freedom to explore has been confined to the structures favoured by the RAE panels. It is also interesting to note that according to Lunt (2008) the research councils started to exert more influence in the targeting of and strategic approach to the funding of science-based research. Thus, it is fair to say that the intention of the RAE was to promote selectivity in the allocation of research funding which, in turn, encouraged HE institutions to concentrate their strengths in particular research areas. The RAE review had made the HE sector confront, albeit in differing degrees, a range of strategic decisions about their goals, structures of staffing and the allocation of research funds. Moreover, the very existence and nature of the RAE, particularly its implications for resource allocation, may be determining as well as measuring the way in which research is conducted in HE institutions.⁴⁵

Although there is a growing corpus of literature claiming that the RAE, as an instrument of performativity, has become too pervasive and influential in determining institutional mission and career paths, it is important to remember that

⁴⁵ As Scott observes: ‘[...] the RAE has become an aggressive instrument, used not simply to concentrate research funding but to restructure the system by determining institutional missions’ (Scott, 2005: 57). Similarly Henkel notes: ‘The RAE reinforced the importance of the subject discipline and of research in academic lives, but selectively. It was an instrument of the demise of underperforming departments, as well as of enhancement of the successful, as research became the subject of strategic planning and national policies of selectivity and output performance related support were mirrored in the institution. Differential power between departments and individuals has become increasingly explicit.’ (Henkel, 2005: 163)

the desire for some form of accountability in research is seen as necessary.⁴⁶ The point to consider here is that the RAE plays a central role (but not the only role) in constructing the meaning and character of contemporary HE and as such was always likely to be an important consideration for any institution aspiring to university status such as the UHI.

I.vi Research and Teaching: Changing Status

As touched upon earlier, one of the consequences of the recent changes in HE is that the notion of research as a process of knowledge creation for individual pursuit has been somewhat eclipsed by the potential for knowledge to generate financial returns. So when it comes to changing perceptions on what counts as research and by implication who is a researcher, the RAE as an instrument of performativity is certainly a significant determining dynamic. As Henkel (2000, 2005) claims the RAE produced a new bipolar typology of the academic, namely the ‘research active’ and ‘research inactive’. In very recent times there have been claims that the selection criteria for promotion within HE seem to place more emphasis and value on a research profile to the detriment of teaching ability. For some of those affected, this trend appears to be creating a hierarchical antithesis between teaching and research within the sector. Underscoring how the recent pressures of research production have shaped notions of academic identity and selectivity Hughes notes:

‘While research has become part of academic currency, bestowing creditability on

⁴⁶ Delamont and Atkinson although critical of the performativity systems associated with research do appreciate the economic arguments underpinning accountability: *‘We do not think that research necessarily flourishes under conditions in which short-term performance takes precedence over long-term inquiry, or in which the likelihood of attracting research funds can outweigh curiosity-driven scholarship. Equally, however, we do not think that everything about today’s university is bad. We argue that explicit reflection on academics’ lives and work is no bad thing. There is no virtue in keeping unproductive academic staff who do not fulfil their basic contractual obligation to undertake research and disseminate it into the public domain. [...] ‘Research’ that remains unpublished is just a hobby that wastes public money and personal time’.* (Delamont and Atkinson, 2004: 3)

those who possess a curriculum vitae listing their research publications, there are signs among the academic community of disillusionment with this arrangement' ⁴⁷ (2005: 23). Hughes (*ibid*) citing earlier writings (Court, 1999) goes on to argue that in a climate in which research has become so critical to the economy as well as the status of the institution, some staff deemed as having a relatively poor research output may feel that they have been consigned to an explicit second class category among the academic community.⁴⁸ Thus, the historically constituted notion of the synergy between teaching and research (perhaps rooted to the Humboldt's notion of research and teaching) where research 'supports' or 'informs' teaching, although still looming large in the mission statements in many institutions, should no longer be understood to operate in all academic areas within the HE institution. It is not uncommon to find that the 'teaching and research' nexus that formed the traditional identity of the HE academic has now been superseded by new academic identities, namely teaching-only and research-only staff. In the ever-changing landscape of HE, the notion of research as a professional activity with its own career path and structure decoupled from the teaching process has become increasingly more commonplace (Delamont and Atkinson, 2004). However, this development cannot be attributed to the RAE alone. As considered earlier, the HE sector has been increasingly encouraged to be more entrepreneurial in its outlook and activities. In the light of this new spirit, HE has been encouraged to seek research income derived

⁴⁷ The Times Higher Education Supplement reported that an academic, branded as 'research inactive' because his work would not be submitted to the 2008 RAE, was forming a support group for other academics 'left out in the cold'. The article stated *'In the last RAE, in 2001, the work of about 50,000 researchers, out of 116,000 full-time academic staff, had their work submitted. Many claim that exclusion stigmatises academics and damages their careers.'* (TES, 3rd August, 2007: 1)

⁴⁸ Hughes citing earlier writings (Court: 1999) notes: *'Staff assigned more teaching duties, administration or other tasks because their research profile is modest or non-existent – as envisaged by the Dearing Report – will find it hard not to feel second-class citizens in the more differentiated higher education of the future.'* [...] *Assessments such as the RAE may polarize such a situation'*. (Hughes 2005:23)

from grants and contracts from private business, research councils and industry. Such research activities can be divorced from or perhaps be on the periphery of the teaching process. The salient point here is that although the teaching and research synergy still has currency in that it constituted a strong source of identity for academics, in terms of value and professional status, the teaching dynamic has given ground to research activities which guarantee the highest rewards and standing.

I.vii Globalisation, Communications Technologies and the Impact on Higher Education

Whilst setting the UHI against the overall policy drive for the expansion of HE helps to appreciate why it moved from a blueprint to a tangible entity in 1993, there were of course other factors influencing how the organisational structure of the UHI aligned itself with the wider changes and dynamics within HE. As discussed earlier there was a pressure to open up HE to more levels of accountability and harness it more directly to serve economic interests. More specifically, HE was increasingly required to respond to the emerging global dynamics of globalisation. Globalisation is sometimes seen as a predominantly economic process, presented as the ongoing integration of national economies into the international economy whereby trade, manufacture, foreign investment and capital flows are increasingly interwoven. However, globalisation is also recognised as being driven by a combination of technological, social and cultural as well as economic factors. Traditions, values and associated forms of social interaction are transformed, realigned and, in some cases, diluted beyond recognition as the flux of communication technologies transcends sovereign nation states and erodes many of their traditional powers. The new information technologies are claimed to be paramount in the construction and (re-)invention of new local and international identities. Inevitably, the intricacy of these

interconnected dynamics has impacted on HE. For Scott (1995) there are many affinities between globalisation and the growth of mass HE. Although many universities have always been international in their aspiration, according to Scott (*ibid*) the interrelated dynamics of globalisation have accentuated this. International student flows have increased, partly for internal reasons – they provide much needed income – and partly as a consequence of increased global mobility.⁴⁹ As a result of growing global competition there has been a new emphasis on the social and economic importance of knowledge itself. In this context the terms ‘knowledge society’ and ‘knowledge economy’ have gained particular currency. According to Barnett *‘The knowledge society, by definition, is one that values and creates knowledge’* (2003: 69). Under the banner of the knowledge society it is claimed that knowledge production is diffused across society and universities can no longer have a monopoly over the production of knowledge; rather they must now collaborate or contend with others outside the university in the creation of new knowledge (Barnett, 2003). In the knowledge economy, new knowledge, so the argument follows, is required to be of consumable value to the economy (Delanty, 2001). Economic success in this context is seen to depend on the production of value-added products and services, which are in turn dependent on new knowledge, especially scientific and technological knowledge leading to innovation. Governments worldwide saw HE as important, but not sole, contributors to both the ‘knowledge society’ and ‘knowledge economy’. As such, HE was increasingly seen as a critical site for the production and transfer of economically productive

⁴⁹ For Delanty (2001) this increase in international student flows accounts for the perceived cosmopolitanism of HE. The universities are, according to this argument, shifting from being an ideological apparatus of the nation state and the guardian of its heritage to being more independent and broadly based, especially in terms of their knowledge production and information dissemination. Developments such as increased student mobility, the internationalism of the curriculum and educational policy as well as intensified international research collaboration are all cited as embroiled in the globalisation of knowledge as well as the rapid diffusion of knowledge.

knowledge. (for more details see Edwards and Usher, 1997; Barnett, 2000, 2003 and 2005).

In these narratives of increasing complexity associated with the interrelated dynamics of globalisation, the role of communications technologies in shaping HE was central. Towards the end of the 1990s, policy statements increasingly emphasised the need for HE to harness Information Communications Technology (ICT) in order to engage with an emerging range of interconnected factors, including the expansion of provision and global economic pressures. The *Dearing Report* (1997) subscribed to a teaching and learning paradigm that placed great emphasis on harnessing the potential of new technology in shaping the future of education.⁵⁰ Timms suggests that the *Dearing Report* celebrated the potential of ICT, introducing it almost as a “wonder drug” and hailing it to be the most logical step towards solving the growing difficulties in carrying out the policy drive to widening access and increasing student numbers and, of course, allowing HE to respond to the increasingly global conditions (1999: 43). Most significantly, in the context of the UHI, teaching and learning could now – with the help of the communications revolution – transcend the physical and geographical precincts of the university campus as traditionally conceived. As Dalenty observes:

The traditional university was located in a territorial space where the institution of the lecture was the primary form of communications and the solitary scholar the agent of knowledge. Today in our global age [...] verbal communication is being challenged by new kinds of non-verbal communication and new kinds of agency. The producer and recipient of knowledge are no longer the professor and student engaged in scholarly

⁵⁰ As the epicentres in the domain of information generators, universities have been foremost among institutions projecting the promise of the information communications revolution and pioneers in introducing innovative proposals in the use of such technology in the areas of learning, teaching and research. The use of the internet, and increasingly, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) have revolutionised communications and are causing radical developments in the way that universities enable their staff and students to find and create knowledge and interact with each other.

discourse in the tutorial. Knowledge is being depersonalised, deterritorialised and globalised. In the global age, the scholar's space is opening up beyond the traditional spaces of the library, the seminar room and the study to a virtual level. (Delanty, 2001: 114)

A decade after the somewhat evangelical claims on how new technologies would transform HE, there is currently a much more cautionary and sceptical attitude as to what such technologies can achieve in the domain of education. However, the significant point here is that developments in ICT, especially at the time of the UHI's inception, made a dispersed institution such as the UHI, possible. Thus, the UHI organisational structure can be seen to have clearly capitalised on the promise of ICT. As argued earlier, ICT was said to be creating new opportunities especially for the landscape of HE and the UHI was going to be an institution that would embrace such developments for academic advantage. Indeed, as will be considered in chapter two, the UHI was aiming to create a new learning paradigm through a collegiate federation linked by a powerful information and communications highway (Hills, 1992; Hills and Lingard, 2004).

I.viii Postmodernism: Changes in the Meaning and Purpose of Higher Education

The rapid process of globalisation and the rise of new communications technologies have been accompanied by an upsurge of critical orientations and interpretative frameworks for analysing and describing the social world. Amongst these, 'postmodernism' attained a particularly prominent position. In most contexts postmodernism – broadly seen as a philosophical critical orientation – is distinguished from (but sometimes conflated with) postmodernity, or sometimes referred to as the 'postmodern condition'. In temporal terms, postmodernity is commonly defined both as overlapping and going beyond the age of modernity; it is the world we now occupy, shaped by information communication technology,

particularly in the sphere of global communications and media (Edwards and Usher, 1997). As Edwards and Usher observe: '*Postmodernity, [...] is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning floats without traditional teleological fixing in foundational knowledge*'.⁵¹ (1994: 10). Postmodernism, on the other hand, can be described as the philosophical gaze deconstructing and destabilising the 'grand narratives' of 'Enlightenment' and 'Progress' associated with modernity. As Scott and Usher observe:

Postmodernism [...] questions formerly secure foundations of knowledge and understanding. The quest for a 'God's eye view', a disembodied and disembedded timeless perspective that can know the world by transcending it is no longer readily accepted. What has taken its place, and what the postmodern expresses, is a loss of certainty in what is known and in the ways of knowing. What we have now is not an alternative and more secure foundation but an awareness of the complexity and social-historical contingency of the practices through which knowledge is constructed.⁵² (Scott and Usher, 2002: 25)

However, it is important to stress that postmodernism is very much located within a contested terrain, and as such, seen as part of a loosely textured set of approaches attempting to theorise the complexities of our age, amongst them the socio-economic technological and cultural changes resulting from globalisation and communications revolution (Halsey, *et al.*, 2003). In terms of relevance to this study, the intention here is to locate the university within the context of its postmodern condition and to map how the postmodernist philosophical critical orientation has informed debates on changes within HE.

⁵¹ Drawing on Bauman (1992), Edwards and Usher also state: '*Postmodernity is marked by a view that the human world is irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority [...]*' (Edwards and Usher 1994: 12).

⁵² Delanty (2001) identifies three phases in the emergence of the concept. The first was the arrival of the postmodernism movement in the arts and architecture. The second, which paralleled aesthetic postmodernism, was associated with the writings of Foucault and poststructuralism and reflected an explicitly epistemological thesis concerning the nature of knowledge. Finally, the 1980s witnessed a postmodernist critical orientation reflecting a theory of society concerned with questions of the identity of the self in an age of uncertainty, fragmentation, multiplicity and difference and a critique of overarching narratives of capitalism.

The analytical framework associated with postmodernism exercised a significant influence over intellectual life, creating something of an ‘epistemic transformation’ producing, albeit unevenly so, new modes of thinking and writing in a wide number of disciplines in the humanities and social studies (Jenkins, 2006).⁵³ The emergence of postmodernism as a critical orientation can be seen to have informed debates on the transformation of the university sector over the last two decades. As Scott notes, its arrival coincided with the massification of HE in the UK. According to Edwards and Usher, the notion that the university is both responding to and being shaped by the postmodern is not surprising: ‘*Education is the dutiful child of the Enlightenment [...] the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realised*’ (1994: 24). In other words, the university as an institution is deeply rooted within the enlightenment ideals and, as a prime locus of knowledge production, constitutes an obvious focal point for the postmodernist critical gaze. By exposing certain fault lines in education through what Edwards and Usher call its ‘*problematizing of epistemological structures and hierarchies*’ (1994: 25), the postmodernist interrogation, can be seen to challenge the very foundations of the university. According to Barnett: ‘*The modern university is a site of tectonic plate movement*’ (2000: 58). Expanding on this metaphor, Barnett (*ibid*) submits that the university has undergone so much ‘seismic activity’ that the very conceptual foundations on which the nature and purpose of the university rest have been irretrievably cracked. Barnett’s thinking is underscored by the premise that the university now operates in what he terms an ‘age of supercomplexity’ seen as

⁵³ Postmodernism is not inherently associated with any one set of ideas or orientations. There is no firm consensus as to what is meant by the term, and the multiple analyses and accounts of postmodernism are irreducible to the language of a particular subject area.

enmeshed in the overall postmodern condition.⁵⁴ For Barnett (*ibid*) the HE sector can be seen to be engaging with, being shaped by and in some cases as giving expression to the wider dynamics claimed to surround or constitute the so-called condition of postmodernity. By way of example, the information technology revolution has created a myriad of alternative means and places for educating, creating new forms of social networks to emerge within the university, networks which are ephemeral as well as local and international. Over the last two decades it has been claimed that the university has increasingly lost its once privileged role as the principal producer of knowledge (Edwards and Usher, 1994; Barnett, 2000, 2003 and Delanty, 2001). It is no longer the crucial institution in society for the (re)production of instrumental or technical knowledge nor is it the main codifier of the now fragmented national culture (Delanty, 2001). The internet, the proliferation of think tanks, private research institutes and consultancies have, it is claimed, displaced the university from its once privileged status as primary producer of knowledge (Delanty, 2001). The result is that universities are now part of a wider knowledge market within which they are increasingly forced to compete for funding resources to create new knowledge(s). Perhaps more significantly, it has been noted that mono-disciplines have given territory to trans-disciplinary workings within the university in recent times (Scott, in Barnett, 2005). Within the context of trans-disciplinary knowledge production where universities are increasingly required to collaborate with other agencies, new concepts such as mode 1 and mode 2 emerged in the early 1990s to influence debates on the changing nature of HE. As will be

⁵⁴ Defining this 'age of supercomplexity', Barnett states: '*The fundamental frameworks by which we might understand the world are multiplying and are often in conflict. Of the multiplication of frameworks, there shall be no end. It is this multiplication of frameworks that I term supercomplexity. It increasingly characterises the world we all live in. Working out its operational, cognitive and pedagogical implications for the university constitutes much of a challenge ahead.*' (Barnett, 2000: 6)

considered in chapter two, such concepts were at play in the construction of the UHI identity.

According to Barnett (2000) neo-logisms describe the new role of the university variously as the ‘virtual university’, the ‘multi-versity’ and the ‘entrepreneurial university’, all of which can be seen to bear the broad hallmarks of the postmodern condition. The virtual university can be characterised by the loss of a defining centre whilst engaging with multiple audiences through ICT. The multi-versity – a term first introduced by Clark Kerr in the 1960s⁵⁵ – has been described as a conglomerate of activities and interests with little in common. As Barnett (2000) notes: ‘*multi-versity makes available multiple spaces, multiple identities and multiple communities*’ (115) (see also Delanty, 2001 and Land, 2004). For Barnett (2000) the growing multiplicity of roles that is associated with the concept of the multi-versity has found new popularity with the expansion of HE and its interaction with globalisation. The entrepreneurial university is conceptualised as an institution jettisoning certain elements of its traditional heritage to undertake venture and risk to interact with other agencies as well as to develop new ideas to secure new markets at reduced costs. The new emphasis on the entrepreneurial spirit challenges previous patterns of work and associated values within the sector and the overall articulation with global forces can be seen as part of the postmodern condition and

⁵⁵ The concept of the multi-versity can be traced back to Clark Kerr’s Godkin Lectures at Harvard University in 1963 and subsequently to *The Use of the University*, (1963). Kerr (*ibid*) describes the multi-versity as a ‘city of infinite communities’ and a ‘community of competing visions’ consisting of a number of different and sometime conflicting communities. Its governance is more decentralised than the more traditional university.

other labels describing fast change and uncertainty and, as such, is found in many debates on the role and nature of HE.⁵⁶

On a separate but related note, the postmodernist critical orientation has also left its mark at the departmental level within HE, although the depth of its impact is uneven and the degree to which it may have displaced previous structures and thinking a matter of debate. In subjects such as history, postmodernism has stimulated new debates on the nature of knowledge and truth.⁵⁷ Whilst Scott (1997) acknowledges the relevance of elements of postmodernism for HE, he does not believe that it is far-reaching and powerful enough for the university to have lost its established lines of legitimacy. More recently, Field described postmodernism as having fashionable, trendy leanings:

Postmodernism is a dead end, though it can be quite an interesting dead end. Its existence is itself evidence of the way our fast-moving knowledge economy is partly driven by fads: just as structuralism and then post-structuralism were advanced and then abandoned by scholarly trendsetters, so postmodernism is already becoming the emblem of the intellectual fashion victim. (Field, 2006: 145-6)

Notwithstanding the tensions surrounding its actual shelf life and perceived value, postmodernism continues to inform debates on education. The postmodernist critical lens has presented us with a view of the world characterised by shifting sands of multiplicity: pluralistic and divided into many trajectories and sites of authority, all intersecting and competing with each other. As Jenkins claims: *'The*

⁵⁶ Discussing HE, Land notes: *'Higher education comes to be seen as operating within what is characterised variously as post-industrialism, globalisation, late capitalism, or postmodernity. Whatever the label, the environment is characterised by volatile change, rapid [...] flows of information, uncertainty and unpredictability, particularly in relation to enrolments and revenues. The environment is marked by fierce competitiveness and potential organisational decline unless there is a vigilant drive for innovation and flexibility.'* (Land, 2004: 2)

⁵⁷ As Evans notes: *'The questions they [postmodernists] raise [...] about the elusive and relative nature of knowledge [...] do not merely challenge historians to re-examine the theory and practice of their own discipline, they also have wider implications that go far beyond the boundaries of academic and university life.'* (Evans, 2000: 9)

old centres barely hold. And the old meta-narratives no longer resonate with the actuality and promise, coming to look incredible from the late twentieth-century sceptical perspectives' (Jenkins, 2006: 75). Interestingly, it is this notion of the 'old centres' no longer resonating with the actuality and promise of the new, as well as, by extension, its demands, that strikes a chord with Professor Hills' vision for the UHI.

I.x Conclusion

The evolution of the UHI has coincided with a time of fast-changing global, social, economic and technological currents during which the very meaning of HE has undergone major changes. Of course, the nature of the UHI cannot be understood against the changing backdrop of HE alone. For the UHI's major partners the FE colleges – the post-1992 period was also a time of significant political, social-cultural and economic change. For the newly independent Scottish colleges, the UHI was seen as a potential route to a new market, an opportunity to expand their portfolio for new status and growth. On one level, the UHI has arguably proven to be distinct in the sense of going against the grain of what went before. Modelled on a federal, collegiate university based on a number of dispersed FE colleges and research institutions, it has clearly discarded the more conventional model of a single campus university housed in a single location. However, set against the constellation of wider changes taking place, where HE has expanded and become more diverse, complex and entrepreneurial, the UHI could perhaps be seen as simply an expression of its time. Paradoxically, despite the pressure to make HE more entrepreneurial – a dynamic that has co-existed with notions of autonomy and freedom – there has also been more external control over core elements of academic practice. Against this backdrop, the discourse of performativity has grown to

occupy a prominent position in the academic debate analysing how the HE sector has been reconfigured. Performativity with its associated modes of regulation and control based on rewards and sanctions has been seen here as orientating the institutional structures and cultures. Given that the UHI is composed of a number of FE institutions it has had to deal with both the HE performativity script and an FE performativity script. In other words, the values and behaviours encouraged or underwritten by UHI policy, and framed by HE performativity, have had to operate within an educational setting that was already fashioned by FE performativity.

The RAE – described here as an instrument of performativity – is commonly seen as a barometer for research quality by superimposing a common framework of specific research output criteria to be met within a set time period. For the HE sector, the RAE enacted a new kind of symbolic power and status and operated as an indicator to other funding bodies as to where the best research areas and institutes could be found. Under the pressures of performativity, the notion of research as a process of knowledge creation for individual pursuit has been arguably eclipsed by the potential for knowledge to generate financial returns. What counts as valuable and useful research has been challenged. Over the last decade there has been a move away from individual “bluesky” research projects towards research that would yield clear economic and social benefits. Under this performativity paradigm, knowledge is increasingly judged not by its capacity to describe the world but by its actual value as a “consumable” product with a “pay-off”. Research capacity building has introduced conflictual currents and tensions with regards to notions of academic identity. As Henkel (2000) claims, the RAE produced a new bipolar typology of the academic, namely the ‘research active’ and ‘research inactive’. Within the context

of the UHI, it seems fair to say that as it absorbs RAE performativity, conflictual currents surrounding research identity may well emerge. The crucial point here is that FE performativity will set in place certain cultural norms, rituals and value systems that can both enable and constrain particular activities depending upon their perceived relationship to the core activities of FE. Given that research is not a normative part of FE performativity, the policy drive to embed a research culture is unlikely to be absorbed into the FE partners in a straightforward way.

Chapter Two

II. UHI: Evolution and Location within the Wider Landscape

A detailed chronology of the structural and managerial changes within the UHI exists elsewhere,⁵⁸ and the following account is more of a general mapping with specific relevance to this study. In particular, it aims to set the genesis and evolution of the UHI against the backdrop of changes taking place within HE at the time. In doing so, it will discuss some of the political tensions associated with the overall changes surrounding the new UHI constitution in the late 1990s and early 2000. The chapter will also explore how intellectual fashions such as ‘postmodernism’, ‘virtual’ university and knowledge concepts such as ‘Mode 1’ and ‘Mode 2’ were intertwined with discussions on the identity of the UHI. These can be read as attempts to gain academic respectability and/or to promote the idea of the UHI as a ‘radical, trailblazing enterprise pushing new frontiers’. It will conclude by mapping the development of research expansion within the UHI and, in doing so, it will set the scene for the more detailed discussions associated with the study research questions examined in later chapters.

In 1993, the Scottish Executive announced its support for the UHI (then referred to as the University of the Highlands and Islands Project, or UHIP) which was heralded by its advocates as a distinctively radical enterprise. The previous year, in a keynote speech at the Centre for Highlands and Islands Policy Studies Conference, Sir Robert Cowan⁵⁹ described the proposed multi-campus partnership

⁵⁸ See Hills and Lingard: *‘UHI the Making of A University’* (2004) and Plenderleith and Adamson in Gray, F (2002) *Landscapes of learning: Lifelong Learning in Rural Communities*.

⁵⁹ Sir Robert Cowan was a member of Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

of local institutions as an exciting initiative that would challenge orthodoxies.⁶⁰ As stated earlier the UHI was originally envisioned in a consultative document written by the former Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde, Professor Sir Graham Hills – who also gave a speech outlining the main thrust of what became known as the *Hills Report* (1992) at the Barail conference. As can be gleaned from the themes considered in chapter one, the timing of the report was auspicious and reflected the overall spirit of the age. It is also significant that Professor Hills' contribution did not stop at this early stage. After the publication of the *Hills Report*, he continued to be heavily involved in the development of the UHI project as academic advisor and a member of the UHI Foundation. The *Hills Report* (published two weeks after the Barail Conference) established the rationale for the project, confirming the potential for a federal, collegiate university based on a number of existing further education colleges and research institutes. It clearly abandoned the more conventional model of a single campus university housed in a single location. It was to be a new type of university, a collegiate federation linked by a powerful information and communications highway. This perceived distinctiveness is encapsulated within the opening pages of the *Report*:

The model of the university will be that of a hub and spokes. The hub will be the administrative centre responsible for the conduct of the university as a corporate entity. As such it will seek to mediate and harmonise the activities of the separate university colleges, especially those of delivering distance-learning material in the most cost effective way. (*Hills Report*, 1992: 4)

Claimed at the time to be a new university for the twenty-first century, the UHI was not going to simply echo a distance learning mode found in the Open University and

⁶⁰ Sir Robert Cowan stated: 'We have a new [...] opportunity to create a Highlands university of a different kind, because a new market is opening up as access to university is being widened, and because new models of what a university is means that they can be much less capital intensive [...] We will however maximise these benefits only if we break the mould. We have to eschew conventional thinking'. (The Barail Conference: *A University for the Highlands and Islands - Prospects and Possibilities*, 1992)

in outreach learning ventures commonplace in Scottish universities. The fundamental concept of the UHI was that individuals should be able to engage in learning locally, in local community learning networks (consisting of FE colleges, and their affiliated outreach centres) that operated collectively as a single university entity. As well as reflecting subjects commonly found in other HE institutions, the UHI development trajectory would very much reflect a curriculum tailored specifically to the economic needs and aspirations of the dispersed region of the Highlands and Islands. For Professor Hills the emerging social, economic and technological changes in the last decades of the twentieth century required (if not demanded) a new type of university to those already established in Scotland. In an interview for this study Professor Hills adopted something close to a Darwinian framing in discussing the need for the UHI to be different:

I believe in diversity, the more species the more opportunities for adaptability, change and survival. To survive in the new millennium the university must be constantly reinventing itself, adapting to the new environment it operates in. From the very outset that UHI had to be cast in a different mould from the rest of the Scottish system to fit the new demands, and more importantly to gain a foothold and survive in the new environment of higher education. (Interview with author, April 2004) ⁶¹

Although the ‘hub and spokes’ analogy depicting the relationship between the centre and periphery has long fallen into obscurity, the structural relationship it attempted to articulate did materialise. At the time of writing, the UHI constitutes a partnership of thirteen independent institutions known as academic partners.⁶² Seven of the academic partners are FE colleges, four are specialist research and teaching

⁶¹ The study used an ethical statement (see Appendix Three) that sets out a clear undertaking that the information provided by interviewees would be anonymised and the identities of providers of information kept confidential. However, with respect to this particular interview Professor Hills, given his unique position within the evolution of the UHI and the nature of the information provided, kindly waived his right to anonymity.

⁶² Argyll College; Inverness College; Lews Castle College; Lochaber College; Moray College; North Highland College; Orkney College; Perth College; Shetland College; Scottish Association for Marine Science; Sabhal Mòr Ostaig; Highland Theological College; and North Atlantic Fisheries.

institutions and the two smallest academic partners, Argyll and Lochaber colleges, provide an infrastructure of academic support for students in rural areas studying FE and HE modules or programmes offered by the other partners. The UHI also has two associate institutions: the Ness Foundation, a health research centre which has been associated with UHI since 1999 and, since 2005, the Sustainable Development Research Centre, a not-for-profit research body involved in supporting the monitoring and measuring of sustainable development. The UHI Executive Office undertakes a range of duties to coordinate and support the activities of the academic partners, including the promotion of research and the provision of information for statutory and planning purposes. Although the Executive Office is located in Inverness, it also employs a number of staff who are based in the academic partners.

The faith placed in the “promise” of new technology in the evolution of the UHI is difficult to overstate. Certainly at the inception of the UHI in the early 1990s, there were many who found themselves genuinely galvanised by the new challenges of exploiting and moulding such technology. Indeed, the promise of (ICT) stirred a new adventurous spirit which, at its most radical, mobilised something close to a missionary zeal in the fostering of a new educational order. For some newly converted crusaders, the promise of ICT was so powerful that they routinely claimed it would produce a paradigm shift in teaching and learning and thus forge a new university ethos and structure, able to give the university the resources to find a better footing in the so-called age of supercomplexity (MacFarlane 1992; Hills and Lingard, 2004).⁶³ As stated earlier it was against the background of, and in reaction to these wider technological changes that the UHI found a foothold by actively

⁶³ In retrospect, it was perhaps a rather grand, if not naïve, claim to make. For others, such technology was just as much the instigator of supercomplexity as the potential solution for the education system to operate within the growing sphere of supercomplexity.

embracing ICT infrastructures for academic advantage. Indeed, for many of its strongest and most outspoken advocates the UHI is without doubt a '*deus ex machina*', perceived as providing a powerful response to the challenges facing the HE sector in the new millennium. Hills and Lingard reflecting on the early days of the 1990s, enthusiastically celebrate the idea that ICT had created an epistemic transformation, producing a new genre of thinking about learning and teaching:

UHI [...] represents the response to the information and communications technology revolution. [...] History may regard the foundation of the new university as remarkable not just in its novel attitudes, which will eventually become commonplace, but rather in its timing. [...] Because the new communications system discounts both place and time, earlier insuperable obstacles of distance and remoteness have suddenly dissolved. [...] A new learning paradigm suggests itself. (Hills and Lingard, 2004: xiii)

Thus, it is fair to say that in the first part of the 1990s the literature and academic discourse from UHI's proponents depicts a vision of a university that would be radically different from a traditional campus-based HE institution.⁶⁴ During the first decade of its progress it was claimed that the UHI would not only widen access and increase student numbers – primarily in the Highlands and Islands – but also offer improvements to the learning experience at a reduced cost compared to the more traditional forms of HE. Instead of demanding that its students attend a central location, the vision dictates that the UHI reach out to them, offering courses through the internet, through video-conferencing and e-mail, through close collaboration between a number of FE colleges and research institutions. In the first '*UHI Staff Guide Document*' the then Chief Executive Professor Duffield stated in perhaps somewhat hubristic terms: '*UHI is the most exciting educational development in the United Kingdom. [...] The rest of the world is watching as we develop a new kind of*

⁶⁴ This focus on uniqueness still looms large today in the literature although compared to the early 1990s is less radical in its outlook.

university – built on partnerships and collaborations’⁶⁵ (1998: 3). The decision to embrace ICT can clearly be seen to have been informed by wider developments within Scottish HE. Although the overall blueprint and rationale for the UHI project was set out in the *Hills Report* (1992) there are overlaps with and, in some aspects, strong parallels between the respective visions set out by Professor Hills and a report entitled *Teaching & Learning in an Expanding Higher Education System* (1992) by a working party of the Committee of Scottish University Principals (CSUP) under the convenership of Professor A. G. J. MacFarlane. This report, commonly referred to as the ‘*MacFarlane Report*’, set out a number of long-term recommendations aimed at making HE more effective and efficient. Heralded as a ‘grand design’ (Hartley, 1995a) the *MacFarlane Report* prophesied how HE should evolve over the next two decades, arguing that rapidly increasing advances in ICT would grow in prominence and play an indispensable role in the future. It emphasised how new technology could foster the realisation of the large-scale production of shared resources and inspire innovative approaches to teaching and learning, particularly in the sphere of distance learning. Borrowing from Kuhn (1962) this conviction gained so much ascendancy that it eventually took on the status of a paradigm shift in the rhetoric of Professor MacFarlane’s lectures in the 1990s and the early literature surrounding the UHI concept. Acknowledging the *Report’s* relevance to wider governmental intervention, Hartley observes: ‘*The Report is a sign of the times, a symbol of the cultural and economic changes taking place*’ (1995a: 151). The *MacFarlane Report* certainly appealed to Professor Hills. Suggesting a blending of perspectives and conceptual horizons he stated: ‘*I came to the same conclusions as the MacFarlane Report, independently. I saw the Report as*

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the most recent UHI Staff Guide (2009) is much more modest in its claims and makes no mention of the interest from the rest of the world.

the technical solution to the UHI (Interview by author, April: 2004).⁶⁶ Expanding on the above, Professor Hills gave the clearest connection between the UHI and the *MacFarlane Report* when he stated: '*Alistair MacFarlane believed the UHI was the ideal vehicle for the recommendations outlined in his Report*' (*ibid*). For others involved in the evolution of the UHI the *MacFarlane Report* was an invaluable guiding document. As one interview respondent – Thomas [leader of an FE partner and longstanding supporter of the UHI] noted:

He [MacFarlane] was very important: he chaired the Teaching and Learning Committee in the early days, the early to mid-1990s and stepped in to act as Chief Executive in summer of 2000. The [MacFarlane] Report was very influential; it was used as a sort of bible by people who were involved in the curriculum. It started a new culture, if not that, then certainly a new focus on learning and teaching and to its credit it survives right the way through to this day in the UHI. Having said that, I'm not sure whether the overall outcomes on the ground would give you evidence of the aspiration first hoped for. The UHI is not that far forward in terms of application of technologies and learning as you might have expected and as outsiders often believed to be the case. (Interview with author, December: 2006)

Although there seems to be irrefutable evidence to indicate that the *MacFarlane Report* and its main author had direct influence on the evolution of the UHI vision, the question of which aspects were embraced, subverted and ignored or lost in translation is outside the scope of this study. However, as the quote above hints at, the UHI may not have turned out to be the trailblazing project for introducing new teaching and learning approaches that some of its early rhetoric suggested.

II.i Difficult Times for the UHI

The UHI project has not escaped censure, much of which centred on what was perceived as a move away from the original vision, in particular a shift in the concentration of decision-making power away from the periphery to the UHI Executive Office. One of the more unfavourable renderings appeared in *The Herald*

⁶⁶ Regarding interview respondent anonymity/confidentiality see footnote 61 page 64.

in an article entitled ‘Staff Strife amid University’ (10 June, 2000: 8). The same edition of *The Herald* also featured an essay written by Professor Hills entitled ‘The dream of a university of the Highlands and Islands seems to be fading’ (*ibid*: 15). This polemical essay was particularly critical about how the UHI was being managed by their leaders. For Hills and Lingard (2004) the UHI vision was being altered beyond recognition. The impact of these internal difficulties – which were by the summer of 2000 firmly placed in the wider public domain – reverberated beyond the leadership of the UHI itself and those with a financial stake. Interested parties began to ask searching questions in an attempt to seek some assurance that the UHI project was still a viable initiative. As Webster observes after such bad press coverage: ‘*The earlier shared confidence in UHI [...] had been shaken, and UHI had acquired the prefix ‘troubled’ in most of the Scottish press – a label that proved hard to shake off*’⁶⁷ (2003: 44). Thus, the UHI was very much a divided community by the late 1990s and early new millennium. Much of the tension and fragmentation between the different partners resulted from how to respond to the Scottish Office’s new quality control mechanisms. In the early years it had been widely assumed that the project would be granted university status through Royal Charter, a method used to create the University of Stirling some thirty years earlier. This approach, which according to Webster (2003) was an ‘*unexamined assumption*’, turned out to be a momentous misreading of the new political landscape. As the Royal Charter route to university status was no longer seen as viable option for the UHI, the only realistic path towards the goal of university status was following the criteria set out in the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* (1992) which gave the Secretary of State of Scotland the power to

⁶⁷ Webster is an important contributor here as the Principal of Perth College from 1991-2006 and long term supporter and active agent in UHI. In addition he was the author of a Doctorate thesis entitled ‘*UHI Insider Perspective*’ (2003), University of Lancaster.

designate the title of Higher Education Institution (HEI) to any aspiring educational institution. This new development meant a fundamental rethinking of the original decentralised federal collegiate vision. Under the guidelines of the 1992 Act, the UHI would have to operate within a new structural and political landscape. The view that the UHI's loosely defined federal arrangement lacked the necessary safeguards in terms of accountability and responsibility for the Scottish Office is made explicit in the writing of Hills and Lingard (2004) and Webster (2003). It is also important to note that at this time there were a number of power struggles within the UHI partners which spilled out into the public domain. According to Hills and Lingard (2004) and Webster (2003) there were several sources of conflict involving different combinations of actors but the main epicentre of dissent and conflict centred on the question of a federal versus a unitary model. In this respect there was conflict between those who were prepared to make concession in exchange for HEI status and those who were unwilling to make any concessions that might ultimately displace the original Hills vision. Other issues of tension and conflict related to membership of the various decision and policy-making bodies as a number of the smaller partners resented being excluded from certain policy-making committees (Webster, 2003). A sense of the complexity in seeking to find a sense of unity within the disparate nature of the UHI arrangement can be found in an article by the Principal of Inverness College who retired in early 1999:

The UHI has travelled a phenomenal distance in a very short time [...] Dramatic change and significant development are often characterised by tension and challenge [...]. One of the challenges has been the speed of progress. Laudable and necessary [...] it has been incredibly difficult to prioritise the multitude of tasks we have all been involved in, not least for those with full-time jobs in a partner institution. And those within the Executive Office have steered a supporting and co-ordinating course, often without the information and response they might have hoped for.

Another challenge relates to our vision. We must not lose sight of a truly comprehensive, new kind of university, based on a collegiate federal structure of thirteen institutions each with its own identity and mission. To achieve designation as a Higher Education Institute we had to separate, in constitutional terms, Higher from Further Education. The identity of each institution presents a challenge [...]. We had to become more trusting, less competitive and more willing to share. No easy task for institutions which have developed independently and vigorously since incorporation, and whose self-worth is bound up in their independence. (Price, *UHI Wavelength*, February, 1999: 5)

The above can be seen as significant in the context of research expansion. Many of the respondents interviewed for this study made reference to cultural and structural barriers to the embedding of research, some of which are inherently linked to the difficulties of networking and aligning individual partner autonomy and identity with that of being part of a wider hybrid HE/FE organisation. Despite the opposition of some partners to any constitutional change, a new constitution was endorsed by a show of hands at the Annual General Meeting of the UHI at the end of summer 1998 (Hills and Lingard, 2004). The overall result was that the UHI would now be working towards the quality control arrangements set out in the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* (1992). Despite such tension, progress was being made in some areas. Significantly, in 1998 the UHI achieved accreditation by the Open University Validation Service (OUVS) for the awards it was developing. Interestingly, the stated mission in the UHI's first Strategic Planning Framework Document for the period 1998-2001 was: *'To establish for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland a collegiate university which will reach the highest standards and play a pivotal role in our educational, social and cultural development'* (1998: 1). Thus, alongside the response to the economic and social needs of the area was the commitment to develop and preserve the region's unique cultural heritage. Moreover, its research profile received a considerable boost with The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) becoming a UHI academic partner in 1999.

However, during 1999 and 2000 the unease within the UHI did not come to a close. The summer of 2000 was seen as a chaotic time for the project, which reached a high point in late August when the Chief Executive declared his intention to retire prematurely. According to Webster (2003) the Chief Executive's adversaries hailed this departure as a triumph and the tensions that reached the public domain quickly dissolved. In an interview for this study Professor Hills felt that the outgoing Chief Executive lacked the necessary creativity and sensitivity needed to translate his vision into a tangible HE Institute:

Of course, it [the UHI polo-mint model] had to have a centre, but if the UHI Executive saw itself above the rest [partners] then it was making a mistake. [...] Brian Duffield from the start attempted to disregard the original vision. The Scottish Office lacked the imagination to realise the original vision. (Interview with author, April: 2004) ⁶⁸

The above comments can be seen as a clear indication of the tensions between Professor Hills' vision and the *reapolitik* of the times. It is fair to say that his rendering underplays or perhaps, arguably, erases the wider discourses of performativity, managerialism and accountability which increasingly penetrated HE at that time.⁶⁹ In September 2000, Professor MacFarlane agreed to act as Director and Chief Executive until a replacement could be appointed. Professor MacFarlane had played a valuable role in the UHI for several years, initially helping to prepare the UHI network for trials of academic quality assurance but also as Chairman of the UHI Academic Advisory Board and a long-term member of the Academic Council. Whilst acting as Director and Chief Executive, Professor MacFarlane was confronted with the UHI's shattered reputation and an administrative structure

⁶⁸ Regarding interview respondent anonymity/confidentiality see footnote 61 page 64.

⁶⁹ Moreover, it also has to be remembered that from the late 1990s Professor Hills was on the periphery of the UHI and therefore not immersed in the subtle complexities and day-to-day politics of the organisation. Webster, on the other hand, as a principal of one of the largest FE partner colleges and actively involved in UHI at both macro and micro level, was close to these subtle political and social dynamics and thus, can be seen to be more in touch with the intricate power struggles at play.

heavily stained by allegations of what Webster describes as ‘*arrogance and excessive centralism, loss of confidence by academic partners and serious morale problems among Executive Office staff*’ (2003: 45). In response to grievances about the uneven distribution of decision-making powers among the partners, Professor MacFarlane quickly introduced new structures to reflect a more egalitarian policy-making structure.⁷⁰ Although the literature still referred to the UHI as embracing a federal collegiate structure (which from a traditional perspective implied only a small UHI core) in reality the Executive Office had far more authority and accountability than that envisaged by the *Hills Report* (1992). Interestingly, claims of corrosive divisions between some partners and the Executive (Webster 2003) may have led to a situation where some policy makers lost confidence in the FE partners’ ability to embrace certain policy initiatives stemming from the centre. In other words, the tension in the early days may have planted seeds of doubt and created sceptical attitudes among some involved within the UHI, especially when it came to changing what might be seen as entrenched working cultures.

On 1st April 2001, the Scottish Parliament formally declared the UHI an HE institution. Consequently, the UHI then had to follow the same performativity scripts and criteria as other Scottish HE institutions. Ultimately, this meant that research expansion within the UHI would, as within other Scottish HE institutions, be tied to the RAE. With the goal of designation finally achieved, Professor MacFarlane stood down as acting Director and Chief Executive in September 2001, subsequently to be elected Rector of the UHI in October whilst Professor Robert

⁷⁰ He expanded the Executive Board to comprise all heads of partner institutions with a Chair elected from their number to ensure that partners operated in a more inclusive way when making decisions. This helped to displace claims of corrosive divisions and attempted to foster a collective voice within the UHI.

Cormack took on the role of Director and Chief Executive. At this time, widening access to HE for the dispersed communities of the Highlands and Islands and facilitating what was commonly referred to as a seamless progression between FE and HE were identified as important goals for the newly designated HE institution. More recently (August, 2008) the UHI has been able to award its own taught degrees, thanks to the achievement of taught Degree Awarding Powers (tDAP), a major step in the path towards gaining full university status. At the time of writing, the bid for university title is being supported by the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Strathclyde.

II.ii UHI Identity: Changing Ideas, Changing Goals

A certain ‘pioneering’ leitmotif informs much of the literature charting the evolution of the UHI. When the UHI was designated as an HE institution, the then First Minister Henry McLeish took the opportunity to reaffirm the perceived distinctiveness of the UHI beyond the borders of Scotland: ‘*The UHI is a superb trailblazing project, special even in European terms*’⁷¹ (UHI Millennium Institute News, summer, 2001: 1). According to its proponents, this dynamism and radicalism was represented by a shift away from the more traditional classroom/lecture theatre approach to a dynamic ‘synergy’ of staff from different institutions and computer-mediated courses all collaborating to create a learning environment that would eliminate geographical boundaries and give students wider and more affordable choices. In a sense, Professor Hills can be described as tacitly, if not overtly, capitalising on the emerging technologies, intellectual fashions and

⁷¹ In more recent times this sense of distinctiveness still features as a defining characteristic of the UHI. Commenting on the UHI, the vice president of Microsoft (Bob McDowell) stated: ‘*UHI has the potential to be a jewel in the region’s crown; a new and exciting university that others will learn from.*’ (2008 UHI Prospectus, 4)

political aspirations of the early 1990s. In this respect it seems that the arrival of postmodernism as a critical orientation did not escape the attention of the founding father of the UHI. Although Professor Hills has written widely on the evolution of the UHI, it was only while being interviewed for this study that he associated the UHI with what he saw as certain elements of postmodernism and the postmodern condition. Of course, this association does not make Professor Hills a ‘postmodernist’ (however that may be defined) but it does suggest that he found some of the more popular themes associated with the *Zeitgeist* of the postmodern useful in articulating his particular vision for a university of the future. Unpacking his notion of postmodernism and the ‘postmodern university’ Professor Hills stated:

In the 90s it [postmodernism] was gaining popularity in academic circles [...] and it appealed to me as a way of explaining change, and most importantly exposing the things that were fast becoming beyond their time, no longer relevant to a world where technological advances were growing. [...] In the context of the university it is about exploring beyond the habitual, the accepted traditions and orthodoxies. The postmodern is about thinking beyond the customary, the established way. And for some traditionalists in the university, it – my idea of postmodernism – can be seen as a rebellious act, a direct challenge to the conventions and habits. So the UHI was in my own mind thoroughly postmodern in its style. It was going to be different, growing in novel ways unseen in the established Scottish university sector. (Interview with author, November: 2007)⁷²

Thus, Professor Hills’ understanding of postmodernism focuses on the ideas of disruption, difference, discontinuity from traditional hierarchies and moving against the grain of received wisdom. It is true to say that in translating his vision for a new university, Professor Hills eschewed the uniformity, standardised procedures and hierarchy which he believed were so prominent in the more traditional universities in Scotland. For Professor Hills and his closest followers, the UHI was going to follow a different trajectory from the other Scottish universities; it would inaugurate a new era in education, dissolving the traditional anchoring points defining and

⁷² Regarding interview respondent anonymity/confidentiality see footnote 61 page 64.

sustaining the more traditional university. Of course, this rendering is predicated on the notion of a fairly uniform and traditional HE sector. As can be observed from chapter one, however, the HE sector was far from homogeneous or static. While there is a recognition by some that universities are both shaped by and responding to the so-called postmodern condition, the idea of a ‘postmodern university’ as an actual discernable entity is hotly debated (Taylor *et al.*, 2002). But it is important to remember the context here. Professor Hills is, as it were, auto-biographically, reflecting on his own personal agency and deliberations more than a decade after his *Report* was published. What this study would like to emphasise is that, although Professor Hills was more than aware of the postmodern debate at the time of the UHI’s conception, his reflections never actually entered into the public domain or any public discussions on the role and identity of the UHI. Responding to an interview question highlighting this *lacuna*, Professor Hills highlighted the dangers of being too outwardly radical in articulating his vision for the UHI:

To my mind the UHI was always envisaged to be a postmodern university but it was never expressed that way [...]. It was too much to openly express, it was a bridge too far. [...] We judged it in a way that our ideas always had to have respectability. This was essential and unfortunately, this respectability can be at the cost of radical thinking. It acted as a brake. We were radical from the beginning and we intended the university [UHI] to be quite different. But to press that too hard, if it exceeded the imagination of many of the people involved then they would say ‘I don’t recognise this’ and they would take flight. People expected to see a model they recognised and we had to wean them away from that.⁷³ (Interview with author, November: 2007)⁷⁴

Thus, from the above it seems fair to say that Professor Hills’ somewhat playful connections between the idea of the UHI, postmodernism and the postmodern

⁷³ The vision promoted by Professor Hills loosely resonated with a number of characteristics expressed by Barnett (2000) when discussing the notion of a postmodern university. For Barnett the so-called postmodern university incorporates a broad constellation of characteristics including ‘*a virtual university without a defining centre, a widening of communicative capacities, engagement with a multiplicity of audiences and centres of power, and the exertion of centrifugal forces on its own constitution.*’ (Barnett, 2000: 21)

⁷⁴ Regarding interview respondent anonymity/confidentiality see footnote 61 page 64.

condition was very much an internal dialogue in the first instance and, as his use of ‘we’ suggests, something he only shared with the closest of confidants, rather than ever expressed in public. Despite the hubristic tone found in some of the quotes above, the need to earn what Professor Hills calls ‘respectability’ in the early days acted as a powerful counterbalance and ensured that these notions surrounding the identity of the UHI never materialised and impacted on public debates.⁷⁵ However, it has to be stressed that Professor Hills’ depiction of the Scottish HE system downplays the wider changes and dynamics instigated by the Scottish Office and, as such, allows for a smooth and uncomplicated path for evoking the mythology of the so-called ground-breaking character of the UHI. In fact, at the time of the publication of *Hills Report*, the Scottish Office was far from unreceptive to new ideas challenging and disrupting the old paradigms of HE.⁷⁶ Set against the wider theoretical and political backdrop of the post-1992 reforms in Scotland and the UK more generally, the UHI was certainly not the only institution exploring and pushing new frontiers in a newly evolving landscape of HE. Perhaps, set against the wider context of themes explored in this thesis, it would be more appropriate to refer to the UHI as a sign of the times, rather than a ‘radical HE project far ahead of its time’. In other words, set within the wider context of changes taking place at this time, Hills’ radical plans for the UHI were, to use a common phrase, ‘not the only new act on stage’. As such, the UHI can be seen as part of a wider constellation of new initiatives surfacing.

⁷⁵ Professor Hills’ vision for the UHI attempts to disrupt the perceptions on the hierarchies around which HE institutions are normally designed; it seeks to diffuse and redistribute power for decision making to the benefit of what may be considered weaker, smaller actors by crossing traditional borders and associated value systems and redrawing new boundaries. Hence it perhaps comes as no surprise that the blueprint for the UHI (*Hills Report*, 1992) was not going to adopt a research profile similar to that of other HE institutions.

⁷⁶ Overall, the early 1990s onwards ushered in significant changes for HE in Scotland and south of the border. As indicated in chapter one it was a time when new ideas and working structures were fast penetrating the world of HE.

Attempts to brand the UHI as a ‘radical’ institution can certainly be detected in the signifiers describing the UHI after the Report was accepted by the Highlands and Islands University Advisory Group in June 1992. The original federal, collegiate arrangement commonly conceptualised as the ‘hub and spokes’ model where the hub would be the administrative centre responsible for the conduct of the university as a corporate entity, was by the mid-1990s being displaced by a new signifier – the ‘polo-mint model’⁷⁷ and by the second half of the 1990s the term ‘virtual university’ also entered the expanding academic and political lexicon, conveying the uniqueness and structure of the UHI project. However, reflecting new circumstances – not least the need to adjust to Scottish Office quality performance indicators – these terms had become unfashionable and no longer featured in the UHI literature by the early part of the new millennium.⁷⁸ This retreat from the more radical labels is interesting and can be seen to resonate with a more general critical questioning of the somewhat evangelical claims associated with virtual universities. In this context, Delanty drawing on Kumar (1997) underlines the importance of concrete place of the university:

Against the spectre of a virtual university, Kristan Kumar insists that universities are, and must remain places: universities bring people together. They allow for a cross-fertilisation of minds on a scale and in a manner not possible anywhere else in society. This sense of place is what is being undermined by the virtual university. The idea of a ‘home-based’ university is a contradiction in terms, [...] the nature of a university is the opposite of a

⁷⁷ An analogy invented by Professor Hills to portray the UHI Executive Office’s relationship with the partner institutions on the periphery, the point being that the UHI centre should not dominate the stakeholders situated on the periphery.

⁷⁸ This retreat made the headlines in the *Sunday Herald* in an article entitled ‘Highland University has reality check and goes back to class’: ‘*What began as a vision of a pioneering virtual university which would enlist technology to overcome the geographical challenges of the Highlands is finally learning the lessons of reality. [...] Ten years ago the idea of a University of the Highlands and Islands was set out as a "virtual university", where people could use the new telecom networks and video conferencing to do entire degrees from remote crofts. But even as the technology has improved and while it remains an important part of making the project work, the institution's emphasis is to move back to more traditional education in which people meet together to learn.*’ (*Sunday Herald* 18th August, 2002: 23)

home; it is a communal, residential place beyond the private sphere. (Delanty, 2001: 127)

II.iii UHI and Mode 2

Although Professor Hills never openly linked the UHI with his own particular notions of what a so-called postmodern university might look like, he did draw upon other emerging intellectual fashions when attempting to construct an identity for the UHI. For Professor Hills, there was also an aspirational goal to make the concept of Mode 2 knowledge a key feature of the UHI identity. As Hills and Lingard state: *'Graham Hills saw that the UHI had the potential to be the first unashamedly Mode 2 university* (2004: 59). Mode 1 generally refers to knowledge being produced in fixed and traditional disciplines such as scientific research dominated by a closed academic community. Mode 2, on the other hand, is where knowledge is produced in a multi-disciplinary, open system. According to Scott it is an *'open system in terms of its social organisation where 'producers', 'users' and 'brokers' mingle promiscuously, none of them having a privileged role'* (1998a: 38). The seminal publication *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) argues that Mode 2 as a new way of producing knowledge has become increasingly prevalent and assumed a significant place alongside the traditional Mode 1. In tracing the underpinning dynamics that helped to give rise to these knowledge categories, Peters and Olssen (2005) drawing on Jacob and Hellstrom (2000) claim that three important intersecting developments have strongly impacted upon the university research system and knowledge production during the last decade of the twentieth century. Firstly, the shift from a national science system to global science networks; secondly, the capitalisation of knowledge and, thirdly, the increasing integration of academic labour into the industrial economy (also known as the knowledge society).

Thus, it is fair to say that Mode 2 knowledge systems have been developed against a backdrop of the expansion of HE and the broad ideas associated with knowledge production in the global economy⁷⁹ (for a more comprehensive explanation see Smith and Webster, 1997). Peters and Olssen (2005) suggest that these changes in the production of knowledge have implications for organisational forms. In Mode 1 the old hierarchical organisational model has maintained its form. In Mode 2, by contrast, the penchant is for flatter hierarchies using organisational structures that are transient in the sense that they have a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners collaborating together. This heterogeneous aspect was termed by Gibbons *et al.* (1994) as ‘hybrid fora’ i.e. what Edwards and Usher drawing on Luke (1996) refer to as a ‘*wide constellation of interest groups, public enquiries, and government commissions that need to know more about specific areas of interest: [...] trans-disciplinary teams with various heterogeneous methods to address a shared problem until it is mitigated or contained*’ (2008: 109). However, it is important to stress that the concept of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge is not without its critics. Scott suggests: ‘*To claim that the transition from mode 1 to mode 2 represents a paradigm shift is going too far. Rather, they are grinding up against, or sliding over each other rather like tectonic plates – and accompanied by equivalent seismic activity*’ (1998a: 39).⁸⁰ During the second half of the 1990s, the critical literature destabilising the assertion of a clear cut distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 – especially a distinction presenting Mode 2 as a radical new

⁷⁹ Highlighting its popularity, Peters and Olssen claim: ‘*The distinction of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge [...] has become a standard shorthand and dominant representation in policy discourses which emphasises a new pragmatics of knowledge based on practice.*’ (Peters and Olssen, 2005: 44)

⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Peters and Olssen note: ‘*The most pernicious feature of the ‘Myth of the Modes’ is that the two modes are not merely mutually exclusive, but also jointly, exhaustive – that is, not admitting of other possibilities. The alleged exclusivity of the distinction tends to obscure wider questions concerning the interaction of the two kinds of knowledge, if indeed they ever existed in the forms Gibbons claims.*’ (Peters and Olssen, 2005: 44)

departure – may eventually have resonated with those in the UHI Executive. Despite Professor Hills’ efforts to sell the concept,⁸¹ Mode 2 – like the concept of a virtual university – had a very short shelf life and no longer featured in the UHI literature by the new millennium. From reflections elsewhere it is possible to gauge why Professor Hills may have found the concept of Mode 2 so attractive in helping to construct an identity for the UHI. Firstly, the concept of Mode 2 as outlined by Gibbons *et al.* (1994) can be seen to be going against the grain of tradition and orthodoxy: it was portrayed as a new concept that reflected something different from the norm and, significantly, it coincided with early evolution of the UHI. As Delanty notes, proponents believe that Mode 2 offers positive and creative opportunities, in the *‘blurring of the sciences and the blurring of the divide between the science and society, allowing for novel and creative possibilities’* (2001: 112). Secondly, the notion of Mode 2 as a heterogeneous non-hierarchical, pluralistic set of practitioners collaborating together can broadly be seen to mirror the overall structure of the collaborative structure of the UHI. Arguably, the commitment to the concept of Mode 2 can be seen as valuable in contributing to discussions on the epistemological changes emerging at this time and in this sense it can ultimately help frame discussions surrounding the identity of the UHI. In other words, Mode 2 was seen by Professor Hills to not only reaffirm the groundbreaking character of the UHI but, as Professor Hills perceived it, Mode 2 was seen to give the UHI concept an ‘element of respectability’; a respectability that would not only silence any potential critics but also reduce the anxieties of the stakeholders involved.

⁸¹ With respect to promoting the concept of Mode 2, the first issue of UHI’s network newsletter stated under the broad heading of ‘Executive Office news’: *‘The [UHI] Foundation enjoyed three workshops. Sir Graham Hills led the eternal debate between theory and practice, Mode 1 and Mode 2, HE and FE’* (*Wavelength*, UHI’s network newsletter, May 1999: 2). It is also interesting to note that in October 1997, Professor Hills presented a paper ‘New Perspectives in Education’ at a conference held at Stirling University where he discussed the UHI in the context of Mode 1 and Mode 2.

Interestingly, within the context of the UHI being hailed as unique and unorthodox, this study would suggest that the Mode 2 concept was in no way in contradiction to the overall government trajectory of HE reform. Indeed, the concept can be seen to encapsulate the new world order for universities as part of an overall strategy to encourage universities to be more responsive to the perceived economic and global imperatives, i.e. to be more innovative and entrepreneurial and to collaborate with outside agencies in the production of new knowledge. For government, a move towards Mode 2 can be seen as part of the overall strategy to ‘de-institutionalise’ the university to make it interact with other outside agencies (Scott, 1998a). The salient point here is that in the construction of the UHI identity, there seems to be an attempt not only to capitalise on the emerging technologies, but also to borrow from certain intellectual fashions that were emerging at the time. The endeavour to appropriate the concept of Mode 2 might be seen to help create and sustain the image of UHI being a radical trailblazing enterprise and, at the same time, frame it within emerging discourses on how universities will operate in the future. However, in the end Professor Hills failed to mobilise sufficient support for the idea of the UHI being identified as a Mode 2 university and, by the start of the new millennium, the concept fell out of use. Although some of Professor Hills’ more radical ideas have been displaced or watered down, the current description of the UHI still retains many elements that echo those descriptions of the very early years, albeit more modest in their claims. Interestingly, whilst the UHI throughout its evolution has adopted signifiers such as ‘groundbreaking’, ‘radical’, ‘distinct’ and ‘unique’ to describe its character, its identity has not been perceived as clear or stable amongst the interviewees of this study. Indeed, this study found that some

respondents suggested that the lack of a clear institutional identity may have influenced perceptions on the role research within the FE stakeholders.

II.iv Changing Priorities: The Unfolding of New Attitudes

The original *Hills Report* (1992) blueprint did not actually stipulate a clear-cut framework for the status and role of research within the UHI. Instead, the *Report* raised a number of questions on the sustainability of the research paradigm commonly associated with the more traditional HE institutions in the UK.

On the subject of research the *Report* states:

In Britain it is a '*sine qua non*' that, by definition, universities carry out research. The better the research, the better the university. Every member of academic staff is expected, in his or her terms of appointment, to carry out fundamental research of one kind or another. [...] In relation to this new university [UHI] and in the context of the emergence of tens of new universities, we must therefore ask the question 'Do these criteria still apply?' and 'Will the credibility of the new university depend on a substantial research effort?' (*Hills Report*, 1992: 2)

A review of the literature on the UHI certainly suggests that the subject of a research profile was accorded little very attention in the first half of the 1990s. Indeed, Webster's doctorate research thesis on the evolution of the UHI (2003) only included one short paragraph on the subject of research. On the issue of research, Professor Hills asserted that it was important for the very survival of the UHI to steer away from any plans to build a research infrastructure and profile that resonated too much with that commonly found in the other Scottish universities: '*Developing research capacity was never an issue to the UHI vision, to do so would take on the trappings of the other Scottish universities [...]. The UHI had to be different to succeed. We never discussed research in the years I was involved*

(Interview with author, April: 2004).⁸² Thus, for Professor Hills at least, research within the UHI was not going to be heralded as the *sine qua non* of academic life. However, this changed by the later part of the 1990s, largely as a result of the change in the UHI trajectory discussed earlier when the UHI changed its constitution to fit into the new performativity discourses associated with HE. In the later part of the 1990s, references to the value of research started to appear in the UHI literature. This new departure was boosted by the appointment of the first Chief Executive of the UHI and an increase in the number of appointments to the newly formed UHI Executive Office, including a director of research in Inverness.

In 1997, the newly appointed UHI Chief Executive Brian Duffield introduced strategies that aimed to enrich the academic credentials of those partners involved in the project. This involved the allocation of funding to partner institutions to help them finance staff development opportunities for teaching on degree courses and research degrees. Moreover, the UHI Executive Office articulated a range of declarations on the importance of establishing a research culture within the UHI partners. The desire to foster a research culture developed into a general theme in the first UHI Strategic Planning Framework document. Encompassing the notion of a research culture, the document stated:

Research is central to the role of the UHI. As a provider of higher education one of its strategic aims is to expand UHI's research capability and imbue a self-sustaining research culture which will advance knowledge, support student learning and contribute to social and economic development.⁸³
(Strategic Planning Framework document, 1998-2001:53)

The enormity and complexity of this undertaking was not under-estimated. The same Strategic Planning Framework went on to acknowledge creating a research

⁸² Regarding interview respondent anonymity/confidentiality see footnote 61 page 64.

⁸³ Interestingly, this statement can still be found in the 2009 UHI Research Policy.

culture would represent a major challenge.⁸⁴ It is also important to note that as far back as late 1997, the UHI Executive Office set up a research committee comprising members from the FE partners and associated research institutions with the specific aim of advancing and co-ordinating any research activities. Despite some of the aforementioned power struggles amongst partners and tensions regarding constitutional changes, by mid-1998 the UHI announced its support for four research schools throughout the partners.⁸⁵ Significantly, encouraged by the new emphasis placed on research by the UHI Executive, a number of FE partners set up their own internal research committees by the beginning of the new millennium. At the same time, a few FE partners went as far as setting up research units employing full-time researchers in an attempt to kick-start a research profile within their institutions. Of course, the increasing importance given to the fostering of a research profile within the UHI at this time is not surprising given that research and related activities had increasingly been perceived in performative terms as an important bench-mark for university academic status, not to mention an essential source of revenue (Henkel, 2000). Throughout the first few years of the new millennium, the UHI Executive Office increasingly pursued a more structured research agenda with research concentration and selectivity emerging to displace a certain *'ad hoc'* approach of the past. With respect to embracing this new performativity associated with the RAE, in December 2001 one UHI partner – 'Scottish Association for Marine Science Research Institute (SAMS) – was awarded a grade of '4' in the RAE. The award was made for SAMS's research in the area of environmental and

⁸⁴ The strategic plan noted: *'The development of research represents one of the major challenges for the UHI and one to which it is fully committed. The aim is to establish research policies, systems and procedures and develop a strategic framework for the development of UHI research.'* (*ibid*: 58)

⁸⁵ These early research schools were: Natural Systems Science based at Scottish Association for Marine Science Research Institute; Language, Culture & Heritage, Leirsinn, based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig Isle of Skye; Sustainable Rural Development based at Lews Castle College and Learning Environments & Technology based at Perth College.

marine sciences. In a press release entitled ‘UHI Millennium Institute research ‘excellence’ recognised in UK-wide assessment’ the UHI Chief Executive said:

Following designation as an institution of Higher Education in April of this year, we only had a few weeks to prepare our submission for the RAE. [...] Very few institutions achieve such an excellent score on their first submission. [...] This result recognises the very high standard of research already being undertaken within the UHI network and provides us with an excellent platform on which to develop our research activities in other areas of particular value to the Highlands & Islands. (UHI Press release, 14th December, 2001)

Given the tensions reported earlier, this achievement should not be underestimated. However, when considering the success with the RAE back in 2001, it has to be remembered that the majority of partners were unable to contribute to the RAE at this time and that therefore this success was mainly due to the UHI absorbing and capitalising on an already successful research institution namely, The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) which became an academic partner of the UHI in 1999. The overall significance of SAMS cannot be overstated. The study found that all interview respondents acknowledged the significance of SAMS with respect to raising the research profile of the UHI. It also found evidence to suggest that SAMS was perceived as the UHI’s best research asset, with a well- established research culture and proven track record. Within UHI literature SAMS is described as Scotland’s premier marine science research organisation with established international collaborations on all continents. Committed to promoting, delivering and supporting high-quality independent research and education in marine science, it delivers a BSc (Hons) Marine Science and trains (at the time of writing) 20 PhD students. The UHI web page states:

SAMS is one of the UK's leading and oldest independent marine research organisations with five major research themes: Arctic research; marine processes and climate; marine renewable energy; prosperity from marine ecosystems; and industrial impacts on oceans. SAMS delivers taught and research degree and training courses, has outstanding scientific capabilities

and infrastructure, and is also a Learned Society with 450 members. (UHI Website summer, 2010)

Thus, with SAMS the issue for the UHI is not about developing a research culture, but ensuring that its national and international research is sustained, developed, recognised and adequately rewarded. This early success with SAMs would have certainly reinforced the strategy of buying in research expertise. In the wake of this accomplishment, the policy drive on research was increasingly orientated towards the next RAE submission in 2007 (results of which were announced 2008). One of the most significant developments at this time was the UHI Addressing Research Capacity project (ARC project) set up in 2003 which was part of an overall strategy of attracting key researchers to the UHI to develop research capacity in the run-up to the UK RAE submission in 2007.⁸⁶ This was pivotal in achieving the twin ends of increasing critical mass for the RAE and strengthening the overall research culture in certain areas of the UHI, especially in 2006, when the project was awarded £11.4 million for creating new research chairs, high-level research fellowships, and new research positions and supporting structures. The appointment of new research professors, from other HE institutions was perceived as significant in that they would enhance performance ratings and generate extra funding in certain areas. Equally important, it was hoped that they would lay the foundations of a new research culture in these areas by leading other members of staff into research and helping to galvanise research units.⁸⁷ Moreover, it was expected that they would attract new cohorts of doctorate students and initiate collaborative research projects

⁸⁶ This was described in the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan as *'the main plank of our strategy'*. (21)

⁸⁷ During 2003-2008 the number of research centres within the UHI expanded from 7 to a total of 15. Some of the new research centres included: Centre for Nordic Studies (2004); Centre of Policy Web (2004); The UHI Decommissioning and Environmental Remediation Centre (2004); Sustainable Development Research Centre (2004); The Centre for Rural Health (2005); The UHI Centre for History (2005) The Centre for Interpretation Studies (2007) and The UHI Centre for Rural Childhood (2007).

with other institutions both within and outside the UHI. In celebrating the advances made through the ARC project, the UHI Review of 2006 noted:

The build-up of UHI's research strength – another important step towards university title – has continued apace over the last year with 30 researchers recruited to work in marine science, environmental science, diabetes, neuro-developmental biochemistry and alternative crop research. Research staff of all levels have been appointed to the Scottish Association for Marine Science, the Environmental Research Institute at North Highland College UHI, the Agronomy Institute at Orkney College UHI, and the UHI faculty of Health. Eleven PhD students have also started their research programmes with four more due to begin work. The posts have been made possible by an £11.4 million funding package over four years [...]. (*UHI Annual Review*, 2006: 6)

The drive by the UHI to increase its RAE submissions and ratings should not be underplayed. As one UHI Strategic Plan notes:

There are two key linked issues concerning research – sustainability and timing. Mindful, therefore, that those mediocre standards of research performance will not attract funding and that the RAE bar has continually been raised, achieving a high standard of excellence in our target fields very quickly is now vital in order to ensure sustainability or to achieve the standards necessary for inclusion in partnership (pools) which are forming amongst Scotland HEIs in some disciplines. (The Strategic Plan, 2006-2008: 21)

As stated earlier, the RAE can be seen to superimpose a common framework of specific output criteria to be met within a set time period. Perhaps more than any other initiative, it had become part of what Henkel (2000) terms “academics assumptive worlds” creating a new time frame for the production of research. For the institution it enacted a new kind of symbolic power and status and operated as an indicator to other funding bodies as to where the best research areas and institutes could be found. The once informal stratification of universities by wealth, history and reputation was now, thanks to the RAE, made formal, based on judgements against a more limited set of academic criteria. In celebrating the advances made in the 2008 RAE results, a UHI press release entitled ‘UHI on the university research map’ quoted UHI Principal Professor Bob Cormack as saying:

[...] Our research population has increased from 17 to 74 in seven years and is believed to be the fastest growth rate in Scotland. The RAE shows strong evidence of developing research capacity across a broad range of subjects in UHI, and we are rated world leading in three areas – Celtic studies [...] Archaeology [...] and Earth Sciences representing work at the Scottish Association for Marine Science [SAMS] and the Environmental Research Institute [...]. (17th December: 2008)

In 2001 the UHI made submissions in only two disciplines for the RAE and scored highly in environmental and marine sciences. For the 2008 RAE, the UHI submissions increased to eight areas. Celebrating this increase the same UHI press release said: *'We have got an RAE presence in eight disciplines and are being recognised as a centre for developing research excellence. It represents a turning point for UHI as it gives us the kind of profile that a university needs to have'*. (*ibid*). Not surprisingly, the overall expansion of research coincided with a growth in the UHI Research Office from a director of research and two supporting staff to six full-time staff. This included a vice principal of research – appointed in October 2007 – to oversee the strategic development of research and research support. It is also significant to note that from the outset the UHI Executive Office tended to recruit or second many staff from the FE partners, including the first deans of the curriculum areas. However, as the UHI moved into the twenty-first century there was a new recruitment drive to bring in more people from outside the UHI partner sphere. Of course, this move to recruit people from the university sector can be seen as an essential first step in preparing the UHI for university title. Between 2004 and 2006 the UHI appointed a number of external candidates for the position of dean. Not only did these candidates have considerable experience of working in the HE sector but it was hoped that they would draw on this experience to promote research opportunities within their curriculum areas. As well as an emphasis on RAE submissions, there were also more initiatives designed to foster research generally.

Indeed, during the time of this study, a number of significant developments took place that can be seen to have influenced research expansion. The sabbatical scheme (introduced in 2003) for staff pursuing research, and increased financial support for research degrees were seen by many respondents interviewed for this study as significant policies designed to foster a research culture. The Executive Office also provided financial support for staff development relating to research degrees. These initiatives involved delivering research supervision, courses on research methodology for those interested in research, encouraging FE partner institutions to draw up their own research strategies, setting up research committees to encourage and support research activities that both align broadly with the aims of the UHI research strategy and also reflect the colleges' own individual strengths, opportunities and interests. The UHI Research Policy as set out on its current website (March 2010) can be seen to encapsulate a commitment to promote research from an organic perspective, defined as 'growing from within' rather than 'buying in'. Much of this commitment can be traced back throughout successive policy Strategic Plans (Appendix One). Interestingly, despite the considerable changes that have taken place within UHI, there are still areas of continuity with the early statements on the value of research. Perhaps one of the most potentially groundbreaking initiatives to kick-start and guide research within the FE partners was the development of a scale of expected involvement. First mentioned in the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan, reference to this scale can still be found on the UHI website under the current Staff Scholarship and Research Policy:

The UHI has produced a "scale" of expected involvement in scholarship and research for all staff teaching at HE level. This scale identifies the level of involvement in scholarly/research activities commensurate with the level of teaching and examples of evidence that should allow such engagement to be demonstrated. (Para 4.7, UHI website, March 2009)

Under scholarship/research activities the expected involvement has eight criteria: membership of a relevant professional body; membership of HE Academy; attendance at academic/professional conferences; publications in relevant professional journals; presentations of papers at conferences; participation in collaborative research projects; publications in relevant academic journals; securing funds for research projects. With respect to actual expectations the scale lists 'minimum', 'preferred' and 'encouraged' for different levels of the HE delivery (see Appendix Two). In addition, in 2005 the UHI introduced what was referred to as 'seedcorn funding' for research. Under this initiative financial support is made available to academic partners to support both academic and support staff who wish to become involved in initial research activities as part of their own professional and academic development. Although the funding comes from the UHI Executive office, the academic partners have the autonomy to run these schemes with their own locally defined and managed application, vetting, approval and project monitoring procedures. In very recent times (end of summer 2010) the need to sustain current research interests and foster new research opportunities prompted the UHI Executive Office to go as far as appointing an actual dean of research. The announcement of this newly created post makes clear that the development of a research culture is still an important aspiration for the UHI.⁸⁸ However, as stated earlier despite the UHI introducing policies and initiatives aimed at embedding a self-sustaining research culture throughout the academic partners, the overall contribution from the FE academic partners has been relatively limited. This study

⁸⁸ The announcement stated: '*Michael Rayner has been appointed as the dean of research. Michael was formally with the University of Strathclyde for many years, leading their 2001 and 2008 research assessment exercise submission. He was also seconded to the Scottish Funding Council working on research pooling. His remit will be to manage UHI's research excellence framework processes, oversee the establishment of research networks and to further develop the research culture in UHI.*' (UHI, e-newspaper Compass, no 45, August 2010)

has found evidence of a viewpoint and field of judgement that displayed little confidence in the FE partners' ability to grow researchers from their staff base. The overall picture that emerges at the time of writing is one that suggests that the paradigmatic changes stimulated and orchestrated by the UHI's research strategy have not been fully internalised by its partners. Interestingly, as the UHI moved into the new millennium, strategic statements on the need to foster a research culture were tempered by statements reflecting more pragmatic notions of what could be achieved. Strategic policy documents said it was unrealistic to expect all staff in all academic partners to be research active in terms of undertaking scholarship and research as part of their daily professional activities. However, the planning documents made clear that there was an expectation – particularly in the context of assuring the quality of education for undergraduate and postgraduate students – that all full-time staff involved in the delivery of HE programmes would have to become involved in scholarship and research activities. With respect to research it is clear that the overall strategic objectives for those delivering HE programmes assume a relationship between research and teaching: whilst research supports or informs teaching, teaching should exist in an environment of research. These statements of intent not only allude to a set of practices that are valued but they also possess a particular form of authority because they provide a perspective, if not a framework of values, by which research and its relationship to teaching can be judged. However, as covered in chapter one it would be wrong to think that this overlapping between research and teaching rests within a harmonious and uncontested space. Highlighting the overall impact of research on universities, Scott notes:

The adoption of a research mission challenges the supremacy of the historic teaching mission and eventually profoundly transforms the interior culture of

universities, [...] the criteria for measuring academic success, models of organisation and governance, funding and physical appearance. (Scott, 2000: 7).

For Moss *et al.* the mounting pressures to secure a research profile in an increasingly competitive environment (largely driven by the RAE) are at variance with what has been described as a once prevalent communal/collegial and collaborative ethos commonly found in the sector before the onset of the pressures associated with the RAE: *‘In the UK, this pressurised research environment has lead to significant structural change, producing work intensification, elevated stress levels, widespread discontent and dissatisfaction and a lack of team spirit and teamwork’* (Moss *et al.*, 2007: 380). The salient point here is that the drive towards emphasising the importance of a research culture can introduce tensions and ambiguities by challenging traditional cultural practices and values. Whilst these reported tensions cannot be anything other than partial accounts of the broad changes surfacing from the wider constellation of dynamics impacting on research in HE, they do underscore that the notion of fostering a research culture within the UHI partners is unlikely to be a smooth transition.

II.v Conclusion

Perhaps, set against the wider context of themes explored in this thesis, it seems somewhat misleading to promote the idea of the UHI as a ‘radical, trailblazing enterprise pushing new frontiers’. It has been argued here that the UHI can be seen as a sign of the times, part of wider constellations of changes taking place in HE. Yet, it would be unfair to dismiss altogether the UHI structure – a diverse community of stakeholders networked together – as not distinctive and challenging. As this chapter has touched upon, this evolving university model can create certain organisational challenges as partner institutions attempt to balance their own

individual institutional identities in terms of operating ethos and culture, positioning and defining themselves within a much wider institution. There is a case to argue that, as an evolving institution, the UHI's identity is not clear: there are no universal understandings emerging. Thus, identity issues may well surface to be relevant to the interpretation and subsequent enactment of UHI policy on research expansion.

This chapter has shown that research expansion within the UHI was geared towards meeting RAE imperatives and how this was achieved through absorbing existing research institutions and creating new research centres. However, at the same time, the UHI introduced policies and initiatives aimed more generally at fostering research within the FE partners. How these two approaches have shaped and divided attitudes towards the fostering of a research culture constitutes an important area for consideration in this study.

Chapter Three

III. Methodology

III.i Outline of Study

As previously stated, the main research question asks:

‘What are the emerging discourses arising from the policy drive to foster a research culture within the University of the Highlands and Islands?’

In considering the potentially fluid relationship between policy intentions, interpretations, and enactments – what Taylor *et al.* (1997) refer to as the nuances and subtleties of policy meanings and significance – the main research question was further broken down into sub-questions.

Sub-Question	Purpose
1/ How is the idea of a research culture perceived within the context of the UHI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to tease out the meanings and conceptualisations of research within the UHI, how it compares to what is meant by research culture in other HE settings. – to provide insights on whether there is a unified or fragmented view on what is meant by research culture.
2/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the policy aspiration of creating a research culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to uncover how different actors perceive the policy aspiration in terms of it being realistic and achievable. – to reveal insights on a shared commitment to a shared purpose. – to provide understandings on how different actors perceive the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions.
3/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive both the barriers and driving forces in promoting a research culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to uncover understandings on constraint and agency, what dynamics enhance and decrease the levels of engagement in research. – to provide understandings on how policy imperatives might clash against and complement existing structures, arrangements and cultures.
4/ How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the impact of the Research Assessment Exercise on the organisation and structure of policy drivers aimed at expanding research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to give insights into how the RAE opens up a space for research expansion and how it might posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations within the context of UHI research. – to provide understandings on how the RAE shapes perceptions on research activities, biographical profiles of researchers.
5/ What are the emerging researcher identities within the UHI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to provide understandings on how the policy drive creates inclusive and exclusive structures/attitudes and prejudices. – to gain insights of any ‘otherness’ and how it relates to power relations.

In order to identify and map any types of emerging discourses surrounding the policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI, this study has adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research can be traced to the early twentieth century when it was developed and used by social scientists. The word 'qualitative' implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on the processes and meanings that cannot be experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, frequency or intensity. Like many aspects of social science, qualitative research is not without its critics and is often compared with quantitative research. Generally speaking, quantitative research subscribes to realism, objectivity, causal explanation and universal truths, while qualitative research emphasises the interpretive, value-laden, contextual and contingent nature of the social world (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).

Qualitative research comprises a number of different approaches that are underpinned by different sociological and philosophical schools. Mason (1996) suggests that a common thread running through different qualitative research methods is the desire to identify meaning(s) and how they are constructed in the social world. In seeking to describe social meaning, qualitative research is based upon methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which the data is produced. In choosing a research methodology for this study, a grounded theory approach was adopted because it can be seen as an integrated theoretical formulation that generates understanding about changing responses and experiences of persons, organisations or communities to events that occur (Corbin and Holt, 2005). Moreover, this element of flexibility was seen as significant given that the UHI was and is an institution undergoing rapid change, made up of different FE colleges and research institutes, each with its own

individual working structures and cultures but at the same time interconnected to the UHI Executive Office.

III.ii Grounded Theory

It is important to briefly discuss what is meant by ‘theory’ in grounded theory and how it relates to this study. In simple terms, a theory can be seen as a set of concepts that are integrated through a series of relational statements. Within the context of grounded theory, the researcher does not enter the field guided by a predefined theoretical formulation, although they may nevertheless have a general perspective or value system which can influence the types of questions being raised and the interpretations being tested in subsequent questions concerning the phenomena under investigation. However, the definition and understanding of what theory is does not go uncontested and, as such, it can be seen as taking on a variety of meanings. Thomas and James note how in educational discourse ‘[theory] *can mean systems of evolving explanation, personal reflection, orientating principle, epistemological presupposition, developed argument, craft knowledge, and more*’ (2006: 771). This plurality of practices raises questions as to what is demanded and expected of theory and why researchers adopting grounded theory expect their methodology and findings to be called a ‘discovered theory’. Although adopting a critical stance of the grounded theory approach, Thomas and James drawing on earlier writers (Miller and Fredericks, 1999), suggest that within grounded theory two dynamics can be at play:

Theory can, broadly speaking, be seen as being about: (a) inspiration involving patterning or accommodation and (b) explanation and prediction. In its former, looser sense it is principally about bringing ideas together, while in its latter, tighter form it adheres to positivists’ and functionalists’ expectations about explanations. (Thomas and James, 2006: 772)

For Thomas and James grounded theory can conflate and confuse these two processes of enquiry:

[The] former type – involving tacit patterning, interpretation and inspiration – is really a vernacular employment of the term ‘theory’ and is part of everyday reasoning and common interpretative acts. The latter is about generalisations following systematic and extensive data collection, and the testing of the generalisation for the purposes of verification or falsification. (*ibid*)

In a similar vein, Charmaz (2006) writing about grounded theory acknowledges two forms of theory, namely ‘positivist’ and ‘interpretive’ theories which resonate with the above. For her, positivist theory seeks causes and favours deterministic explanations emphasising generality and universality. As Charmaz states positivist theories consist of a set of inter-related propositions aimed to:

- Treat concepts as variables;
- Specify relationships between concepts;
- Explain and predict these relationships;
- Systematise knowledge;
- Verify theoretical relationships through hypothesis-testing;
- Generate hypotheses for research. (Charmaz, 2006: 126)

In the interpretive definition of theory there is an emphasis on understanding rather than explanation. Proponents of this stance view theoretical understanding as abstract and interpretive and assume emergent, multiple realities. For Charmaz (2006) interpretive theory is compatible with symbolic interactionism,⁸⁹ in that it has overlapping assumptions. At the risk of being over-simplistic, symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self and how they define situations.

One of the core ideas associated with symbolic interactionism is that people act the

⁸⁹ Herbert Blumer (1969) who coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ set out three basic premises of the perspective: (1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things; (2) the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society; (3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters. (Robson, 2002:197)

way they do because of how they define situations. Thus, some of the central features of symbolic interaction can be seen as relevant here as the study attempts to capture how individuals orientate themselves around the policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI. Because grounded theory contains both positivist and interpretivist inclinations Charmaz (2000) claims, interpretive theories are often juxtaposed against positivist theories. This is an important point and will be revisited later after mapping briefly the general characteristics of grounded theory.

A grounded theory approach is a research method which employs a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived qualitative account of a phenomenon under investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In other words, it is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data which is systematically gathered and analysed. As the data is gathered, the researcher constructs theories about the subject under investigation and subsequently tests these theories through further data gathering. Theory testing during subsequent data gathering helps build further evidence, understandings and, of course, new theories. This emphasis on generating theory as the study progresses allows the methodology flexibility. Grounded theory was developed and established just over four decades ago by Glaser and Strauss. Their work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) outlined a set of procedures for the generation of theory from empirical data. The approach emerged during studies of hospital staff within the context of palliative care in the early 1960s in the United States. At the time, hospital staff seldom openly talked about or, in some cases, even acknowledged dying or death with seriously ill patients (Charmaz, 2006). From observations of how dying occurred in a variety of hospital settings – in particular how different professionals and their

terminally ill patients interacted when dealing with the subject of dying and death – Glaser and Strauss developed a systematic methodology that could be applied to other research areas. The significance of grounded theory to the world of social science can not be overstated, as Thomas and James note: *‘There can be little doubt that it has been a major – perhaps the major – contributor to the acceptance of the legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research’* (2006: 767). The origins and context of this methodology are significant. It was conceived at a time when symbolic interactionism was in decline, being undermined by the hard statistical methods commonly associated with quantitative methods (Thomas and James, 2006).⁹⁰ At the time of conception, grounded theory was seen as a solution to the broader problems surrounding perceptions of the status of qualitatively based knowledge in social sciences (ibid). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* provided a strong argument that helped to legitimise and rejuvenate qualitative research as a creditable methodological approach in its own right. According to Charmaz it was considered revolutionary because it challenged, for the first time, such issues as:

- The arbitrary division between theory and research;
- The belief that qualitative research was a precursor to the more rigorous quantitative research;
- The belief that qualitative methods were impressionistic and unsystematic;
- The separation of data collection and analysis phases of research;
- Prevailing views of qualitative research as a precursor to more rigorous quantitative methods;
- Assumptions that qualitative research could produce only descriptive case studies rather than theory development. (Charmaz, 2006: 16)

Glaser and Strauss collaborated to produce a research method which would build theory both faithful to, and able to illuminate an area under study, thus placing emphasis upon generating theory and testing that theory. Glaser and Strauss felt that

⁹⁰ As Charmaz notes: *‘Glaser and Strauss entered the methodological scene at a propitious time. Qualitative research in sociology had waned as sophisticated quantitative methods gained dominance in the United States and quantitative methodologists reigned over departments, journal editorial boards, and funding agencies.’* (Charmaz, 2006: 4)

without such an open-minded approach there was always a danger that significant research data would be ignored, since data seen as not fitting a pre-existing model may be disregarded by the researcher. Grounded theory was, therefore, developed to facilitate the collection of data without a preconceived framework. This is significant because grounded theory entails the development of theory from data obtained from a real life setting, often in areas of research interest about which there is little published knowledge. The grounded theorist develops analytical interpretations of their data to focus on further data collection which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses (Charmaz, 2006).

As already stated, this study will be exploring a research culture that is still evolving: UHI policy on research is not fully embedded and is itself subject to modification, interpretation and re-interpretation by the different partner institutions. Indeed, the UHI as a fledging institution has been subject to many structural and cultural changes, not least those associated with meeting criteria for university degree awarding powers. Thus, the complexity of the UHI as a dispersed institution is likely to mean that multiple discourses, meanings and approaches will be evident to a greater extent than found in a more traditional organisational setting and that applying a version of grounded theory would allow this complexity to surface. In other words, by adopting a version of grounded theory the complex dynamics of the UHI can be captured.

On the question of adopting a research methodology it is important to stress that the methodological flexibility inherently coupled with grounded theory (especially the constructivist grounded theory approach discussed in more detail later) was an important determining criterion here. As stated earlier, the institution of the UHI

and its policy trajectory surrounding research are continually developing and responding to internally and externally driven political, social, economic and structural changes and pressures. Any exploration of the UHI's research expansionist trajectory therefore, required a data gathering and analysis approach that offered flexibility. The emphasis on generating theoretical understandings over time in light of new data gathering was essential to the overall process of uncovering the discursive processes of the UHI. As the study progressed, the themes generated from the interview data helped to signpost and tease out the emerging discourses.

III.iii Different Orientations: Constructivist and Objectivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has taken on different forms since its creation, and two strands in particular have gained in popularity namely constructivist and objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2006). Constructivist grounded theory is part of the interpretive tradition and assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate. Constructivists gain multiple views of the phenomenon under investigation and locate it with a web of significance – of both connections and constraints. Charmaz highlights the way in which this constructivist approach is placed against a wider backdrop of implicit and explicit dynamics:

The logical extension of the constructivist approach means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations and relationships. Subsequently, differences and distinctions between people become visible as well as the hierarchies of power, communication and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences and distinctions. A constructivist approach means being alert to conditions under which such differences and distinctions arise and are maintained. (Charmaz, 2006: 130)

Significantly, constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation is itself a construction and adopt a reflexive stance on the research process and its resulting products when considering how any theories evolve. This approach acknowledges the researcher's role in the research process. Rather than acting as an impersonal manipulator of technique, the researcher can be portrayed as intimately involved in the process, with values, preconceptions, preferences and frailties. Objectivist grounded theory resides within the positivist tradition and can be seen to contrast with the constructivists' approach in that it erases the social context from which the data emerges and the influence of the researcher. Within the objectivist grounded theory approach the researcher takes on the role of a dispassionate, neutral observer who remains separate from the research participants, analyses their world as an outsider and treats research relationships and representations of participants as unproblematic (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). Although writers such as Charmaz (2000, 2006) juxtapose constructivist and objectivist forms of grounded theory for conceptual clarity, Charmaz acknowledges how grounded theory may blend the two: *'whether you judge a specific study to be constructivist or objectivist depends on the extent to which its key characteristics conform to one tradition or the other'* (2006: 130). Charmaz's (*ibid*) claim notwithstanding, this study is constructivist in its approach because the study is concerned with the way individuals have constructed meanings around ideas of research and the university within the UHI. With respect to this latter point the study recognises that realities shift with a person's life and that people (re)-act towards things on the basis of their own understandings and cultural biases irrespective of any apparent "objective" nature of those things. In preference to any form of rationalistic, mechanistic and positivist stability, the study points to the open and fluid accounts of social, cultural and

economic change and tries to capture the complex, subtle and shifting meanings created.

III.iv Sample

Grounded theory employs purposeful sampling where the initial decisions about sampling are based upon general understandings of the area under investigation. Theoretical or purposeful sampling involves choosing participants based on their relevance to the study. In other words, decisions about where to collect the data should be determined by which group or individuals will best aid the development of an emerging theory. This is the only decision in a grounded theory approach that may be pre-planned. From this point on, it is the emerging theory which guides the selection of other data sources.

The UHI as an institution is not a homogeneous entity where all the stakeholders share the same experiences and values. Therefore, the selection process focused as far as possible on a representative heterogeneous sample by deliberately involving policy makers, FE leaders, full time researchers, directors of research units and senior staff within the UHI Executive Office who have a role in promoting research and teaching academics across the UHI partners who are required to become research active in some way (see Appendix Four). There was no difficulty in recruiting participants for this study. Much has been written about insider and outsider studies: the interview selection process was informed by insider knowledge bearing in mind that the author is working within the biggest FE partner institution. In other words, decisions as to who to interview arose from discussions with a number of senior people within the author's own institution involved with the UHI who are intimately involved with research in the UHI. It is also significant to note

that during the first phases of interviews many respondents did, without prompting, make a number of suggestions as to who should be interviewed in order to give what they thought would be a broad understanding of what was going on. Although the author works within one of the biggest UHI's academic FE partners, they did not have any prior personal knowledge of those working within the UHI Executive Office. However, they did have prior knowledge of a number of those respondents at lecturer level. The author, being a long-serving member of the research committee at their institution, had had contact with one person who was involved with the UHI Research Committee and thus was able to gain certain insights into what sort of policies were being developed by the UHI. These insights – derived from insider knowledge – did help in the decisions on interview selection. They also gave certain insights into how research opportunities evolve and are supported within the FE partner context. However, the author's practical issues of finding time out of a full-time teaching job as well as the geographical location and working commitments of participants did have an influence on the choice of who to interview (an aspect revisited later). By interviewing a wide range of individuals it was envisaged that the researcher would become more sensitised towards the broader contextual issues and social dynamics of the UHI. This approach should enable the researcher to develop better insights into the evolving networks of culturally conditioned beliefs, assumptions and pre-suppositions of those working on research and related activities within the UHI. This is consistent with Blumer's (1969) depiction of sensitising concepts, and, as Charmaz (2006) suggests, grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain guiding empirical interests and perhaps a set of general guiding concepts that give a loose frame to these interests. These concepts generate ideas to pursue and sensitise the researcher.

Gaining a range of participants' views is essential to portray the full range of contexts of the study and thus helps gather data that tests, corroborates, expands, supplants, and or supersedes any loosely framed guiding notions considered in the pre-interview stage.

Twenty-six semi-structured taped interviews were conducted with a heterogeneous sample of respondents working within the UHI at different levels. The interviews were conducted in three phases over a five-year period from 2003 to 2008. During this time a number of significant structural and policy changes took place regarding research expansion. The interviews were carried out in three main phases. In addition, a final round of interviews between 2008 and 2009 was conducted with main goal of gaining respondents' feedback on the categories emerging from the data. The final round of interviews numbered four respondents previously interviewed. The sample included a senior member of staff at the UHI Executive Office, two senior staff working in research units associated to FE partners and a senior researcher from a research institution partner (discussed more detail later).

III.v Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, a semi-structured interview format (recorded on tape) with structured questions ensuring the coverage of a wide territory was adopted as the primary means of data collection. The interviews were conducted in three main phases. In each of the phases, the interview was transcribed and processed (coded for potential themes) before moving on to the next. The structured questions were the same for all respondents in phases one and two, although the follow-on questions altered with respect to contextual aspects such as the roles, positions and

responsibilities of the respondents within the UHI. Significantly, where appropriate some follow-on questions reflected the emerging themes detected from the previous interviews. In phase three the questions were much more fluid than in previous interviews and altered with respect to emerging themes gathered reflecting contextual aspects such as the roles, positions and responsibilities of the respondents. Interviewees were asked to elaborate, illustrate, reiterate, define, exemplify and confirm matters pertaining to the study question. The initial round of interviews, seen as a sense-seeking exercise, was structured to gather the widest possible range of strains of opinions, alternative ideas and agendas connected to the phenomenon under study. Each interview lasted thirty to forty minutes (with the exception of one lasting more than an hour) during which respondents were asked pre-arranged, opened-ended and closed questions. As far as possible every effort was made to create an open and friendly atmosphere and participants were encouraged to express their views about the question set at the outset to establish any areas they might be unclear about or uncomfortable with. Moreover, they were encouraged to comment about the overall interview approach at the end of the interview. This strategy helped to make the conversation informal and relaxed for the participants. Recording the interview can introduce certain anxieties for the participants as well as restricting responses to the questions, thus reducing opportunities for a frank and open exchange. In order to establish trust and rapport the author requested permission to tape the interview. The author also offered respondents the opportunity to have a copy of the interview transcript before any analysis and reporting. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw – although none did. Brief notes of key phrases were also taken during the interview as insurance against tape failure and to aid any follow-on questions. In addition,

prior to the interview, respondents were given an ethical statement (see Appendix Three) covering an anonymity and confidentiality agreement.⁹¹ However, when it came to citing interview data, one respondent - due to their unique association to the UHI vision – was comfortable to waive their right to anonymity (see footnote 61). Although it is generally accepted that tape recording can inhibit dialogue, the respondents in this study seemed to be comfortable with the approach adopted.

The investigative character of the first round of interviews followed an inductive approach seeking to establish generalisations about the phenomenon under investigation. This conceptualising process focused on the respondents' experience of the policy drivers employed to foster a research culture within the UHI (whether positive or negative) and how these policies were acted upon within their own institutional settings. The respondents were asked to talk about their previous experience before coming to the UHI and this helped to give background context and some form of biographical background for the data processing. This opening question – seen here as an ice breaker - also helped the respondents to be more relaxed, reflexive and open during the rest of the interview. The respondents were also asked to talk about the perceived barriers and supporting structures to the fostering of research within their own institutional setting and the UHI in general as well as to comment on other settings, where relevant. The interviews of the UHI Executive policy makers focused on the transformative processes within the context of research. The structure and content of subsequent interviews have been determined after the data analyses of the first round of interviews were processed.

⁹¹ The overall feedback from the respondents on the interview process was positive. One of the most recurring themes was that the interview questions and subsequent interview interaction raised a unique opportunity for the respondents to reflect more deeply on the issues that impact on their daily working lives.

Drawing on Charmaz (2006) the following guiding statements were used to help orientate the range of data collection:

- Has the author gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions?
- Has the author collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to have ready recall and understanding and portray the full range of contexts of the study?
- Does the data reveal what lies beneath the surface?
- Is the data range sufficient to show changes over time?
- Has the author gained multiple views of participants?
- Has the author gathered data that allows for development of analytical categories?
- What kind of comparisons can be made between data? How can these comparisons generate and inform ideas?

Chapter Four

IV. Data Analysis: Mapping the Emerging Picture

This study pays particular attention to Robson who observes: *'People, unlike the objects of the natural world, are conscious, purposeful actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them'* (2002: 24). In other words, the data analysis adopted for this study recognises that the respondents are shaped by their biographical backgrounds, different experiences and draw on different metaphors to represent the issues they face and the contexts in which they operate. The data analysis is further predicated on the notion that research policies within the UHI, with their intended and unintended outcomes, have been interpreted and contextualised within the matrix of the different discourses and forces that constitute them. Drawing on the writing of Robson (*ibid*) this methodology collects and analyses the data in three stages:

- Exploring conceptual categories in the data;
- Exploring relationships between these categories;
- Conceptualising and accounting for these relationships through finding core categories.

This is achieved by carrying out three kinds of coding:

- Open coding to find the categories;
- Axial coding to interconnect them; and
- Selective coding to establish the core categories. (Robson, *ibid*: 493)

Coding under grounded theory requires the researcher to ask analytical questions of the data gathered and helps to assemble abstract ideas to investigate further. As Charmaz states: *'Grounded theory coding generates the bones of your analysis. Theoretical integration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton. Thus, coding is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis'* (2006: 45). Thus, coding is the crucial bond between collecting the

data and developing an emerging theory to explain the data. Through coding the researcher starts the process of defining what is happening in the data and begins to grapple with what it means. The first round of interview data analysis (starting with open coding) is where the text is opened up and broken apart for intensive scrutiny. As Corbin and Holt note, in this first part:

The analysis makes comparisons and asks questions, thereby heightening sensitivity to the words of the participants. [...] Interview passages are examined, line by line or paragraph by paragraph, asking questions such as what is going on here? What is this data all about? (Corbin and Holt, 2005: 50)

Under the open coding, the data was examined line by line and memo writing employed to first elaborate categories, then to specify their properties, define relationships between each other and, finally, to identify any gaps. The memo writing was supplemented by simple mind maps that helped to keep track of the ever-evolving concepts. These were continually revisited to aid re-focus and to get an overall perspective on the different directions of investigation, as each interview was processed and subjected to a comparative analysis with previous interviews. With the aid of memo notes and mind maps, points of commonality and areas of departure between interviews started to emerge. The questions considered in this open coding analysis included ‘who?’ and ‘what is involved?’, ‘when?’, ‘where?’, ‘how is it expressed?’ and ‘what meanings are given?’

Under the axial coding, data reduction occurs thus allowing the evolving concepts to be presented in manageable categories. Corbin and Holt (2005) describe this as weaving the data back together around groups of concepts which are then grouped into major categories. However, it is important to note for conceptual clarity that a distinction is made between open coding and axial coding. As pointed out by

Charmaz (2006), during the analysis, open and axial coding occur almost simultaneously, for it is nearly impossible to pick out a concept from the data without recognising its possible connections with other data and concepts. At the end of the axial coding process the data is then reduced further by synthesising it under even more abstract concepts which lead to the construction of core categories. This construction of core categories from identified concepts comes under the selective coding process. The results of the selective coding open up the space for more questions to be generated about the phenomena under study, the results of which guide subsequent data gathering.

IV.i The Emerging Picture from the Data Analysis

The first round of interviews, which took place in the second half of 2003 and the first quarter of 2004, covered respondents from the UHI Executive Office, individuals from UHI partners involved in the UHI Research Committee and individuals working in partner institutions involved with research. As already stated, this initial round of interviews, seen as a sense-seeking exercise, has been structured to gather the widest possible range of strands of opinions, alternative ideas and agendas connected to the phenomenon under study. Although efforts were made to interview a wide-ranging sample of respondents, practical issues meant that that was not always possible. In the very few times where the author was unable to get the targeted respondent for interview he adopted a pragmatic approach and simply chose a different respondent within the same organisation with similar working responsibilities and connections to UHI research. Or, in the case of targeting a member of the UHI research committee, the author would simply opt to choose another member of the committee. The first round of meetings involved six

recorded interviews in all (see Appendix Five). During this first phase of interviews, the same question set was used for all respondents and each interview was scrutinised and processed before the next interview. The insights gained at each stage were used to inform subsequent interviews mainly in the form of follow-on questions.

The data gathered from the interviews clearly showed perceptions of a disparate community with respect to thought and action on the desire to promote research imperatives. Respondents used phrases such as: ‘we don’t talk to each other about research’; ‘not joined up’; ‘we are more of a fragmented community than a networked community’; ‘no real networking between researchers’; ‘lack of communication regarding what partners are doing’ and ‘no opportunities for researchers within different partners to meet up’. With the aid of memo notes and mind maps, points of commonality and areas of departure between interviews started to emerge. As already stated, open coding is where the text is opened up and broken apart for intensive scrutiny. Throughout the interview and coding process, consideration was given to the following dynamics derived from Clarke (2003):

- Human elements, i.e. individual and collective actors in specific organisations;
- Non-human elements, i.e. technologies, material structures and infrastructures;
- Political/economic aspects;
- Socio-cultural aspects;
- Temporal dimensions, e.g. historical aspects, crisis aspects;
- Spatial dimensions, e.g. geography;
- Discourses, e.g. normative expectations of actors and situation-specific discourses.

Although these individuals operated at different levels within the organisation and whilst one was no longer involved with the UHI, common threads could be detected running through the data. The following themes surfaced among the respondents:

- Supporting structures such as allowing time out of teaching workloads to carry out research.
- Attitudes that fail to comprehend or value the significance of research and related issues such as the significance of research conferences and staff development opportunities that develop research skills.
- Working practices between partners: colleges fail to operate on a collaborative level on promoting research.
- Levels of commitment towards research between partners: different levels of research activities with perceptions that, comparable to larger colleges, smaller colleges have been more proactive in fostering research.
- Perceptions on FE and HE working practices and cultures: the view that many working in FE have little or no understanding of how universities encourage and support research. As one respondent said, FE has a different ‘mindset’.
- Research focus and associated funding arrangements: the view that many policy makers working in FE partners lack the necessary basic knowledge on the wider policies on the role of research within HE and the national funding arrangements.
- Network and communication on fostering research: lack of understanding of what other UHI institutions are doing in advancing research expansion.

Interestingly, when discussing what respondents perceived as a research culture, all made comparisons with their experiences of working in HE or research institutions. The open coding process identified a number of commonalities in the perceptions on the contours of an idea research culture, such as structural support mechanisms created by departments and institutions, external performance indicators for funding, as well as departmental, institutional and individual attitudes towards the value of research with HE. Significantly, all respondents expressed the view that the UHI does not have a research culture that is uniform throughout. Moreover, all of the respondents cited SAMS as the institution that broadly aligned with their idea of a recognisable research culture and that had existed before being part of the UHI project. This raised questions as to whether there was a collective understanding of what is meant by a research culture within the UHI. Perhaps the most surprising

aspect from the interview with one respondent was that the UHI was not going to be a research-orientated institution in the sense of other Scottish HE institutions. Thus, the open coding from this first round of interviews suggests that a unified research culture did not exist for a number of overlapping and separate reasons. Under axial coding the different segments of information and emerging themes were woven together producing a number of themes whilst the selective coding identified five key emerging categories to investigate further in the next round of interviews.

1. The view that the UHI was a fragmented community in the sense that a research culture existed in pockets only and not uniformly throughout the UHI. Germane to this was the question: is there any sort of agreement as to what a research culture should look like?
2. Tensions existing within the research committees over who should get funding.
3. A sense that FE colleges were not geared up to meet UHI aspirations on research capacity and claims that the UHI should concentrate on those institutions and staff with proven track records rather than wait for FE colleges to evolve into becoming more proactive when it comes to research.
4. A view that structural issues and organisational/individual mindsets within both the UHI Executive Office and partners can, in effect, impede the expansion of research or may already have done so.
5. Communication and network issues.

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, while the interview data reflected a sense of a lack of cohesion and more of a fragmented community, the UHI strategic plan at this time (2002–2006) did reflect a number of initiatives aimed at introducing supporting mechanisms for research such as sabbaticals for research, guidance on level of research for those teaching degree courses, funding for research degrees, and a range of training programmes on research methodology. In addition, during this time, the UHI literature on research increasingly reflected the significance of the RAE in guiding research activities and of course securing future funding. Each UHI partner was also required to write a research strategy that embraced both the

broad aims of the UHI research strategy and the individual research trajectory of their own institution.

The results from the coding on the first interviews helped to generate more open-ended questions that might unpack the issues informing the key categories identified above. The interviews covered the period spring 2004 to end of summer 2004 and covered six respondents – four new, two interviewed previously (see Appendix Six). Open coding from this second round of interviews generated new data that both supported and expanded the categories already developed in the first round of interviews. In this second round of data collection, the emphasis was on seeking data that contradicted, tested, collaborated or expanded the categories and emerging patterns extrapolated from the previous interview data. It is significant to note that the second round of interviews did not close down any areas of interest selected from the first round of interviews. In other words, there were no redundant points of interest. Again all the respondents received the same interview questions and each interview was processed before the next interview. The emerging themes from each interview were fed into the follow-on questions in the subsequent interviews. From the open coding the following new areas of interest materialised:

- Contextual information on the sort of structural, managerial and attitudinal factors influencing research expansion;
- The emergence of polarised perspectives within the Executive Office and partner institutions on how to expand research within UHI;
- Deeper insights into how the ‘FE mindset’ – used here to describe attitudes – influences research expansion and an increasing awareness of criteria used to support research;⁹²
- Perceptions suggesting different ideas on who is a researcher and what constitutes research within the UHI.

⁹² The term ‘FE mind set’ was used by a number of respondents to both describe the overall attitude of a particular FE college or the UHI FE stakeholder colleges collectively.

Those within the UHI Executive Office pointed to what they saw as an ‘FE mindset’ and accompanying structural and managerial approaches as areas that stalled research expansion. They also made reference to the relationship between UHI and its partners, pointing to the fact that the partners were independent institutions and as such operated separately on many levels from each other and the UHI Executive Office. This independence was perceived as influencing any attempts of embedding policy uniformly within the partners. From those outside the Executive Office, perceptions of a lack of leadership and direction from the centre were also seen as a contributing dynamic to the lack of research expansion. Under axial coding the different segments of information and emerging themes were woven together producing new emerging themes and categories informing the subsequent round of interviews. The selective coding approach revealed the following:

1. The respondents did not believe that the UHI communicated its research activities very well. There was a perception of no meaningful network for research dissemination.
2. A number of respondents claimed that those working in FE institutions had an unrealistic understanding of the role of research in HE.
3. Despite the increased focus on research, some respondents believed that FE colleges lacked the necessary supportive mechanisms or attitudes required to expand research.
4. Many respondents believed that a typology of researchers was emerging within the UHI.
5. Many expressed a growing awareness of the importance of the RAE in the funding of UHI research.
6. For those promoting research expansion there was the realisation that absorbing research units or institutions rather than cultivating researchers from an FE base was the most practical and successful approach to expand research imperatives.

The third round of interviews took place at the end of 2005, during the summer 2006 and the first quarter of 2007 and covered fourteen respondents in all, with one

respondent from the previous interview phases (see Appendix Seven). Each interview was processed before the next interview and emerging themes were introduced into subsequent interviews in the form of both open-ended interview questions and follow-on questions. The questions targeted in this round of interviews were much more fluid than in previous interviews. The set of questions altered with respect to emerging themes gathered in the previous interviews and also reflected contextual aspects such as the roles, positions and responsibilities of the respondents within the UHI.

From the open coding, a number of individual and overlapping abstractions and perspectives surfaced, many of them providing more contextual details to the understandings gained from the previous interview phases. The analysis also included regularly returning to the data already amassed and analysing and interpreting it in new ways on the basis of the developing theory. Supporting structures, perceptions of the differences between FE and HE and an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of funding mechanisms for research was more evident in this round than in previous phases. It is significant to note that the RAE and the perceived cultural differences between FE and HE were more observable in this phase of interviews. Charmaz claims that coding is *'the process of defining what the data are about'* (2006: 187). The researcher begins to weave together generalisable statements, some of which can transcend specific times and places, and they provide leads to follow in the construction of broad and core categories.

IV.ii Perspectives on Research Culture

Considering the themes explored here, culture may be seen as a complex set of shared beliefs, values and concepts that enable a group to sustain ways of living that

make some kind of sense of human existence. This complex set might be called a basic belief system, which includes both explicit and implicit items, and can include structures of feelings and demeanour as well as discursive claims about the world. However, the significant point here is that any constellation of shared beliefs that is professed to be constitutive of a particular culture is always only provisional and constantly in a state of flux and tension. Cultures are not merely fragmenting as so often is claimed, but eroding, dissolving and reconstituting themselves in other and as yet unsettled and tendentious forms (Silver, 2003).

One question that is significant here, however, is whether and in what ways members of different academic disciplines consider themselves to be part of the same institutional community (other than having the same employer) or belonging to a value system and way of thinking that may (re-)constitute them as belonging to a unified culture. When considering the notion of an academic culture residing within the university, Barnett expresses scepticism about any idea of a university based on a shared value and belief system that helps to define for participants who they are, what they are doing and why they are doing it:

Large multi-faculty universities – and even relatively small institutions – are a conglomerate of knowledge factions, interests and activities. We cannot assume that the manifold activities of the ‘multiversity’ have anything in common. [...] The notion that there could be a single binding characteristic that all constituent parts of the university share, that there could be an essence, has to be suspect. (Barnett, 2000: 48)

Silver goes somewhat further in debunking the notion of a unified university culture:

The contemporary university may be conceived as a ‘culture of tolerance of diversity’, a ‘culture of extreme diversity’ or a ‘culture of fragmentation in tension’, but these are ultimately unhelpful. The fact that the parts of the ‘collection’ can be defined as sub-cultures in some sort of proximity does not

enable them to be aggregated as a culture. Asserting that there is a ‘dominant culture’ simply bypasses the issues of conflict and lack of coherence. [...] Kogan describes usages of the concept of culture as an ‘intellectual polyfiller [...] used to explain the inexplicable’. (Kogan, 1999: 63-64) ‘Organisational culture’ has been used in relation to higher education to attempt the impossible task of representing its ‘collections’ as unitary and explicable. (Silver, 2003: 167)

The complex picture of fragmentation from the multiple and competing perspectives of academic staff are crystallised in the light of the above. Norms, values and assumptions as well as myths and rituals shared by individuals and groups in a university setting tend to exhibit differences and, as such, are unlikely to be moulded into one unifying culture. Although certain values and rituals may well thread themselves through different groups, whether they capture a significant body of the organisation to constitute what some refer to as a ‘dominant culture’ is open to debate. This makes the idea of a dominant culture within a university setting problematic. It also suggests that the sorts of values and codes that are articulated in mission statements – imposed by top-down managerial practices and heralded as constituting the dominant corporate culture – may be a more of a utopian aspiration: frequently, they do not enjoy full endorsement from members of the organisation.⁹³ However, although it is argued here that the idea of a dominant culture within a university setting is problematic, the RAE framework may be seen on some level as a unifying force in that it helps transform research cultures into sites for knowledge transfer.

Set against the wider backdrop mapped earlier, the concept of a research culture might be seen to apply where these acknowledged and shared norms and values are

⁹³ Highlighting the difference between the officially formulated culture of an organisation and the actual culture-in-practice, Brown maintains that ‘*some universities espouse concerns for teaching quality (we are a teaching oriented institution) [sic] while in practice they recruit and promote employees on the basis of their research endeavours.*’ (Brown, 1998: 31)

orientated around research activities. When discussing what they perceived as a research culture, all respondents involved in UHI research policy making made comparisons with their previous experiences working in HE or involvement in research institutions and, as such, common features emerged: structural support mechanisms created by departments and institutions, external performance indicators for funding as well as departmental, institutional and individual attitudes towards the value of research. However, if we accept Silver's (2003) and Barnett's (2000) reflections on organisational culture, any claims of a dominant or unified culture within an organisational setting may be over-simplistic. As argued previously, cultural values and assumptions are not fixed but provisional and in a state of flux. Also cultural learning even that associated with a proposed culture of research, is a process of contested appropriation. Therefore, particular values and behaviours encouraged or underwritten by UHI policy makers (and articulated in strategic planning documents) are inevitably filtered through certain political, economic and social predispositions and thus are open to re-interpretation. In some cases they may be simply ignored by both individuals and partners involved in research within the UHI. Although policies to encourage and expand research activities may well weave themselves through different institutions and groups linked to the UHI, it is questionable whether they are compelling and resilient enough to displace or pacify potential or actual sites of resistance in the form of counter cultures and embed themselves sufficiently to constitute what might be referred to as a unified culture throughout. As set out in chapter two, successive strategic planning documents for the UHI have articulated strong commitments to the fostering of a research culture – where staff (especially those teaching degree students) within the different partners would be encouraged to collectively absorb

values orientated towards expanding research capability. However, as previously stated, the wider literature on organisational cultural change suggests that the embedding of new values is unlikely to be a smooth transition. The data collected for the purpose of this study seem to indicate perceptions of a rift between the UHI's institutional aim to promote a research culture and of the translation of this aspiration into material practice. When it comes to research culture, the UHI can be described as a divergent and loosely interlaced community rather than one characterised by a tightly bounded configuration. Of course, set against the wider backdrop of organisational culture(s) mapped in the previous pages, it is unsurprising to come across perceptions that reflect more of a conglomerate of different knowledge factions, beliefs and interests.⁹⁴ However, it is argued here that the aforementioned rift is not attributable to the heterogeneous nature of the UHI alone. Rather, this thesis argues that certain emerging discourses relating to the research expansion play a role in accounting for perceptions on the absence of a unified research culture.

The following pages will quote certain extracts from the various interviews conducted. Naturally, to ensure as far as possible the anonymity of the data, a coding system of fictional names for both individuals and their institutions was used. Instead of job titles general descriptions such as 'senior policy maker' and 'policy maker' were employed.

⁹⁴ As stressed elsewhere, the UHI is made up a number of institutions, each exhibiting different organisational structures, different leadership styles and aspirations, local histories and associated myths and rituals, thus making the idea of superimposing a monoculture problematic.

Coding Framework for interview respondents: including pseudo names and contextual details.

Erica - has had a long career in HE and at the time of interview was holding a post within the UHI Executive Office. In her role she contributes to UHI policy making including research policy. (Interviewed April: 2004)

Arnold - has had a long career working in HE and at the time of interview was working for the UHI Executive Office. His research interests are social science. He has overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting as an intermediary between the UHI and the other stakeholders. In his role he is also tasked to encourage the promotion, co-ordination and networking of research within particular curriculum areas and in association with other universities and external institutions. He contributes to UHI policy making and is involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (Interviewed July: 2006)

Philip - has had a long career working in HE and at the time of interview was working for the UHI Executive Office. His previous research interest was in the area of science. He has overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting as an intermediary between the UHI and the other stakeholders. In his role he is also tasked to encourage the promotion, co-ordination and networking of research within particular curriculum areas and in association with other universities and external institutions. He contributes to UHI policy making and is involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (Interviewed June: 2006)

Victoria - has had a long career as a researcher in private sector and HE and at the time of interview was working as a researcher/lecturer based at an FE partner. Her research interests are social science based. (Interviewed April: 2004)

George - at the time of interview was working as a researcher/lecturer based at an FE partner and involved in the UHI Executive Research Committee. His research interests are science based. (Interviewed July: 2006)

Emma - at the time of interview was a leader of an FE partner. (Interviewed November: 2007)

Thomas - at the time of interview was a leader of an FE partner, and was heavily involved with the UHI from its inception, chaired several UHI Executive Committees. (Interviewed December: 2006)

Margaret - at the time of interview was a lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. Her research interests are social science based including social policy formation and impact. (Interviewed, December: 2006)

Derek - has a long history in HE and at the time of interview was holding a post within the UHI Executive Office. He was involved in developing and managing policy on research. His research interests are science based. (Interviewed August: 2004)

William - has a long history as science based researcher in HE, and at the time of interview held a leader post at a research unit attached to an FE partner. He was also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (Interviewed August: 2003, 2004 and September: 2006)

Magnus - at the time of interview was a lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. His research interests are social science based. (Interviewed December: 2006)

Alistair - at the time of interview was a leader of an FE partner, and involved in the UHI Executive Research Committee. His previous research interest was science based. (Interviewed July: 2004)

John - at the time of interview was a senior researcher within a UHI science based research institute. He was also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (Interviewed February: 2004, May 2004 and 2008)

Melissa - was at the time of interview working as a lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. She was also involved in some action research in the area of teaching and learning (Interviewed January: 2007)

Gordon – was a past member of lecturing staff at an FE partner and at the time of interview was working at a Scottish university. He has a wide range of research interests including politics and media studies. (Interviewed December: 2005)

Percy - at the time of interview was working as a lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. His research interests are social science based. (Interviewed January: 2007)

Peter – has worked in FE for more than twenty years in different institutions and at the time of the interview was working in a managerial post at an FE partner. The data gathered from Peter's interview was not coded and therefore did not inform the emerging discourses. It was simply used to confirm certain post analysis reflections. (Interviewed April: 2009)

The following extracts from a heterogeneous sample of respondents working within the UHI at different levels show how perceptions on the policy drive to mould partner institutions have evolved. From the data there are clear views of a rift between the institutional aim on the behalf of the UHI to promote a research culture and of the translation of this aspiration into material practice. As one respondent, Erica [UHI Executive Office] notes:

There is not what one might call a research culture. Most partners do not value research. There are pockets where research is valued. FE partners are on the whole more interested in teaching and learning. (Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

In highlighting the difficulties in fostering a research culture, Erica also stated: ‘We can only give guidelines on research but ultimately the staff belong to the colleges. It is up to the colleges if they wish staff to do research and how to support them. And this makes it difficult for UHI to set targets’ (*ibid*). Similarly, in identifying the sorts of differences between different partners, Erica claimed that the smaller partner colleges were more focused on research than the larger ones: ‘The smaller colleges have a more flexible approach and attitude to research. In contrast, the bigger colleges seem to be more rigid in their working conditions and less responsive to the need to introduce research’ (*ibid*). Thus, for Erica what Scott (1996) refers to as ‘interpretational slippage’ is clearly at play when it comes to embedding a research culture. For her the values and behaviours associated with the fostering of a research culture that have underwritten UHI policy are clearly filtered through certain political, economic and social predispositions of the different partners. Moreover, according to her conceptual lens the actual size of the college seems to be a determining factor in how quickly policy imperatives have been taken up. The suggestion being that when it comes to research, the smaller colleges, compared to the larger ones, are more agile and receptive to UHI policy imperatives.

Another respondent, Arnold [UHI Executive Office] noted:

There are elements of what I recognise as a research culture within the UHI and a growing research culture, but it’s in pockets only. It’s certainly not embedded across the institution. If it were, then we would be looking at RAE submissions in a bigger way.

There is a lot of staff in the UHI who have never engaged in research. [...] Being actively involved in research has never been part of their background and, unless you have background experience, then where is that research culture going to come from? It needs to be nurtured and you must have supporting mechanisms in place to do that nurturing. And institutions need to sign up to the idea of nurturing. Unfortunately that’s not the case with the UHI, well not uniformly across anyway. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006)

When asked if their views were broadly reflected within the Research Committee and beyond, Arnold raised questions as to whether the Committee was completely networked into the wider community:

I really don't know. I think there are some people who recognise what I have been saying but whether or not it is a wide-spread feeling is difficult to say. Those who are developing and reviewing the development of research policy are doing so from their own understanding and perspectives and they may not necessarily have a realistic understanding of the whole institution. Whether it is blinkered or not is hard to say but when research is driven from a particular perspective, simply because traditionally that's where it has always existed, then it can be self-perpetuating in a certain sense. (*ibid*)

Given the unique position and agency of Arnold in bridging UHI Executive policy imperatives to the partner institutions and other external bodies, his views on the policy drive promoting a research culture are significant here.

Another respondent, Philip [UHI Executive Office] also recognised these sorts of disparities across the UHI:

A research culture is moving from a teaching-only environment to a teaching and scholarship and/or research environment across the partnership. Obviously we have got pockets of research culture already in places like SAMS and to do it across the UHI means moving from a teaching-only environment to one where there is an element of scholarship and research. And part of that research should be in my view about learning and teaching. It should be about pedagogy research, people being able to do action research into their own practice and they should be encouraged to do that and write short papers to be published internally or in journals, whatever. (Interviewed by author, June: 2006)

Victoria [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] notes how their institution lacked the necessary infrastructure to support a research culture:

I feel that whole debate is still to be had in the UHI – about research and identity. So when I think about research culture or look for evidence for one, then I ask: 'What is the infrastructure that exists to support that culture?' 'What is there to help research grow?' 'What physical infrastructure is there around to actually support and encourage research?' I have to say [...] that in my institution we do not have any

infrastructure at all. We do not have anything to support research.
(Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

Another respondent, George [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner]

claims there are many cultures within the UHI:

‘Research culture’ should be in the plural for a start. There are many different cultures and I think that’s part of the difficulty of the UHI. There are those who come from places like SAMS which has a culture that is entirely research based with very little teaching and so on. And there are other people who I would say are at the other end of the spectrum, those that come from the FE side which involves all teaching and no research. So it is perhaps wrong to describe it as a culture which gives the impression that it is uniform throughout and that is probably the root of some of the problems we have had in trying to promote more research activities within the UHI. And we really need to recognise this basic reality. [The] UHI is not like other HE institutions, it is different, it’s a collective of different institutions and I think that can cause confusion about the overall role of research. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006)

Another respondent, Emma [FE partner leader] makes the point that the UHI is still evolving with respect to growing a research culture:

I would say we [the UHI] are a maturing organisation and therefore there are some parts which probably have a much more sophisticated and complex idea of what a research culture means than I do. And there are other parts that really do not engage in research at all. So I think it is inconsistent and disjointed and I think it is part of our emerging status. (Interviewed by author, November: 2007)

Emma’s comments suggest that notion of a research culture occupies a wide spectrum of more or less developed and refined definitions where she would assign her own institution what might be described as a ‘subaltern’ status.⁹⁵ Another respondent with a leadership role, Thomas [FE partner leader] not only projected notions of a hierarchical conception of research activities, but also highlighted the practical difficulties encountered (both internal and external) and the sort of pragmatic approach adopted to progress research expansion:

⁹⁵ The notion of the subaltern, meaning of ‘inferior rank’, was adopted by Antonio Gramsci as a concept referring to groups in society subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes. In the context of this study it is used where one group may feel inferior to another i.e. FE perceiving themselves as having an inferior understandings of research.

In the early days, research was largely at the discretion of the individual and the individual institution. Provided you were not looking for large amounts of resources from your employee institution, you could do research if you wanted to. Provided that the partner institution was not looking for resources from the UHI central pot, it could also conduct research on whatever area it wanted to. One or two institutions, and SAMS is the most obvious one, were actually funded as a research institution. They were very successful, very experienced and had their own internal mechanisms and disciplines on attracting funding and so on [...] For the other institutions that made up the UHI, research was largely *ad hoc* and at the sidelines.

[...]The UHI is distinctive; it has not started with a recognisable HE structure and identity. Its overall identity is still developing and its research profile is part of this evolving processes. When we [UHI] began to develop, and I would probably say from 2000/2001 onwards, [...] the UHI had very little to build from, SAMS was about all. But the UHI being a diverse mix meant that different people wanted to do research in all sorts of areas and the likelihood was that, as a fledgling institution, the UHI was struggling to find funding to support research. So one of the first things [Name of Senior leader at the UHI] did was to focus the mind of the UHI on a few areas of research that you realistically could afford to fund.

And our thinking settled on a few priority areas that you could afford to focus on in the relative short term. [...] Of course, within the priority areas we might expand, add bits of research on [...] by deliberately acquiring a research area or by funding chairs or posts and so on. So because of this new focus [...] research in the UHI was going to be much more criteria-driven, much more purposeful and pragmatic and much less *ad hoc* as it was in the past. (Interviewed by author, December: 2006)

The above echoes with Olssen and Peters who argue that HE has evolved somewhat akin to the generalisations of Darwinian evolution: *'In a market economy there is a real analogy to Darwinian natural selection in that profit–loss systems provide a mechanism for the elimination of unfit systems'* (2005: 315). Of course, the above should not be seen to diminish the significant advancements already made by the UHI within the increasingly diverse area of research.

On the issue of research culture, the overall interview data gathered from the different phases produced a number of salient points. Firstly, it offered an account of respondents' views on the notion of a research culture in relation to the UHI's

own conception of a research culture. Secondly, it offered an account surrounding the UHI's ambition to create a unified research culture across the UHI and an assessment as to whether it was succeeding or failing. Considering the former, the different phases of interviews indicate that many of the policy maker respondents, drawing on their previous experiences within the HE sector, shared a common understanding as to what a research culture should look like. The data also indicated that any research culture described was characterised by inter-related generic dimensions such as professional relationships and attitudes, climatic conditions such as organisational arrangements and opportunities for encouraging and nurturing research expansion. The respondents did recognise that these norms and values underpinning research varied in emphasis and stricture within different disciplines and institutions. By way of example, when respondents were recalling their earlier times working at a university they would identify slight differences in the way certain faculties operated when carrying out research. Commonly, the study found that respondents with a scientific grounding tended to claim that they were more likely to collaborate with other partners such as private business and industry or colleagues in other universities than colleagues from other disciplines such as social science. At the same time, many respondents, especially those involved in policy making in some way, did not perceive that there was a marked difference between the UHI conceptual understanding of research culture and that found in HE in general. This suggested that it was widely recognised by the respondents that the UHI's conception of research culture *per se* was not out of step with that found in other, more traditional institutions. On the question of the UHI's ambition to create a unified research culture – perceived here as essentially the creation and embedding of structures, norms and values that encourage research activities within

and between the UHI partners – it was also widely recognised by all respondents that this had failed to materialise across the UHI partners. The only clear exception to this overall lacuna acknowledged by the respondents was SAMS which was perceived as having an established research culture prior to being absorbed by the UHI. In this sense the UHI was seen to be simply strengthening an already established culture of research rather than creating one. Thus, although policies to encourage and expand research activities may well have woven themselves through different institutions and groups linked to the UHI, the data suggested that these policies had failed to embed themselves sufficiently to influence a significant body of the UHI to constitute what might be referred to as a culture of research. If there was a widely held belief that there is no such thing as a research culture throughout the UHI, this begged the question: ‘What are the perceived dynamics – social, structural, economic, political and cultural – relating to research within the UHI? And what sort of discourses were emerging with respect to research?’

IV.iii Narrative of Data: Towards the Main Categories

Most respondents felt that, with reference to research issues, the partners did not communicate or collaborate as effectively as they might or should do. This sense of a fragmented community was seen to be attributed to a number of interlaced factors. For many – especially those involved in policymaking at some level – there were some fundamental fracture lines within the UHI research expansion policy. Indeed, a number of those respondents involved in policy making felt that the overall policy aspiration to foster a research culture within the FE partners was perhaps unrealistic because it did not adequately account for the particular operating structures and attitudes embedded within these institutions. There was the overall perception that FE structural arrangements and a working culture (sometimes used interchangeably

with the term ‘FE mindset’) that valued teaching over research acted as a powerful counter current to UHI aspirations on research expansion. Moreover, some researchers felt that the Executive Office policy drive lacked the necessary momentum to overcome this perceived barrier. In fact, with regard to UHI policy, many respondents across all levels of the interview sample adopted a somewhat sceptical, if not cynical, attitude towards the aspiration to expand research within the FE partners, claiming that the policy drive from the UHI Executive Office needed to be more authoritative in order to persuade partners to become research active. More specifically, there was a belief that a research culture would not, and could not be embedded unless fundamental changes were instigated, such as a change in contractual conditions for those staff teaching HE within the FE partners. In other words, it was widely felt that the FE academic contract was an obstacle to the aspiration to foster a research culture. These dynamics can be seen to resonate with Ball who notes that *the ‘enactment of policy texts relies on such things as commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, cooperation and intertextual compatibility’* (1994:19). This ‘intertextual compatibility’ is significant here as it refers to how new policies interact with existing policies. The study also found that those teaching within the FE partners attempting to do research in some way identified themselves as individuals not embedded within a collective or supportive research community. The evidence suggests that research was not generally seen as part of the ‘lived reality’ of the FE institution. Research activities were not seen as having a prevailing input into the overall success of curriculum areas, departments and individual career advancement. Instead, it was perceived as more of a sideline to the real activities, especially if research activities were not seen as generating income in some way.

This suggests that the FE performativity framework did not create a suitable climate for UHI research aspirations to embed in. In addition, some FE staff interviewed, felt that, compared to their own working conditions, academics working in HE institutions had better supporting structures for their research. A number stated they were reluctant to become involved in research because they did not enjoy the same working conditions as those in a more traditional university. It was felt that academics within other universities had less teaching and thus more time and opportunity to carry out research compared to those staff teaching HE in the UHI FE partners. Within this context, this study identified an element of ‘othering’ taking place. ‘Othering’, as it is referred to here, is an approach an individual may adopt to both define and secure the contours of their own position and identity through projecting an image and identity on an ‘other’. In other words, within the context of this study ‘othering’ took place as a strategy to confirm a respondent’s own identity, role and position by projecting an identity, role and position on others. The study also found that some respondents involved in UHI policy making and researchers located within the FE partners made reference to this ‘othering’ process, claiming that some FE staff teaching HE tended to idealise the policy structures that encouraged and nourished research in other universities.

The study further noted that economic imperatives were perceived as paramount, particularly for those policy makers within the Executive Office and those attached to the Executive Office with responsibilities to encourage, co-ordinate and expand research within their respective curriculum areas. With respect to this economic imperative, the RAE was seen as increasingly central in determining as well as measuring the way in which research was conducted in the UHI. As such it was involved in promoting certain meanings and attitudes. By way of example, it was

constantly referenced as key in framing the UHI research expansion trajectory including a range of strategic decisions about UHI goals, structures of staffing and the allocation of research funds. It was seen as particularly forceful in creating new research-centred staffing policies. It was also felt by many that the dominance of the RAE agenda meant that the UHI was concentrating its strengths in particular research areas at the expense of others. This in turn, reinforced hierarchical attitudes as a consequence of which those contributing to the RAE would be given a higher status than those who did not. In this context, some respondents maintained that research funding seemed to prioritise specific areas pointing towards an elitist structure, with areas such as social science pushed to the periphery by science-based activities. Thus, the study found that research associated with the RAE was perceived as far more exclusive and elitist than other research activities such as small-scale, individual, non-income generating research, with the exception of PhD research. Indeed, within the UHI, the RAE was perceived as creating a new bipolar typology of the academic, namely 'research active' and 'research inactive', with the latter increasingly seen as being of less value to the organisation. The study also found evidence to suggest that there was a perception, mainly on the part of individual researchers and those attached to the Executive Office with responsibilities to encourage, co-ordinate and expand research within their respective curriculum areas, that more attention should be given to other areas not necessarily ready to contribute to the RAE criteria, suggesting that the current research expansion trajectory was too narrow and a more widespread approach in terms of expanding research focus and interests should be adopted. With regards to the FE partners' ability to embrace UHI expansionist policies, the RAE was used in part to reinforce 'othering' ideas that the FE partners were simply not ready to

create a space for research to be embedded in. Thus, from the overall interview data a number of recurring themes were apparent: the perception of insufficient communications and networking; the idea that FE partners for a number of interrelated reasons seemed to be struggling to embed the notion of a research culture as well as the awareness of the increasing dominance of the RAE in shaping a normative space for research. This latter dynamic was seen to stimulate a counter current advocating that the UHI research focus should be widened beyond the RAE criteria.

The axial coding processes wove the data into a number of what can be called key categories. Mind maps, diagrams and flow charts were used to arrive at the categories. It is argued here that the social, structural, economic, political and cultural dynamics relating to research can be located within a number of broad categories which can be further divided into political strategies and perspectives. It is also significant to note that these political strategies and perspectives can incorporate certain discursive strategies defined here as drawing on certain perspectives and constructions in order to selectively mobilise particular meanings and attitudes (Arnott and Ozga, 2009).

The following provides a summary of how the political strategies and perspectives were formulated.

Descriptive statements formulated from the coding process	Themes guiding category formation
All respondents stated that they did not recognise a research culture permeating throughout the UHI partners. There was a general perception that a culture that supports research has not embedded within the partners. Those who had previously worked in an HE institution tended to make comparisons between their past experiences and their current time at the UHI. The UHI was seen as a new institution and research was still evolving.	Policy not embedded throughout. FE partners lacking understanding of the role of research in HE.

<p>Research culture was defined by making reference to HE. The majority of reflections indicated that the notion of a research culture can be loosely defined as a collection of norms, values and assumptions that values research activities. A research culture was seen as not only a way of thinking or a value system but also incorporated structural supporting mechanisms – seen as the climate to cultivate and sustain a research culture.</p>	<p>UHI research culture not unique, broadly reflecting other HE institutions.</p>
<p>As detected in previous interviews, a persistent theme to surface was that the UHI did not communicate its research activities very well. No real network for research.</p>	<p>Lack of communications/networks. More structural control from the Executive Office needed.</p>
<p>Claims of tensions regarding the funding of research activities. Some respondents maintained that research funding seemed to prioritise certain places pointing towards an elitist structure with social science being pushed to the periphery by science-based activities.</p>	<p>Some areas being given more attention. Too elitist – a preference for a more egalitarian approach.</p>
<p>Some contributing to policy making felt that the FE attitudes, structural arrangements and culture that valued teaching more than research were a counter-current to the UHI aspirations on research expansion. The FE academic contract was seen to counter research expansion. The implementation of an HE contract was seen by both management and non-management respondents as significant in expanding research.</p>	<p>FE performativity and structure gearing towards teaching rather than research. More managerial control of contractual arrangements focusing on research outputs.</p>
<p>There was evidence that many respondents, especially those from FE partners, were not aware of some of the proposed initiatives outlined in the UHI strategic plans.</p>	<p>Lack of awareness. Research not part of the FE normative space.</p>
<p>Many interviewees involved in the UHI Research Committee recognised tensions with regards to allocation of funding for research.</p>	<p>Research performativity criteria creating inclusion and exclusion.</p>
<p>Many contributing to UHI policy making maintained that FE colleges were not geared up to create research capacity. They also recognised that FE partners can only be given guidelines on expanding research.</p>	<p>FE partners lacking the structure and culture to absorb research. Sense of lack of authority to enforce research policy.</p>
<p>There appeared to be a recognition that a ‘research culture’ did exist in certain places, mainly in those research institutions that already had a proven track record in research before being involved in the UHI partnership.</p>	<p>Divide between research institutions and FE partners.</p>
<p>Some policy makers within the UHI recognised tensions between the UHI aspiration to promote research and a FE partners’ mindset that marginalises research by viewing teaching as the dominant activity. There was a perception that FE partners lacked the necessary base skills and motivations to advance research.</p>	<p>Lack of confidence in FE partners’ ability to absorb UHI research expansion aspirations.</p>
<p>Respondents suggested that the overall desire to promote research throughout the UHI was unrealistic. The aspiration failed to recognise the complex dynamics of the partners and the relationship between the UHI Executive Office and the stakeholders.</p>	<p>Scepticism about policy aspirations.</p>

<p>A number of those respondents working within the FE case study institutions claimed that becoming research-active was not a recognised component of the academic career trajectory in their institution.</p>	<p>No incentives to carry out research. FE performativity pushing research to the periphery.</p>
<p>One of the more persistent themes to surface was that respondents working within the FE institutions claimed that their line managers or senior managers perceived the overall drive to foster research as an unwelcome obligation and not something they wanted to identify with in any real and meaningful way. Research was seen as a sideline to the real activities of the institution, especially if research activities did not generate income.</p>	<p>FE partners lacking the necessary climatic conditions to encourage, support and nourish research. FE performativity pushing research to the periphery.</p>
<p>Those teaching within the FE partners attempting to do research in some way identified themselves as individuals not embedded within a collective or supportive research community.</p>	<p>Research identity not widely recognised in FE. FE performativity pushing research to the periphery.</p>
<p>Many teaching HE in FE institutions claimed that there was no meaningful communication between faculty deans, the UHI Executive Office and individual researchers within the FE partners.</p>	<p>Lack of communication. Feelings that FE can't produce research.</p>
<p>Those attached to the Executive Office with responsibilities to encourage, co-ordinate and expand research within their respective curriculum areas across the FE partners believed that RAE had introduced a more focused approach to certain areas of research at the expense of other areas. By way of example, the RAE could produce an individualistic culture, isolation and a lack of wider teamwork. At the same time, it could reinforce hierarchical attitudes where those contributing to the RAE would be given higher status than those who did not. This could alter subjectivities of researcher identity and make it more difficult to become involved in research.</p>	<p>RAE creating typology of researcher and research.</p>
<p>There was a strong feeling that FE managers did not value or support academic staff wishing to be active in research. This was articulated by both individual academics within FE and UHI policy makers trying to encourage research to take hold in the FE partners.</p>	<p>FE unable to encourage and sustain research. FE performativity discouraging staff to carry out research.</p>
<p>UHI policy makers and those attached to the Executive Office with responsibilities to encourage, co-ordinate and expand research within their respective curriculum areas across the FE partners believed that better conditions for research would evolve within the FE partners if they adopted an HE working contract. Reducing summer holidays was seen as an important structural change that would allow more time for research activities.</p>	<p>Sceptical attitudes towards current direction. More structural change needed if policy aspirations are to be realised.</p>
<p>Most academics within the FE partners attempting to do research experienced negative feelings of isolation, and they reported that this was having a detrimental effect on their enthusiasm.</p>	<p>Lack of value, no encouragement.</p>

<p>Some FE staff interviewed claimed that academics working in HE had more supporting structures for their research. In articulating this stance, some respondents projected unrealistic or outdated stereotypical views about HE staff. Some involved in UHI policy making and promoting research made reference to this stance claiming that some FE staff used this narrative as a reason why they were not involved in research.</p>	<p>FE staff opting out of being involved with research through ‘othering’.</p> <p>‘Othering’ being recognised by UHI policy makers.</p>
<p>The RAE and other funding sources were seen as being increasingly important to the direction and focus of research within the UHI.</p>	<p>RAE increasingly dominant and can shape attitudes on research expansion.</p>

With the aid of mind maps, the themes recorded on the right were further scrutinised for common characteristics and differences. This process was used to form a number of broad categories that help to explain how research expansion was perceived. These categories are mapped next.

IV.iv Broad Categories

1 ‘Egalitarian’: a political and discursive strategy adopted by some interview respondents positing the view that every UHI partner should have the opportunity to apply for UHI funding to develop a research profile.

2 ‘Opting Out’: a political and discursive strategy adopted by some interview respondents drawing on what can be seen as ill-informed ideas of how academic research takes place within the UK university sector when constructing their identity within the institution and vis-à-vis their relationship to research. Respondents adopting this strategy constructed certain narratives about researchers operating in HE in order to legitimise why they themselves had opted out of being involved in research and related activities. It is important to stress that the interview evidence suggested that both UHI policy makers and academics active in research

within their own partner institutions drew upon this opting out strategy to explain why research had not expanded within some of the FE partners.

3 ‘Fragmented community’: a perspective adopted by some interview respondents maintaining that the UHI partners were not communicating in a way that promoted research. Many respondents saw this fragmentation as either blocking or slowing down the embedding of a research culture within the UHI partners.

4 ‘Sceptical’: a perspective adopted by some interview respondents maintaining that research was not supported in the way that it should be. Its proponents expressed the view that FE colleges needed to change their working conditions if research was going to expand in a way that would meet the aspiration set out in the strategic plan. The desire for working contracts that mirrored the HE working contracts were seen as a condition common to this position. This perspective may also be seen to have utilised othering by projecting notions of how an FE mindset could deflect the aspiration for a research culture. Thus, this sceptical perspective may also be seen to contain elements of a discursive strategy.

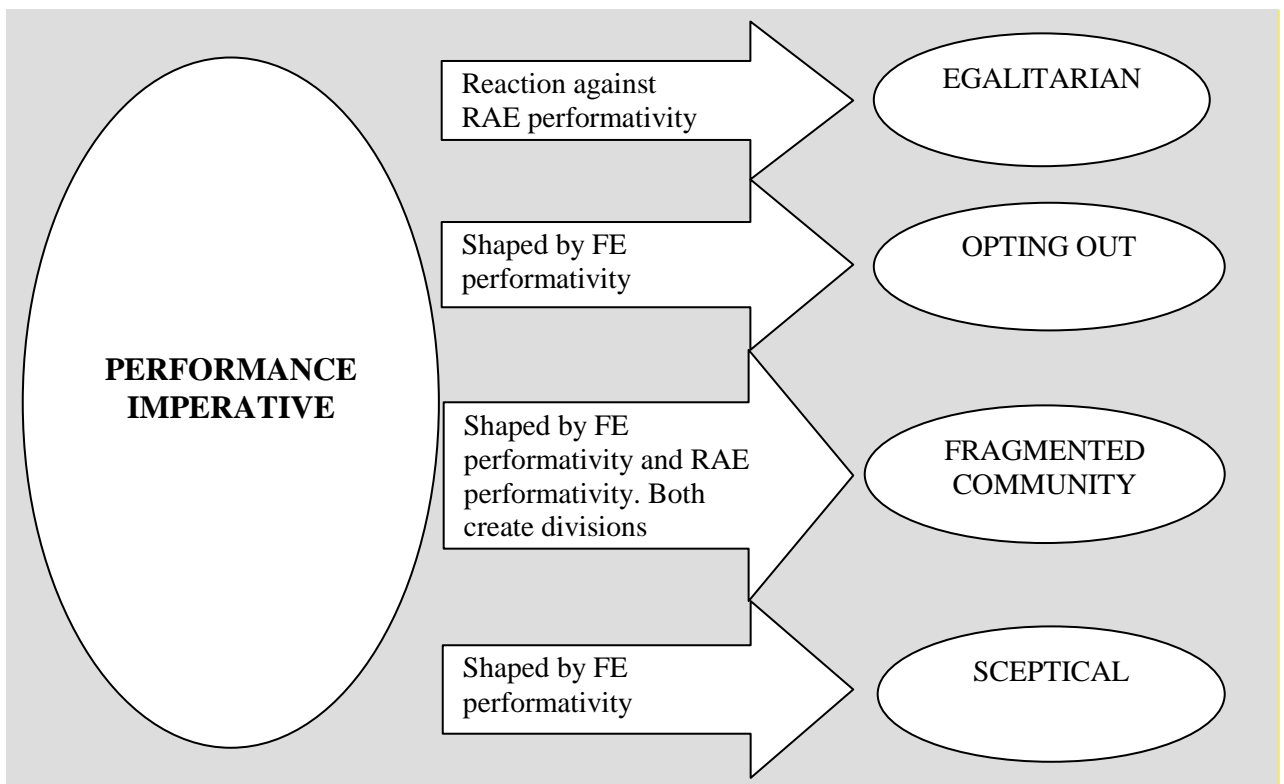
5 ‘Performance Imperative’: this is a policy strategy and may operate as a discursive strategy to achieve change. It was informed by two interrelated dynamics. One posited the view that research contributing towards the RAE should take priority over other research activities. This was a persistent theme to surface and could be seen to have generated feelings of inclusion and exclusion vis-a-vis research activities and ultimately impacted on perceptions surrounding researcher identities. In other words, the RAE was being used as a yardstick to measure the potential worth of research. Its advocates believed the RAE created new roles, subjectivities and identities within the UHI. The other dynamic constituting this

policy strategy was firmly located in the operation of FE partners and their shaping by FE performativity policy. More specifically, it was associated with perceptions of the FE partners' overall operating culture and structures. Its advocates perceived that the FE partners due to their traditional culture and structural arrangements predominantly geared towards teaching delivery had intrinsic barriers to opening up a space for research activities. In other words, its advocates believed that FE partners – by virtue of enacting their own FE performativity – restrained UHI policy aspirations to expand research because they lacked the necessary culture and structural apparatus to nourish, sustain and legitimise research. This FE dynamic was also used to justify the shaping of UHI research expansion by the RAE.

The above political strategies and perspectives above were reduced further through the process of selective coding. This involved returning to the overall data themes and accompanying narratives to identify from amongst different possibilities the construct that was the most representative in explaining what was going on. It was felt that the first four political strategies and perspectives might go some way towards helping to capture the essence of participants' narratives while at the same time presenting these stories within an overall informative framework to elucidate how the aspiration to foster a research culture had been perceived by those affected by it. This study argues that the performance imperative proved to be the best construct through which to understand the dynamic social power relations and emerging dominant discourse influencing and informing the fostering of a research culture within the UHI.

It is important to stress that the intention is not to suggest that the first four strategies and perspectives lack relevance. Instead it is argued that the performance imperative is an integrated conceptualisation in that it discursively engages with all the other strategies and perspectives at some level (see diagram A). Moreover, it introduces a number of structures, procedures and attitudes that ultimately converge in intended and unintended ways that both re-energise and redraw the boundaries, ultimately creating patterns of power relations among different groups as well as perceptions that reflect something close to a typology of what counts as research and, by extension, who is a researcher. The identified strategies and perspectives inevitably have underlying discourses and these will be discussed in chapter six.

Diagram (A) Relationship between core category and other categories



IV.v Taking the Categories Back to the Respondents

The grounded theory methodology is inherently inductive as the researcher's subjectivity bears on the coding process. Different orientations, including attitudes and value systems produce their own emphases in the production of the data. Thus, in an attempt to confirm or refute the analytical logic that led to the choice of concepts and categories rendered from the coding process, it was decided to take the interpretations back to a number of participants in order to obtain their reactions. As Corbin and Holt note: *'Participant feedback not only contributes to the co-construction of the theory but also enables the researcher to make changes or modifications to the theory as needed'* (2005: 51). A small heterogeneous sample of respondents was presented with the five political strategies and perspectives and asked to comment upon each. The sample included a senior UHI Executive Office policy maker involved in research policy, two senior staff working in research units set up by FE partners, a researcher from a UHI research institution who is involved with the UHI Executive Research Committee. All respondents recognised the categories, although there was a general agreement that the Egalitarian and the Performance Imperative strategies could be seen to fit at either side of a continuum. The participants' feedback also suggested that the Fragmented Community strategy and Sceptical perspective were far more closely related to the 'Performance Imperative' than first thought. The Performance Imperative strategy was seen as significant to all. Interestingly, from the feedback interviews it became clear that the respondents still held on to the same signifiers and personal understandings first encountered in previous interviews. This suggests that despite the considerable expansion of research within the UHI, the respondents did not migrate from their initial viewpoints and understandings but were adhering to the same stories,

identities and othering projections that were observed during the early interview phases. Interestingly, one respondent described subtle moves by senior leaders in a FE partner institution to ensure the public image and identity of the newly set up research centre would not be too closely associated with the FE identity. Instead, it was suggested that the research centre should construct its public image and identity by concentrating more on HE and its networking with other research centres and down-playing the FE association. For this respondent these moves pointed to the fear as an explicit message here – the fear that this newly created research centre would be perceived in the public eye as somehow inferior and as a result missed out on potential business opportunities (income from research bid) because of its association with FE. The inference seems clear here: the wider public expect a research centre to be located within an HE setting and not an FE college. In addition to the four interviews described above, the author conducted one final interview with a respondent with managerial responsibilities within a FE partner institution. The interview focused on one open-ended question: ‘Where do research activities feature within your overall responsibilities?’ This interview was not used to inform any theory building. Rather, it was used to determine if the main themes within the FE performativity discourse developed from the previous interview phases (2004 – 2007) were still valid at the time of writing (April, 2009).

Chapter Five

V The Emerging Discourses: Mapping the Evolution of Research in the Interplay of Power, Identity and Cultural Change

Chapter four identified a number of political strategies and perspectives, some of which incorporate certain discursive elements and mobilise particular meanings and attitudes (Arnott and Ozga, 2009). The ‘egalitarian’ strategy claims that current policy is too restrictive and meritocratic with the RAE as instrumental in creating these conditions. The ‘opting out’ stance is a political and discursive strategy drawing on FE performativity and ‘othering’ strategies. The latter are used by some teaching HE in the FE partners to legitimise why they have opted out from taking part in research. Complaints about poor networking and the lack of leadership from the centre can be seen to be at the heart of the ‘fragmented community’ perspective whilst limitations within the research policy trajectory, inflexible FE structures and ‘othering’ strategies are some of the elements informing the ‘sceptical’ perspective. The performance imperative brings into play both the RAE and FE performativity. This next chapter aims to locate these political strategies and perspectives in the context of specific underlying cultural discourses accompanied by a representative quote.

As already stated, for the purposes of this study, discourses are seen in terms of their social setting in which they simultaneously create conditions of possibility and constraint. As such, they produce certain interpretative “realities”, hierarchical power relationships as well as individual and communal identities of consent and dissent. As Edwards observes:

Discourses are powerful and some are more powerful than others. States and governments are powerful. Through political and policy-making processes they [discourses] attempt to inscribe certain practices with particular kinds of meanings and position actors as having particular roles and dispositions, thereby shaping the institutional climate within which they work and live. (Edwards, 2008: 21)

Edwards and Usher drawing on earlier commentators (Ball, 1990) also note how discourses can create subjectivity and hierarchical relationships:

Discourses are [...] about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations [...] thus, discourses construct certain possibilities for thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations. (Edwards and Usher, 2008: 159)

Thus, discourses work in different ways to redraw boundaries. As Ball (1994) suggests, discourse constructs ‘heroes and villains’, creates the space for action and, at the same time, excludes other possibilities. It attributes cause and effect, legitimates new voices and creates naturalising tendencies by construing events as logical, natural occurrences (Ball, 1994 and 2008). Ball (1997) argues that discourse informs our linguistic unconscious, authoring a script for us to articulate, ultimately shaping our sense of identity:

We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities; the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do ‘know’ what we say, we ‘are’ what we say and do. In these terms we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies. (Ball, 1997: 22)

It is also important to note that discourses are located within a particular political and contingent sphere and, that as such, they tend to occupy a provisional zone. As Croft observes: ‘*Over time, discourses decay under the weight of their own internal contradictions and external alternatives*’ (2006: 12). Maclure (2003) drawing on the earlier work of Gee (1999) distinguishes between discourse with a capital ‘D’ and discourse with a small ‘d’. Whilst the latter is used within linguistics, the former is

associated with broad socio-cultural conceptualisations and their analysis which is the focus of this study. According to Foucault, discourses are inextricably linked to institutions such as the legal, health and education system and they are intrinsic to and disseminate from the disciplines which construct the normative space for those who are brought under the influence of these institutions. In this sense, people are ‘fabricated’ into the social order; they are invoked by one discourse or another (Foucault, 1979, 1980). There are many instances in which the power differential inscribed in discourses is fairly obvious. However, these power relations are not always clearly demarcated or visible, Maclure drawing on Foucault (1980) posits a cautionary warning against simplistic polarisations and emphasises the subtle dynamics of power relations:

Power is not a force wielded by one group or sovereign figure against others, but a more sinuous and insinuating mechanism that works its way in a capillary fashion into the very grain of individuals, inhabiting their bodies, their beliefs and their self-hood, and binding them together as institutional subjects. (Maclure, 2003: 49)

Thus, for Foucault inequalities resulting from power relations are not always the result of a clear-cut story. Rather they can develop and coalesce as the result of complex interactions that are not under the direct control of the groups which emerge as the dominant ones. Ball (1994) drawing on Foucault’s ideas, argues that those working in education – especially teachers – are enmeshed within a complex matrix of forces where co-ordinating mechanisms such as curricula, market and management systems can be seen to work with either direct agency or in a more subtle capillary fashion – depending upon the specific context – to redefine and reconstruct the meaning of their role. In explaining these complexities, Ball drawing on Foucault (1981) states:

We are enmeshed in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradictory discourses, and ‘subjugated knowledges’ cannot be totally excluded from

arenas of policy implementation. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (Ball, 1994: 23)

The following discussion will attempt to capture, delineate and specify the discourses surrounding the policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI partners.

V.i Emerging Discourses

As highlighted earlier, the coding process resulted in certain political strategies and perspectives, which illuminate the social and political dynamics of research expansion within the UHI. The following discussion focuses on their discursive content.

- 1. 'Egalitarian'**
- 2. 'Opting-out'**
- 3. 'Fragmented Community'**
- 4. 'Sceptical'**
- 5. 'Performance Imperative'**

As explained in the data analysis chapter, the first four political strategies and perspectives may go some way towards capturing the interviewees' narratives, locating them within an overall network of significance that gives insight into the sort of dynamics resulting from the drive to promote research within the UHI. Each of these draws on certain underlying discourses which highlight aspects of understanding of social agency and social intentionality within the context of UHI research.

‘Egalitarian’: this political strategy can be seen to draw upon Enlightenment discourses of freedom and equality. It is not against diversity in the way research is conducted nor is it the goal to make everyone the same when it comes to researcher identity. It aims to establish political, economic and social conditions in which people will be able to enjoy equally worthwhile research opportunities and working conditions. It is not about blanket uniformity, but about levelling the conditions of social existence within the realm of research expansion within the UHI. It seeks to redraw the boundaries inscribed within those discourses that seem to encourage and support elitist attitudes and structures. The following extract from Philip [UHI Executive Office] can be seen to draw upon this underlying enlightenment discourse of freedom and equality:

There is the RAE, which is the prime means by which we bring in the funding. So a lot of people might see research culture as much more elitist or much more at the earning side end of the spectrum. Whereas I want to see research move across the spectrum in the UHI with everybody having the opportunity to do something even if it does not relate to the RAE or income generation. (Interviewed by author, June: 2006)

‘Opting Out’: this political strategy can be seen to draw on an underlying discourse of liberalism suffused with elements of ‘othering’. Drawing upon the discourse of liberalism, it champions the view that individuals should have the freedom to choose whether they wish to be involved in research or not. It advocates freedom and guaranteed rights for those who wish to be involved with research. In the context of the UHI, advocates subscribing to this opting-out political strategy believe they should have the same rights and opportunities as those carrying out research in traditional universities. It is here that we can see the working of ‘othering’ appearing. Advocates subscribing to this strategy maintain that they should have the same working conditions as those working in the more traditional

universities and thus project a particular view of HE. Under this ‘othering’, the HE lecturer/academic is constructed as having very low teaching commitments, and as such, as able to devote most of the working week to research. It is certainly true that the world of HE compared to FE has more infrastructure to support research and has a culture that values research. However, as stated earlier, HE now operates within a competitive environment that bears little resemblance to the image created by those subscribing to this othering discourse. This othering of HE is used as a reference point against which to evaluate UHI expansionist policy. More importantly it is used as a way of exposing perceived weaknesses in the FE institution. Evidence of this ‘opting out’ can be found in the following interview with Margaret [lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner]:

I would like to be involved in research but I teach far too much. When it comes to research FE is a completely different environment to that of HE. I don’t have the same conditions or support as lecturers in universities. They have lots of time to do research. If I had just six hours teaching per week then I could read academic journals, go to conferences, build up good networks with other academics and of course have the time to write papers. My institution wants me to teach HE but expects me to do that as well as research without giving me any resources that university lecturers get. I just say to myself I’m not doing it. (Interviewed by author, December: 2006)

This characterisation can also be found in indirect quotations. As Derek [UHI Executive Office] noted:

They [FE staff] don’t understand the reality of university life or, if they do, they are unwilling to admit it. And there is always ‘well I am teaching 24 hours per week’ and that’s the excuse I hear often. I’m sure it’s true for some but not all. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

Similarly, Victoria [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] had this to say about her teaching colleagues:

University lecturers don’t get 12 weeks off per year and that is why they can do research. I think it’s an interesting issue. You know, my colleagues are constantly complaining that they are not being treated as university lecturers. Well, one of the consequences of being treated as a university lecturer is that

they would have a reduction on holidays and be given more outputs to achieve in terms of producing research. (Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

‘Fragmented Community’: this perspective can be seen to draw upon an underlying communitarian discourse with overtones of new managerialism. It emphasises the self as being embedded within a community. It resonates with the ideas of partnership and networks and rejects what it perceives as the corrosive effects of working in isolation where the self-interest of individuals or institutions dominates. Within the context of the UHI research, it argues that the UHI partnership is fragmented and the FE colleges and research institutes are too absorbed in their own respective self-interests and lack the drive to explore what others are doing in the area of research. It advocates that the UHI Executive Office needs to do more to encourage a better organised communications strategy between partners on the subject of research. It is within the context of the demand for a better organised communications strategy that new managerialism comes into play. Evidence of this underlying communitarian discourse with overtones of managerialism can be detected in the following interview from William [leader/researcher at research unit attached to an FE partner]:

Well, one of the difficulties I see is that we just don’t seem to belong to a network of organisations as far as research is concerned. I know we say we are networked but in terms of research we don’t communicate very well. We don’t seem to concern ourselves with what research activities are taking place throughout the UHI. It’s too divided [...] we don’t talk very much, we don’t meet up to share ideas and we certainly don’t use the human resources of each other. I think the Executive Office needs to look at introducing mechanisms that encourage us to talk to each other. I know the UHI has conferences for research staff but we need to go beyond that; we should meet up much more, have exchange visits, etc. We should be much more trans-disciplinary and to do that we must talk to each other first. The UHI really should be looking at this, take the lead and introduce proper networks and opportunities that allow a cross-fertilisation of ideas. Unfortunately this is not going to happen organically. This needs real direction from the centre. (Interviewed by author, September: 2006)

‘Sceptical’: this perspective draws upon elements of a managerial discourse. It rejects the UHI current policy on research as lacking essential foundations for success. It views the aspiration for a unified research culture for all partners as a doomed project because it suffers from a lack of basic structures. In this sense, it rejects other discourses encouraging individual partner autonomy whereby institutions can decide working conditions. Within this perspective, the UHI research expansion goals are re-articulated more towards human resource management. There is a perceived need to take more control and specifically to introduce contractual obligations that maximise research expansion and output. Its proponents express the view that, with respect to research, FE colleges are unconstrained and have too much autonomy. The solution is more structural control from the centre in the form of a new working contract emphasising direct engagement in research activities for those FE partners. An example of this underlying managerial discourse can be found in the interview from Derek [UHI Executive Office]:

Given the fullness of time and if and when everybody involved with the UHI network has the same employer and is working under the same systems, until that time research will not be as uniform as that indicated or hoped for in the strategy. Until that time, research will be introduced, developed and encouraged in an *ad hoc* manner. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

Similarly, Philip [UHI Executive Office] also acknowledged this underlying discourse:

I think [working differences] are the biggest issue facing the UHI and the colleges in years to come. Not only is the FE contract unlike the university contract but also college ‘A’ may have different working conditions from college ‘B’ and so on. So it’s very complex. [...] But the human resource issues are the major ones to change research, I think. And I think everybody realises this. (Interviewed by author, June: 2006)

‘Performance Imperative’: this is informed by an underlying performativity discourse, the examination of which can help to understand some of the wider

economic and political processes at play. As covered earlier, a performativity discourse relates to the enactment of reform objectives, how groups and individuals are inscribed in and respond to the officially sanctioned imperatives for change. Within this context, educational policy and performance indicators can be perceived as a script creating new roles, subjectivities and identities for the world of education. This study has identified two dominant interrelated performativity discourses influencing and informing the fostering of a research culture within the UHI: namely 'RAE performativity discourse' and 'FE performativity discourse'. The former focuses on strict research quality criteria and the latter on the predominance of teaching delivery. It is argued here that these performativity discourses proved to be the best conduit for understanding the perceived successes and tensions associated with UHI research expansion by helping to illuminate the micro processes within the UHI.

Under these performativity discourses there is a distrust of anything that threatens or opens up established parameters and identities. They produce certain realities and hierarchical relations of power identities. For example, the RAE performativity discourse advocates that research institutions such as SAMS and the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) are the elite and therefore should get the best resources. In contrast, the FE performativity discourse ensures that teaching delivery is paramount and should not be displaced by other activities such as research. Indeed, under this FE performativity imperative, the notion of a researcher identity would be seen as being in conflict with the teacher identity.

As stated earlier, the 'Performance Imperative' proved to be the best construct through which to understand the dynamic social power relations and the emerging

dominant discourse influencing and informing the fostering of a research culture within the UHI. However, it is important to stress that although the other political strategies and perspectives above and their respective underlying discourses may go some way towards helping to capture the essence of participants' narratives while at the same time presenting those stories within an informative framework, they should not be seen as being divorced from each other. Instead, they should be seen to overlap. Moreover, some of the respondents, in giving their accounts of research expansion for this study, can be seen to be drawing upon several of these identified discourses at the same time, be it to describe their own identity and agency and/or those of others. In other words, they identify with these categories and their respective discourses not only when describing their own experiences but also when they are projecting their notions on how others are responding to the UHI policy drive on research expansion.

V.ii UHI: Embracing the RAE and Creating a New Normative Space

The following pages map respondents' accounts of the impact of the encroaching performativity requirements of the RAE with particular attention to the question of how far the RAE did penetrate policy drive and constituted a new normative space in which research choices, agendas and ultimately researcher identity were forged. This mapping process will also attempt to identify how the RAE imperative impacted on the long standing strategic goal of fostering a research culture within its FE partners. The analysis will seek to make visible whether, and in what way, the RAE imperative influenced the interplay between individual choice and the apparatus that nourishes, sustains and legitimises research. It will also analyse how the performativity discourse(s) on research positioned themselves in the face of the

political and institutional transformation taking place within the UHI at a time when it was preparing for, and ultimately enacting the performativity imperatives leading up to the RAE submission in 2007.

As stated elsewhere, during the late 1990s and early 2000, the rhetoric on the value of research and related activities rapidly moved from the periphery to a more prominent position in the overall trajectory of UHI strategic policy. As Thomas

[FE partner leader] observed:

So because of this new focus introduced by [Name of senior policy maker at UHI Executive Office], research in the UHI was going to be much more criteria-driven, much more purposeful [...] So anybody wanting to do research in much more esoteric areas, in areas outwith the core focus of the UHI research growth, was essentially left to their own devices. They would have to fight for time, they would have to fight for resources and money and the institutions they belonged to would not be funded by the UHI. (Interviewed by author, December: 2006)

The above shows how policies on research did become more tightly laced and, in Ball's (2008) terms the 'field of judgement' had become more instrumental and focused. The phrases 'research in esoteric areas', 'outside the core focus' and 'fighting for time, resources and money' are interesting as they point to the start of an increasingly competitive nature in the interplay between individual choice and the apparatus that nourishes, sustains and legitimises research. Derek [UHI Executive Office] also acknowledged how the new policy trajectory and funding formula would inevitably create an exclusion/inclusion dichotomy:

The ideal was that we have the UHI Research Committee to establish policy and strategy and then that strategy and policy would get fed down to the college representatives sitting on that committee. That way the individual partners would then implement the strategies. It's beginning to work. Inverness for example, arguably one of the top two FE partners, did not have a research profile but now it has set up its own research committee and it is beginning to interact and be more responsive – to explore what they want to do in the area of research and consider how that might relate to what the UHI is trying to do in the area of research. But of course, the growth of research

has lots to do with money. If you don't marry in with what the UHI is trying to do then you will not get financial support. But on the other hand, UHI does not prevent research; if research does not fit into the UHI badge then it shouldn't prevent colleges or individuals doing what they want to do. Colleges or individuals just have to resource it themselves. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

The above highlights how the UHI Executive assumed more explicit responsibility for research development, introducing new research-centred policies. This marked a departure from past arrangements, a shift towards a more formal, instrumental and rational organisation for the support and expansion of research. The last two sentences of the above quote are revealing in that they underline how policies should not be read as simply dictating 'what one must do'. Rather, as Ball claims, '[policies] *create circumstances in which a range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set*' (1994: 19). Within the context of the interplay between individual choice and the apparatus that nourishes, sustains and legitimises research, both these quotes offer insight into the emerging definition of 'research active' in output terms within the UHI. Research that does not resonate with the Research Committees core focus – such as research undertaken for personal professional development or to satisfy personal interests or curiosity – would be perceived to have less currency and may be more difficult to secure support from the Executive Office.

The reflections of Henkel (2000) can be seen as instructive here. Within the context of creating conditions for expanding research, Henkel (*ibid*) notes that institutions need to strike a balance between what she describes as 'mechanistic' and 'organic' approaches to institutional transformation. Mechanistic policies are interpreted as being orientated towards the short term achievements of the RAE criteria and, in contrast, organic policies are orientated towards the longer term developments of

the academic culture and intellectual growth of departments. Of course, the boundaries between these are fuzzy with certain overlaps, and institutions would normally be pursuing both of these policies. This study found evidence from a range of respondents that strategies for change were leaning more heavily towards the mechanistic policy than the organic. Indeed, for some respondents the overall policy trajectory and momentum was so much orientated towards the RAE that their views might resonate with the aforementioned concerns expressed by Beckman and Cooper who claim that *'the RAE creates conditions of domination within the "life-worlds" of HE through funding mechanisms'* (2004: 8).

As stated in the methodology, in presenting the data the study deliberately sacrifices some contextual specificity in order to preserve anonymity of the respondents who could otherwise potentially be identified by their role and location. Suffice to say, the following views are from a heterogeneous sample of respondents involved in research in some way. What they did share was a connection with the UHI Executive Office Research Committee, with some having senior leadership roles in either partner institutions or curriculum areas within the UHI whilst others were associated with the UHI research committee in a representative capacity. Thus, they can in their own individual or collective way be perceived as having contributed to the introduction of the policy goals, structures and apparatus that nourish, sustain and ultimately legitimise research. In discussing the location of the RAE in terms of gaining a foothold, one respondent, Philip [UHI Executive Office] noted how the RAE was instrumental in the policy drive to create a new normative space for research:

UHI is a young institution so the RAE has influenced it from the start. One of the reasons why it was important to get SAMS as a partner was that SAMS

was going to be the big earner in the RAE. If you are looking at the UHI as a university overall and you want to see the quality of research income, then the UHI without SAMS would be a very different institution. At the moment, with SAMS we score more highly than some of the more traditional universities in Scotland.

I think if you look at the Research Committee and if you asked what's the view of the members of the Research Committee as embodied in its chair they would be defining research essentially as RAE focused. And therefore that influences the whole approach towards research across the UHI. It does follow fairly straightforward criteria. If it's not RAE-able, it's not bringing in money, then how can it be afforded and how can it be funded? (Interviewed by author, June: 2006)

Thus, for Philip the allocation of resources is firmly conditional upon researchers' and institutions' capacities to contribute to the RAE. At this time there appears very little synergy between the UHI Research Committee focus and research areas that would be considered outside the sphere of RAE imperatives. The point about the UHI being a young institution and being influenced by the RAE from the start is noteworthy as it underscores important differences when making comparisons between the effects of the RAE on the UHI and on other more traditional universities. Unlike the latter, the UHI did not have a critical mass of academics with an established research profile in the first place. There was no re-orientation of the value systems and structures of an already existing pool of researchers towards the performativity criteria coupled with the RAE. Philip's view reinforces the notion that the RAE is a system of assessment, a framework for measuring performance. But it is important to not overstate the pervasiveness of the RAE. As Henkel (*ibid*) notes, the 'organic' approaches to research expansion are still in evidence in HE. Within the context of the UHI one can find research activities funded by the UHI that are not linked to the short term goals of the RAE – this study included. However, what Philip is suggesting is that in a diverse institution such as the UHI, any research areas directly contributing to the RAE are likely to be more highly

valued, and therefore more nurtured, than other research areas. When considering their role in advancing UHI research aims – in this case building research capacity within a particular curriculum area – Philip went on to suggest that the narrow selection focus set in place by the RAE imperative may have discriminated against any aspirations of research being perceived as the life blood of intellectual growth. Re-addressing this imbalance by encouraging research in new areas was perceived as a significant challenge for Philip: *‘I think the main challenge is to develop those currently non-active areas of research; but particularly, as the RAE is the main driver at the moment, and I think that’s the difficulty at the moment’ (ibid).*

Another respondent, Arnold [UHI Executive Office] not only expressed what they felt were overall difficulties with the impact of the RAE performativity criteria, but also noted that the UHI research agenda did not offer any incentives for the creation of a new institutional-wide structure that could help bolster the link between teaching and research within the UHI:

It [RAE] doesn’t necessarily encourage good research. It encourages people to move in a direction for getting publishable outputs, it encourages universities to try beef up their RAE ratings by buying in people who have good RAE potential. It’s a sort of transfer market, it is open at the moment as people are transferring from different institutions and as they do that they bring their research profile contacts with them.

I think the problem with UHI is that the RAE is just of limited scope. Out of all the UHI they focused on a very small amount of people at SAMS and ERI, and one or two other people here and there. But it’s too limited and narrow and doesn’t reflect the different parts of the institution. For example, if you were to look at [Name of FE partner] I don’t know how many people would have a return on the RAE. The only one obvious to me – and this is no disrespect to what you are doing – would be the [name of researcher]. He is the only person who stands out to be eligible for the RAE. I think there might be one person in [Name of another FE partner].

But then if you go to SAMS, [...] they have a big input [to RAE]. If you were to look at these in terms of student numbers and the impact of teaching they are minimal. And we are supposed to be talking about research and embedding

it in teaching and learning and all that sort of stuff. Well these are the places that focus on research and have very little to do with actual teaching. So there is a disconnect between this policy or the concept of promoting research on the one hand and teaching as mix on the other, that is research-led teaching or research-informed teaching. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006)

According to this respondent, the RAE imperative within the UHI was restricting diversity, discriminating against other, wider research areas and ultimately helping in drawing the boundaries around the definition of research and researcher. Moreover, the drive towards the RAE is seen to have a polarising effect, driving teaching and research apart. These reflections of respondents on the implications of the RAE within the UHI need to be set in the wider context of HE. Within the landscape of HE this polarising effect is not uncommon. As Henkel (2000) states the magnitude of change required to install research as a core activity for new post-1992 HE institutions could only be achieved in the short term by specifically introducing research-only appointments, thus making a division between teaching and research considerable if not commonplace. Nevertheless, within the UHI context – where the expressed policy drive is also to foster a research culture throughout its partners – the paradox noted in the quote above has a degree of currency.

The notion that the drive to achieve a good research rating can lead to more selectivity in terms of support for research was also expressed by George [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner]:

It [UHI] has given much more emphasis to the RAE than anything else. Which is understandable, because people are looking towards the quick win, getting money for the things we do really well. But from my perspective, it has also marginalised and down-graded other really good activities. There is more credit for publishing in journals for example than books, so if your research work is mainly directed towards writing books or other things, that is worth much less in RAE terms. For example, reports to governmental committees are quite influential and hard to get, nevertheless, in RAE terms, they are seen

as less important and therefore the UHI has seen it as a less important aspect to support or encourage within the partners. Personally I think that a bad step. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006)

Another respondent Victoria [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner]

not only feels there is a displacement of certain research areas but also observes the onset of a hierarchical mindset with some subject disciplines getting more attention than others:

I think there has been a focus on science. I can see why – it is to give them a better RAE rating – and from that better funding, and I understand the reasons behind that. But as a consequence of that, other research has been de-prioritised for a long time. And I think there is a bias against other non-science research.

I have been at the Research Committee meetings and I know I have to argue very strongly about getting other things to be considered. I think there have been some changes now. But I think some people, who because of their background are more comfortable with science research, are being privileged in terms of being supported for RAE purposes.

While I know that it is important to prioritise research that is close to the RAE, there has to be a long term plan to grow new areas. I think it's not good if the Research Committee and people that make decisions constantly focus on certain areas, say funding certain areas for the next six years and not looking at other research areas. They should have a strategy that considers growing capacity in other smaller areas too. I am talking about the social sciences here. (Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

Thus, for this respondent science dominates too much. However, despite these concerns, others involved in creating UHI research capacity suggest that the drive towards the RAE is not as competitive as one might find in other HE institutions. Talking retrospectively, in the post-RAE submission period, another respondent, William [leader/researcher at research unit attached to an FE partner] downplays the effects of the tensions highlighted above:

If this was a traditional university then, yes I would see the RAE being a critical filter [in the sense of being critical in selecting and supporting research areas]. But the aim of UHI is not only to do top research but also to be a regional UHI university to contribute to the region as well. I would say UHI has a regional development function and of course the RAE only comes every

five or six years [...] but I have not seen in the UHI the focus you would see in other universities.

Now if we in the colleges were being really pushed towards the RAE, I think we would have more submissions. That's not the case, and I don't know what we will get. To put it another way I have not seen the RAE as my top priority. Of course, others will be driven by the RAE. I did get in the last one [2001] and am in this one, that's true. But I think getting the highest grade in the RAE is not [...] the most important thing to be concerned with in the UHI. Especially as most fields or disciplines of research we have in UHI are starting from a relatively low level probably. We may have a few good people but, except in marine environmental science where we got a grade 4 last time, we are starting off relatively low. (Interviewed by author, July: 2008)⁹⁶

For this respondent the UHI's conceptual identity as a regional university has not been lost amid the new performativity associated with the RAE. The comment about FE colleges not being pushed towards the RAE is significant here. As this commentator argues the lack of pressure put on FE suggests that the UHI is not pursuing a hard hitting and uncompromising policy drive that pushes anything outside the RAE to the periphery. But it also raises questions on the role of FE in the drive to increase research.

In summary then, it is fair to say that there is a shared perception among those interviewed that RAE performativity discourse has had a prevailing influence in constituting the normative space for research expansion within the UHI from 2001–2006. In this regard the UHI is no different than any other HE institution. The interview evidence gathered shows that the new normative space resulting from the policy drive impinges on research choices, agendas and researcher identities ultimately creating a typology of what counts as research and who is a researcher. Although the UHI strategy encompasses inspirational statements and initiatives that are located under the sphere of organic policies, this study has found evidence that

⁹⁶ This particular interview was part of the four feedback interviews conducted 2008/9. As such it was outside the three phases and therefore not used to construct the emerging discourses.

this newly emerging normative space for research has evoked a degree of disquiet among many involved. In particular, the newly surfacing normative space has attracted censure that there is an imbalance between short-term and long-term goals. In other words, during the period of the interviews there was a perception that some research areas were being nourished and advanced while other areas were being neglected or ignored.

From the interviews cited here, the emerging discourse on research expansion in the UHI has displaced those wider inspirational goals of fostering a research culture that transcends all partners. If we look at the descriptive words and terms used we can see the inception of an interpretative reality that recognises polarisation. On the one hand the words and phrases such as: 'RAE focused', 'RAE is the main driver', 'looking towards the quick win', 'there has been a focus on science' and 'to give them a better RAE rating and from that better funding' can all be seen to recognise the instrumental necessity of the RAE for income generation. On the other hand, the idea that the RAE performativity can be corrosive to more organic policy aspirations is also evident in the following words and phrases: 'too limited and narrow and doesn't reflect the different parts of the institution', 'it has also marginalised and downgraded other really good activities' and 'other research had been de-prioritised for a long time'. For some respondents at policy-making level, the encroaching performativity of the RAE can be seen as instrumental in questioning the potential of the FE partners in contributing to research capacity. However, in order to gain a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of the struggles resulting from the policy drive within the UHI, it is necessary to explore in what way this emerging normative space has been legitimised and sustained. The following pages attempt to

show that the FE partners' own performativity discourse has had a prevailing influence in constituting the normative space for research expansion.

V.iii Further Education: Progress Towards A Research Culture?

The interview data also suggests that the transition from an *ad hoc* approach to research to a more structured one has not been smooth. Derek [UHI Executive Office] comments upon the messy realities of attempting to foster research expansionist policies within an organisation constituted from a number of FE partners with no history of carrying out research:

We have just gone through an exercise of refining the research strategy for seeking funding etc. And quite honestly, there were many at that meeting who have no understanding of the value of their research or other research within the UHI – how good it is, how it stacks up against other research in Scottish universities or other UK universities or international research in that same field. It's quite incredible. When it comes to the FE colleges, there is a lack of a wider understanding on the levels of research. This is partly because they are doing something unusual in the college or FE setting but it's not the same level of research of the average academic working at Dundee University. The researcher in FE would not get in the door at Dundee University. There are different perspectives on what they [the FE researcher] are doing and how good it is compared to other researchers working at other HE institutions. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

When it comes to research, the above statement encapsulates the 'othering' within the academic space, of insider and outsider relationships. The respondent, working as policy maker within the UHI, is cast in the role of an authoritative voice, occupying a privileged position because he has grasped the complexities of research in HE. He can confidently draw on a particular discursively constructed notion of what constitutes real or acceptable research (in this sense he creates a 'regime of truth'). This is reinforced and legitimised by his previous experience working within the university sector and of course by his current status and knowledge as a senior policy maker within the UHI. While those in FE partners are perceived as outwith

the dynamics of HE research and are thus typecast as outsiders, albeit invested with a particular level of understanding, they lack an otherwise widely accepted approach to research appreciation. In other words, they are seen as somewhat uninitiated into the wider constellation of HE research. There is also the suggestion that the few staff in the FE partners carrying out research activities have an unrealistic, perhaps even inflated view of the significance and value of their own research – especially when compared to that taking place in HE. Of course, this sort of mutual ‘othering’ should come as no surprise; after all, it is fair to say that the FE sector traditionally has never had a role in research. By way of example, when making reference to debates within the Research Committee (including with the respondent quoted above), Alistair [FE partner leader] lent a degree of legitimacy to the assertions above by outlining how difficult it was for him to comprehend the political and structural implications of research expansion within the context of the UHI:

I have a vision of a research culture that allows anyone involved in academic work who want to take it beyond the repetitive teaching and move towards research in some area. And I regularly have this discussion with [Derek] and others on what research actually is. And, for my sins, I have chaired [name of UHI Committee] and there is always this issue on what research actually is and means to the UHI. I don't think I realised how difficult research is and it was only when I got involved with the UHI that I realised how controversial and complex a subject research identity is. [And] the fact that you can really upset somebody by saying that they can't do the research they want because it does not fit into UHI focus on research. But on the other hand, some people's expectations in terms of financial support mechanisms can be unrealistic, too. (Interviewed by author, July: 2004)

Although the above indicates that wider debates on the role of research within the UHI took place, for some respondents they were not sufficiently rigorous to answer some fundamental questions. As John [senior researcher at a UHI research institute] stated:

The UHI has not addressed the fundamental questions surrounding research. It has no clear idea or direction. It needs to consider the following: What does research mean to different people within the UHI?

What are the specialist areas? How can we help support such areas?
(Interviewed by author, February: 2004):

The evidence gathered here shows that the new normative space resulting from the policy drive to gain the best RAE rating not only impinges on research choices, agendas and researcher identities but, in doing so, has exposed perceptions of fracture lines within the UHI policy structure. The data shows that the encroaching discourse of the RAE within the UHI serves to exacerbate rather than allay any potential misgivings harboured about the FE partners' ability to foster research from within their own institutions. Perceptions on cultural differences between HE and FE were seen as an obvious dynamic; as Derek [UHI Executive Office] notes:

There is an FE mindset that certainly prevents research from growing the way it should. There is certainly a big split between FE and HE, based on what I have come up against in the last five years at the UHI and in my experience at university, and that's some 25 years. I would say it was much polarised, certainly at the start. There were strong undercurrents working against us trying to implement policies that attempted to kick-start research. And if I can generalise here, to me FE staff still believe the myth regarding university staff – the old sherry in the afternoon and only teaching 8 hours in a week; the idea that 'what a life university staff have with their low teaching commitments, no wonder they can do research they have no other commitments'. Of course it's rubbish, universities are not like that at all. But there is still that mindset floating about, and they [FE staff and the sector] seem incapable to see research as an individual thing or grown out of a small collective of individuals. They [FE institutions] are very structurally orientated, they have to have 'the managers' and 'the structures' and their schools – too many chiefs in FE for my liking. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

Derek's rendering of FE staff construing university staff as having very low teaching commitments and relaxing with a glass of sherry in the afternoon adds weight to the depth of 'othering' taking place. It also highlights some of the defining characteristics that are part of the 'opting out' perspective. Expanding on the issues of FE working structures, Derek (*ibid*) went on to say:

I think FE staff resemble school staff in that they have set working patterns [...]. And of course, in FE when the students are on holiday, the academic staff are too. Now in the university by comparison, academic staff do the bulk of their research activities when the students are on holiday. If this [the UHI]

was an established university, my emails would not drop from about 180 per day to about 20 per day during the summer vacation.

They [FE staff] don't understand the reality of university life or, if they do, they are unwilling to admit it. And there is always 'well I am teaching 24 hours per week' and that's the excuse I hear often. I'm sure it's true for some but not all. Some universities have academic staff on considerable teaching loads and they still have to cram in the research activities on top of that teaching.

On the issue of the different cultures between FE and researchers, Emma [FE partner leader] had this to say:

At the minute what we have is the sort of world of teaching, learning or lecturing. I think we have a strong learning and teaching culture but, research-wise what we have is a few people 'over there' [research unit] who do a bit of research – something we don't really know very much about. And the research culture element will not really take hold until the climate is right and the opportunities are right, when people will be able to engage in it as part of their fundamental role and not as something they add on to their day when they have a few hours to spare and when they are not asked or expected to do something else. (Interviewed by author, November: 2007)

Not only does this college leader evoke the idea of the otherness of researchers within her institution and as being detached from the main working business of the college, there is also an acknowledgement that there is no meaningful climate (in the sense of attitudes and structures to nurture and support research) within which to take research from the periphery to a more central stage.

Philip [UHI Executive Office] lists four interlinked factors that he sees as constraining research expansion:

The first [is] the way the RAE drives research. The second is the constraints of time, you know, that people teaching so much of their time and developing new courses and so on. But there is very little time in the colleges to consider research and scholarship. The third is the current college contracts. In traditional universities the summer would be the time where much of the research would take place. But for example, in this college as from today, most of the staff will be away until August. I understand why the contracts are the way they are and that's the kind of contract that we are working with at the moment. And the time when the students weren't there traditionally in the

universities was the time when research happened. So the current FE contract is a real stumbling block for the development of a research culture or perhaps the spread of research into more areas throughout the UHI. Number four is about the need to have a more inclusive research culture which covers the sort of areas that don't attract RAE funding potential. (Interviewed by author, June: 2006)

Arnold [UHI Executive Office] adds weight to the outlook that FE cannot produce sufficient researchers from within the institution:

I think there is a tension existing between the FE and HE mindset. Again it comes down individual pockets, there are some people in the partners that are FE people for all intents and purposes and they are interested in research but they don't get the opportunity; they are constrained by time. There are other people in FE partners who have no interest in research and no doubt use the FE working conditions as a pretext to keep away from being involved. But if you look at [name of college], they are predominately FE but do some research. And again at the [name of research centre] at [name of college], they do research. But that's not come out of the FE culture, that's by bringing in an HE culture into the FE college. Same with [name of college], they are not FE people but HE people taken in. So I would not say that the vast majority of FE people are doing research. Rather the research done in FE colleges is predominantly from HE people imported in, who have engaged in research elsewhere and built up a profile elsewhere and they have come into the UHI family. But they would not have come in or been invited into any of the partner FE colleges if it wasn't for the fact that the college was part of the UHI. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006):

Arnold's comment about FE culture is noteworthy as it underscores important differences when making comparisons between FE lecturers and researchers. More specifically, it highlights how the research centres employ researchers from HE or the private sector and how they operate under different contractual conditions from those FE teaching staff delivering HE courses for the UHI. In other words, researchers within the centres are not seen as part of the normative FE structure and culture. In discussing the overall *lacuna* of research within the FE partners, Arnold also highlighted what he felt were weaknesses of FE managerialism:

Having experience as an educational manager, I am aware that there is a huge discord between the new managerialism culture in FE and the transformational culture that exists in HE. [...] And to use the terminology, HE tends to be transformational and FE tends to be transactional. And I am caught in the middle or the cross hairs of that because I am supposed to embed the

transformational ideas and I constantly run up against the managerialist transactional, [...] and how do you break that down? (*ibid*)

We view reality through the language and conceptual formulations currently in circulation and such portrayals from leading agents can perhaps work to exclude or devalue particular voices expressing the potential agency of FE in growing researchers. For Arnold building up a research profile is a long-term investment and FE managerialism impedes research because it tends to focus on short-term gains:

There tends to be the perspective that, unless there is a direct correlation between the input activity and output, then it's not worth it. And research is a future output and not an immediate one. And that's why it does not fit comfortably with the new managerialist thinking in the FE partners. (*ibid*)

Interestingly, Arnold's use of the term transactional to describe FE management style resonates strongly with the views of the ex-college principal and now educational management consultant cited in chapter one. It seems that management thinking and agendas are certainly embroiled in any discussions on potential barriers to the embedding of research orientated policies within the FE partners.

The idea of cultural and structural barriers was also recognised by those located within the actual FE partners as well as from those outside, as Emma [FE partner leader] notes:

But the biggest challenges are cultural. As I said at the beginning, we want research to become part of how we think and work. I want it to tick away as part of our everyday activities and that's not happening at the moment. There is also a parity issue in terms of where people see themselves in relation to the university sector, for example the UHI versus a traditional university and FE versus the UHI. So in this parity issue people might be asking 'Am I doing the things that a traditional university is doing?' 'Why am I doing this when in fact other universities are doing something different?' So, I think there are these sorts of challenges to overcome.

I think there is an FE culture that is not geared towards research and it takes more time to change cultures when starting from a different position. I mean let's face it, we don't start from 40 years history of university activity, we start from many years of vocational and practical activity with strength in teaching

and learning. So I think we need to just keep chipping away at the old culture, it's a long drive.

But I don't think it's a major stumbling block. I am a bread and butter FE person and I have never really been involved in an HE environment, but my perception of the UHI and our research activities is not that of an existing university: it is that of a new hybrid university. [...] I think what is hard for us is that the word 'university' conjures up a whole set of preconceptions and the word 'college' conjures up a whole set of different preconceptions and in fact we are neither a college nor a university when using that vocabulary. We almost need a better word to make it easier for people to move forward. (Interviewed by author, November: 2007)

Evidently, for this FE leader changing the old FE culture is a long-term process. The fact that she describes herself as a 'bread and butter FE person who has never really been involved in an HE environment' might explain why she concentrates on identity issues and fails to engage in other issues such as making value judgements on the policy trajectory of UHI research and the role of RAE. Neither are there reflections on how other FE leaders encourage research. The suggestion that her staff could 'move forward' by a simple rebranding of the UHI has more in common with a marketing public relations (PR) perspective than an appreciation of the complexities associated with research within the HE landscape. The notion that FE colleges have a long way to go both culturally and structurally before they can contribute to UHI research in a meaningful way is widely expressed. More recently, one respondent John [senior researcher at a UHI research institute] noted that FE has still to make significant changes:

We want this to be an internationally recognised university, and in Scotland universities have to do research, and the bench mark for research is governed by the RAE. But in order for the colleges to do that, to reach that level, they need to introduce massive institutional changes both to the systems and the attitudes within the organisations. [...] This expansion in the UHI can happen, but you need the right people, you need a principal and a leader in a research area to be working closely together to get these changes done. Once each partner has a research unit that functions like a university department then research can spread around the academic partners. I do think we should work harder to strategically build something research-related in each partner, if we

can, as a way of spreading research throughout the UHI. Most people think that developing research is simply getting a few research people in but it's much more than that. You have to have a whole administration to support research; you need administrators who know the funding systems, accountants to look after the costings etc. So we have a way to go yet. [...] We have made considerable progress over the last few years, but in terms of research, the UHI is not ready to be a university yet, we need to develop things even more than we have done.⁹⁷ (Interviewed by author, July: 2008)

As stressed elsewhere, the UHI is made up of a number of institutions, each exhibiting different organisational strategies, structures, management systems, local histories, associated myths and rituals, thus making the idea of superimposing a monoculture problematic. In Foucault's terms, the discourse emerging within the normative space of research creates 'regimes of truth' that see the buying in of researchers as the quickest and most effective way to build a research profile. The quotations above highlight the fact that research expansion within the FE partners will not be an easy journey. Ball, drawing on Foucault (1981) claims: *'Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it'* (1994: 2). Considering such sentiments, the discourse of performativity emerging within the UHI with respect to research can be seen to undermine or perhaps even de-legitimise any notion or aspiration that the FE sector can grow sufficient researchers. It can even be seen to destabilise the policy goal of fostering a research culture within the UHI – one transcending all areas of the UHI. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the idea of fostering a research culture within the different FE institutions may be more of a utopian aspiration than a reality. As Derek [UHI Executive Office] notes:

On the subject of the research strategy, right from the word go, I never saw any possibility of getting research activities introduced in range and scope evenly across all the UHI partners. To think otherwise in the early days was

⁹⁷ This particular interview was part of the four feedback interviews conducted 2008/9. As such it was outside the three phases and therefore not used to construct the emerging discourses. It was included here as it highlights certain continuity with the main themes identified from earlier interviews.

unrealistic but you needed to show confidence and exaggerate the hopes. UHI research was really going to be focused in certain areas, hotspots, if you like, disjointed rather than uniform throughout. Given the fullness of time and if and when everybody involved with the UHI network has the same employer and is working under the same systems, until that time research will not be as uniform as that indicated or hoped for in the strategy. Until that time, research will be introduced, developed and encouraged in an *ad hoc* manner. SAMS being the exception as it already was a research institution before joining the UHI. They did research only and no teaching. (Interviewed by author, August: 2004)

What is being outlined here is the view that FE partners lack the necessary skills, structural support mechanisms and attitudes to foster and sustain researchers. There is also the suggestion that the UHI is too fragmented in terms of operating conditions. Though the above comments cannot not be taken as irrefutable evidence from which to reach concrete conclusions on wider parallels, such comments are nevertheless from key active agents, who have been conditioned and tempered by the various dynamics of the UHI research expansionist process and, as such, may be seen to give a unique insight into the issues and dynamics associated with research expansion. When it comes to fostering research within the FE partners, there seems to be the view that there is still much to be done both culturally and structurally, as well as a need to introduce more intrusive policy directives such as radical changes to the current working contracts for those teaching HE within the FE institutions. However, it is important not to allow these perceptions to obscure some of the broader initiatives set in train by the UHI in the policy drive to promote what we termed organic research earlier.

V.iv The Performativity Discourse within the FE Partners: Can it Create a Normative Space for Research?

Many respondents in this study expressed the view that FE is not geared up to absorb UHI research imperatives, especially those aligned with the RAE. Of course, the notion that expanding research within an HE/FE hybrid institution such as the

UHI would be a challenge was never downplayed, being fully recognised from the outset in official documentation.⁹⁸ Although the literature on FE and research is rather limited, there are some commentators who have ventured into this area and thus may contribute on some level to the issues being raised in this study. Rowley, in a pilot study considering the tension between research and teaching in FE, found that staff involved in the delivery of undergraduate and equivalent level courses experienced difficulties in carrying out research because of heavy teaching commitments: *‘Many staff in such institutions have carried out and still carry relatively heavy teaching loads, and only infrequently have access to sabbatical leave and other opportunities that allow them to focus on research’* (1996: 75). Other commentators such as Elliott (1996b) claim that the collective world of FE does not have a research culture and, with the exception of a limited number of self-motivated and dedicated individuals, is not engaged in research of an exploratory nature, i.e. research activities beyond market research. Underlining this peripheral status of research, Elliott states:

The existing FE environment is unsupportive of research: it is student full-time equivalent numbers that count. This is a major factor. Funding mechanisms do not encourage or repay research activities. [...] Research is therefore not seen by the colleges’ principal external funding agency as a valued activity, and this may thus be hard for managers to resist. A consequence of this is that staff who are engaged in research are generally not supported by college management with funding, are often regarded with suspicion by colleagues, and are given little or no time allowance to carry it out. (Elliott, 1996b: 107)

According to Elliott (*ibid*) the current priorities and operational pressures of FE, especially those arising from managerialist agendas, may be seen as a highly effective ideological device for neutralising the development of a research culture.

⁹⁸ As the 1998-2001 *UHI Strategic Planning Framework* notes: *‘The development of research represents one of the major challenges for the UHI and one to which it is fully committed.’* (1998-2001:58)

Articulating the general lack of value placed on research, Brotherton observes:

They [research activities] have been, and still are in many respects, viewed by both management and staff alike as potentially useful things to do if time and resources allow after the critical activities of curricular development and delivery have been attended to. As a consequence, research and related activities are not seen by senior FE managers as activities which should lie at the heart of either the institution's strategy or its operational priorities. (Brotherton, 1998: 311)

Given that these commentators are discussing the English FE sector in general, and not a unique hybrid FE/HE institution such as the UHI, one could not, of course, suggest an explicit correlation between the observations above and some of the issues identified in this study. Nevertheless, setting aside this obvious limitation, the observations in relation to the English FE sector resonate with some of the perceived practical and conceptual difficulties identified by respondents in this study and other observations concerning the developments of a research culture within the Scottish FE context.

In very recent times, the aspiration to promote a research culture within FE has not been something unique to UHI Executive Office. In a recent Scottish Further Education conference on exploring the potential role of research with Scottish FE, the Depute Chief Executive of the SFEU, John McCann (Paper at SFEU Research Conference *'Enhancing Quality Through Research'*) rejected tokenism in respect of research and called for a holistic approach firmly embedded in the college culture: *'all parties need to work together – it is not about 'researchers' and 'non-researchers' – research needs to become part of the educational landscape rather than being regarded as something that is nice to have as an additional extra'* (9th May, 2007: 1). In an age of the blurring of the boundaries between HE and FE, this new trajectory for FE may arguably be simply part of the political *Zeitgeist*.

However, the structural and cultural difficulties to surmount were not glossed over at the conference, as the keynote speaker Professor David James noted:

At present, learners and potential research staff are pitted against SMTs or the funders/stakeholders. There are further tensions in the power relationship between researchers in Scotland's colleges and those in the higher educational institutes. There is no parity in the rates of pay and the complexities of arranging for FE researchers to carry out their activities can be difficult. Scotland's colleges are run as businesses and research must therefore produce results that are easily seen.

If a research culture is to be established in Scotland's colleges, then it is important to acknowledge that there are difficulties. The subject level, physical and psychological 'silos' need to be broken down. Further, the promotion of research requires leadership that has vision and future planning, and management (how to get there) instead of managerialism. Managerialism is premised on the idea that the manager already has all the answers. (*ibid*)

For Professor James (*ibid*), the Scottish FE sector has a number of structural and socio-cultural barriers to overcome or, in his terms, it has 'silos' to be broken down before it can have any chance to cultivate a research culture. The term socio-cultural is mobilised in this context to signal an account of human thought processes and fields of judgements that recognise the essential relationship between these processes and their own cultural, historical and institutional settings. In this context, the thought processes and fields of judgements are located in FE. In considering such socio-cultural barriers, James notes the inevitable negative effects likely to arise because of the overall lack of appreciation and understanding of research, especially the time and effort needed to do research. He also notes that if colleges are to create a space that enables staff to carry out research then college managers and staff alike need to set aside the penchant to desire tangible, visible and immediate outcomes and appreciate how research in the long term is central in mobilising intellectual growth within their institution and the sector more generally. This position can be seen to resonate with Simmons and Thompson who note in their study on creativity in FE: '*Teachers may welcome [creativity] as signifying*

open-mindedness, exploration, the celebration of difference and originality [...] an automatic opposition to the language of targets, to instrumental skills, the measurement of outcomes and the dogmas of accountability' (2008: 603). But as these commentators note, such notions of creativity currently occupy a rather paradoxical position in educational discourse: whilst they are being sold as a symbol of liberation from the confines of centralised instrumental systems of education – in other words performativity – they are increasingly an important element in those systems. Thus, in educational discourse, the notion of creativity is fast being appropriated by the discourse of performativity.

Set against the backdrop of the evidence found in this study, the new approach James advocates – one which calls for the subversion and peripheralising of some of the hegemonic management systems in the sector – will not be easy to implement. However, when it comes to the sort of barriers that need to be displaced, it is clear that his views resonate with the views of the respondents in this study. Indeed, some of the views expressed by those working in the UHI FE partners can be seen to offer insights into the sort of problems likely to be encountered if research was to be encouraged in FE colleges. In other words, the interview data of this study can be useful in that it can add detail and perhaps colour to James's reference to the physical and psychological 'silos' in need of breaking down.

The study found evidence from those located within the FE partners that their institutions did not have the necessary structural arrangements to support and nourish research. As Victoria [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] noted:

We don't have a culture in the college for research; we don't even have a room dedicated to research where researchers can work, meet up and discuss aspects of research. We have a research committee at the college but it does not seem to take action. There is endless talking about things but no action. I get really fed up with it all and I ask myself why I am doing it through you [the FE partner institution]. For example, human resources are incapable of dealing with research or anything outwith the normal FE work [...] They say, well, we don't have a scale called research assistance, so they pay them £7.20 per hour, I just don't understand it. I have to find a way to pay them more money. [...] So there isn't any such research culture in that sense. There is a complete lack of understanding amongst some levels of staff within the institution. (Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

As highlighted elsewhere, academic partners are required to draw up their own research strategies, setting up research committees to encourage, co-ordinate and support research activities that both align broadly with the aims of the UHI research strategy and also reflect their own individual strengths, opportunities and interests. However, Victoria's evident sense of frustration highlights the significance of group dynamics within research committees as well as how committee remits and agendas are set by individual institutional leaders. Her concerns raise questions on the sorts of performativity criteria being used to both guide and measure the success of the research committees within the UHI partners. Such questions can be used to signpost future studies on research within the UHI.

The point about human resources being unable to deal with research assistance underlines identity issues within the FE institution. In Victoria's view the human resource department was too inflexible to accommodate unfamiliar identities outside the normative space of FE. Despite earlier claims of a blur between FE and HE, some gaps still prevail. As Victoria further notes:

I'm not that sure about other colleges' partners but in my experience it is up to the individual. I have absolutely no support from my institution in terms of real encouragement to making research more prominent.

I am seen as a maverick, which I think says something about how research is perceived within my institution. I know that [name of other researcher/lecturer in different FE partner] is also seen as a maverick within their institution. We are individuals who are seen as not fitting into the FE system.

It goes beyond my immediate colleagues to senior management. And I think it creates a whole kind of scenario because if you see people as mavericks then you don't see them as part of the main stream of the organisation. And if you don't see them as part of the main stream, they are operating on the outside of the main business, as it were, and you don't develop the kind of infrastructure to support them in what they are doing. (*ibid*)

For Victoria this inability to identify with her role as a researcher and naturalise it within the other activities of the institution created barriers to the fostering of a research culture. On the issue of contractual working conditions, Victoria also noted too much inflexibility on the part of her institution:

You have to keep a certain level of contract work up if you want to be in the game, as it were. I mean it is constantly evolving like a business and you need to be thinking ahead. [...] But the college seems to put no mechanisms or systems in place for research. They never say 'well, you have all these contracts, how you will manage it? What can we do to help you to do this?'

There is no recognition from the college for my extra days outside the normal working period. Then I spend six months unravelling and explaining to the college why I had to work in the summer and why I am due time off or perhaps even possibly a payment because the college after all got paid for my work and I should have a share in that. They can't even sort out that kind of fundamental issue. (*ibid*)

On the subject of how colleagues perceive research within the HE environment, Victoria observes a lack of awareness of HE working practices:

University lecturers don't get 12 weeks off per year and that is why they can do research. I think it's an interesting issue. You know, my colleagues are constantly complaining that they are not being treated as university lecturers. Well, one of the consequences of being treated as a university lecturer is that they would have a reduction on holidays and be given more outputs to achieve in terms of producing research. That would not bother me. But I am just not sure how many of my colleagues would be willing to opt for that. I do know that a lot of my colleagues sign off in June and will turn up mid August. That is great, good for them, if they do. But we are not going to develop a university culture with that going on. (*ibid*)

When offering reasons why some people in her institution steered away from being research active, Victoria maintained that some of her colleagues thought that the institution simply lacked the necessary supporting structures:

In my institution we have people who have a PhD but don't have a track record in research. They are not prepared to do it. In fact, they are probably wise because they know that if they want to do research then they will have to do it off their own back and, from my experience, most likely on top of everything else. And people here are not prepared to do that. That's one thing different between teaching and research. Once you get a contract to do a piece of research you have to do it. If you fail to produce on time or produce poor quality research, then that jeopardises any future research, it jeopardises funding for the next piece of research. There is a lot of pressure and it's very public and if you do one bad piece of work then that is the end of it. (*ibid*)

Magnus [lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] not only discussed the research committee but also made some interesting observations on the role of research centres within the college:

I'm not sure about how they [the research committee meetings] are actually helping me to become research active. They are more of an update of what the different researchers in [name of research centres attached to the institution] are doing. The committee is not well attended, lots of apologies and I guess that says something about how people feel about it. Not the most important priority, in fact we don't have many senior people attending either.

Some researchers from the centre attend but they are not regulars. They don't seem to be very eager to mix with teaching staff to try and encourage them to be involved with what they are doing. But I can understand that, we work on different levels. I don't think the committee is all that vital to determining their [researchers'] own research; am sure they have their own meetings in the centres. (Interviewed by author, December: 2006)

Thus, for Magnus there are very few opportunities for FE teaching staff to have mentor support from researchers within the research units. This lack of connection between those within the research centres attached to FE institutions and teaching staff has been observed by others. Indeed, a recent EIS survey of UHI staff claims:

'It is important to note that there seems to be a clear distinction between ordinary lecturers who deliver the degree courses and the research staff' (EIS Response to the Government's Consultation on Award of University title to UHI Millennium

Institute, 19th November, 2010: 3). Magnus also maintains that leaders are pragmatic in their policy approach on raising the research profile of the college and how many teaching staff don't have the penchant to pursue opportunities for research:

I think that despite the college saying they want more research in the college for teaching staff to become involved in research, deep down they [college leaders] know it's the research centres that will bring research money in and raise the profile of the college and of course the UHI. As most of us teaching HE here [Name of FE college] would admit, we simply don't have the expertise and, to be frank, most don't have the actual drive and enthusiasm to get involved in something we don't understand or feel we would be offered sufficient support from the institution. There are no incentives to do research. (*ibid*)

Magnus also suggests there are no research role models among most senior staff:

A lot of our managers and directors don't even have research degrees never mind research experience so they probably feel out of their depth and unfamiliar with the whole research culture thing. They got promoted because of their ability to manage teaching resources, staff and curriculum. So when I think about research I think there is no real zeal or enthusiasm from most of us in the college. Well not at the moment anyway, maybe in five or ten years when we start hiring lecturing staff, managers and leaders who have experience in research, a track record in research, people who know the score, have worked in a university doing research.

And of course, that's why the college has opted to set up research centres, run by people with a proven research background from outside FE. It's the only short term way to raise the profile of the college in terms of being part of the UHI research community, but I don't think you could say that the research centres we have actually encouraged research amongst the teaching staff within the college itself. I don't see any evidence of research collaboration between teaching staff wishing to do research and those in the research centres. We share the same employer and college grounds and that's all. (*ibid*)

In highlighting some of the financial difficulties, Alistair [FE partner leader] notes the difficulties of securing funds to support research:

If someone wants time off teaching to do research that has no commercial or financial benefit or can't gain external funding, then someone in the institution has to come up with a large amount of money to support this research request. So it's difficult to find the money to support research that may turn out to be a lot of exploration of loss leaders – research that brings in no money. I think one of the problems is that we are not fully tuned into the funding side of things. Traditional, established universities with a good proven research

profile are no more likely to keep funding research units from their own monies; they need the aid of external funding. (Interviewed by author, July: 2004)

George [researcher/lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] talks about how the FE contract can be used by some as a shield to hide behind:

It may well be that the offer of regular sabbaticals is a way in which we can encourage people to get more involved in research and hopefully demystify this “demon” of the contract that people sign up to, and in some case hide behind to dodge being involved in research. But then people need to feel supported by their institution. There is no point in bidding for and winning a research contract and then finding that your departmental head or institution are not willing to give you the time to do it or that you have to spend a lot of effort justifying that it is important and relates to the bigger picture with regards to the UHI promoting research capacity. (Interviewed by author, July: 2006)

One respondent, Melisa [lecturer teaching HE and involved in action research at an FE partner] was relatively positive about actual staff commitment to research within her institution, claiming instead that it was more of a loss of confidence in leadership that slowed down the process of the culture being embedded:

I don't think that we are way off the mark in achieving a research culture in our department. We have some people who are interested and keen to get involved and that is a good start. I think the difficulty at the moment is the lack of direction from management. They are confused between college priorities and UHI priorities and much more comfortable with FE systems and that is in the main teaching students numbers. Research is much more complex and unfamiliar to management – for my line manager anyway. They tend to steer away from taking an active interest and asking questions about research. I can understand that. (Interviewed by author, January: 2007)

Feelings of disillusion also came from Gordon [a past member of lecturing staff at an FE partner, now working at a Scottish university]:

Unfortunately, I perhaps suffered in that I was one of the first staff to go through this process, so it became apparent that not all processes were actually in place nor indeed that research policies were in place.

The other barriers tended to be more of a political nature, it wasn't clear who had responsibility for the research – was it the UHI or college? I felt there was generally a feeling from staff that you were doing something that wasn't perhaps contributing to the core activity of the faculty.

I actually became really disappointed – and disenchanted – with the way [name of college] engaged with the whole concept of research. [...] Yes, there were strong statements on encouraging research which specifically talked about ‘using the skills and enthusiasm of staff’ or something like that. [...] I volunteered myself on to the research committee, but all we seemed to really do there was talk, discuss ways to write bids, etc., which is of course important. But when anyone raised practical questions about staff being given time to carry out some research, or released from teaching duties or things like that, there was just blanket opposition. In the end I just got disenchanted with the whole thing and stopped going to the committee, and so did others. (Interviewed by author, December: 2005)

As well as to these wider concerns, Gordon also attributes his experience of frustration to the organisational culture of his particular department:

My faculty head had a perspective that research should be limited to a kind of ‘service facility’ for their own internal faculty objectives, like market research, and beyond that interests such as mine actually constituted a kind of ‘disloyal’ drain on my teaching time availability. Talking to colleagues who were interested in research, I think they generally came to feel just like me – if you wanted to do research then you would have to do it in your own time. I was made to feel I was indulging in some sort of personal, almost ‘selfish’ agenda in pursuing research opportunities. (*ibid*)

Similarly, another respondent, Percy [lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner] notes the difficulties with finding time and the overall lack of appreciation of the UHI policy drive on research expansion:

It would be nice if we had more time to go to conferences; it would be nice if we had time and encouragement to carry out research and publish papers. But what we are trying to do is operate as HE lecturers in an FE setting with an FE management with their FE quality and audit systems. I get encouraged to write courses which involve scholarly activity, but not actual research. We don’t have time to do research at this college. And of course research time and resources between different subject disciplines are different and I am not sure if the college has grasped that. We never talk about UHI strategy and how it fits into our own aspirations. We have this FE outlook only, and it is more evident at the moment with all the changes going on. (Interviewed by author, January: 2007)

For Percy creating time to carry out research activities is elementary to any attempts to encourage research. He also makes clear that the managerial configuration which is culturally and organisationally focused on FE simply lacks the necessary understandings and motivation to translate UHI policy into a reality. As stated

elsewhere, the new normative space for research within the UHI has in a large part been determined by a drive to enact the performativity discourse associated with the RAE. The results of this have not only influenced the trajectory of research choices, agendas and ultimately researcher identities but also revealed perceptions of incipient fracture lines between FE values, cultures and structures and the UHI policy drive for fostering a research culture. From the interview data, it is argued that the encroaching discourse of the RAE within the UHI serves to exacerbate rather than allay any potential misgivings harboured about the FE partners' ability to foster research from within their own institutions.

Despite the widely held perceptions that the UHI focus was too heavily leaning towards the RAE, the successive Strategic Plans (from 2000 onwards) set out a number of policy initiatives specifically targeted at giving guidance, encouragement and support for research expansion within the FE partners. Yet, it seems paradoxical that there was very little evidence from the heterogeneous sample of respondents to suggest that these wider policy initiatives directed at expanding research had an overall impact in moving research from the periphery to a more central stage within the FE partner institutions. Indeed, as already highlighted, the most visible research activities within the FE partners have come about by means of importing researchers (mainly from HE or the private sector) into the institutions rather than growing research from the FE staff base. Although there is a myth of FE having the ability to be agile and responsive, to absorb and enact new forms of performativity, the embedded managerialism and its gospel of performance indicators – the plethora of prescribed policy directives designed to monitor, inspect and judge FE activities – is perceived to form socio-cultural and structural barriers or, in James's (2007)

terms, the ‘silos’ that must be broken down, or at least subverted, altered or neutralised in some way before the sector can have any chance to cultivate a research culture. It is here we can see clearly the emergence of the FE performativity discourse identified in the ‘Performance Imperative’. However, when offering insights into how research expansion is progressing within the UHI, it is important not to fall into the trap of constructing a simplistic dichotomy between managerial thought and action within the FE discourse of performativity and the more organic policy aspirations detected in the UHI strategic planning documentation surrounding the fostering of a research culture. A simple contrast between managerialism and the aspiration to foster a research culture is inadequate as a means of grasping and conveying the subtle dynamics found within organisations. It is important to be mindful of the fluid nature of organisations highlighted earlier. Subscribing to such polarisation conveniently overlooks the complex cultural heterogeneity found within organisations. In particular, it ignores notions that managers and leaders – like all other sense seekers and interpreters in the organisation – are shaped by different biographies and are embedded within different institutional structures and social networks of power. In other words, such polarisation fails to consider the infinitely complex and shifting character of the individual. Despite the coercive potential of the discourse of performativity in FE, policy makers and managers should not be perceived as mere ‘automatons’ happily enacting the rules, aims and objectives of the overarching performativity blueprint. Rather they are active agents inscribed with different levels of motivation, understanding, aptitudes and ethical frameworks. Under this broader analysis, managerial decisions will – to varying degrees – operate within a contextual dimension where individual, cultural and temporal properties as well as

biographical histories intertwine and act in shaping meanings and responses to policy imperatives. Unfortunately, mapping such complex cultural heterogeneity depicted above cannot be explored in any detail in the context of the scope and scale of this particular study. However, the issues raised above can perhaps be used as a signpost for the need for future studies on the impact of UHI policy.

The above account is not claiming that, under the auspices of performativity, moments of shared understanding, focus and practices or what Ball, drawing on Jessop (2002) terms the 'spatio-temporal fix' (2008: 5) could never materialise and transcend divisions within the sector. There will of course be shared practices and fields of judgement but, at the same time it is equally valid to say that, when subjected to a more fine grain scrutiny, departures and disparities accompanying any elements of shared thought and action will emerge. It is argued here that by adopting a polarised position – especially one that suggests that managerial thinking and its gospel of performance indicators are the main cause of the paucity of research – we risk simplifying and ironing out the complexities and differences between institutions. This study rejects any notion that institutions necessarily exert a coercive and one-sided imposition of power. Rather, it recognises more complex accounts of the institution as comprising of paradoxical, fluid and contradictory processes and practices. As such, institutional power is perceived here as being associated with a conglomerate of dynamics including persuasion, complicit co-operation and consensus, as well as darker elements of coercion and oppression. From the interview data, certain common perceptions can be seen to emerge and point to the agency of FE partners' cultural values and structural mechanisms in the policy drive on research expansion. The evidence gathered in this study also

suggests that individual motivations and aspirations can play a rather paradoxical role, as highlighted by one respondent: they claimed that their colleagues complained about not being treated like university lecturers and not having the time to do research, but at the same time they probably would be unwilling to give up FE working conditions and sign up to an HE orientated contract – especially if that meant a loss of annual holidays. The potential difficulties and tensions involved in moving from a traditional FE institution towards absorbing structures and value systems aligned with HE have been recognised throughout the UHI. As Thomas [FE partner leader] noted:

As a major partner, the college must itself come to terms with the implications of joining the HE sector across a range of issues. Some of these, like shortfalls in financial and physical resources, will be difficult to resolve but are straightforward conceptually. Others have a cultural significance, relating to new academic obligations and expectations, new priorities, new attitudes and perceptions. They are very much concerned with ‘the way we do things around here’, much harder to resolve. (Interviewed by author, December: 2006)

On the subject of ‘the way we do things around here’ one respondent, Peter [with management responsibilities at an FE partner] may be seen to encapsulate how the FE performativity discourse may actually impede the overall aspiration to expand research by locating it on the periphery of the main activities of FE:

The view from my window is quite simple. As an operational manager I have to achieve targets set by strategic managers. These targets fall into three main categories. Firstly, hard targets: the business imperative, so to speak. They are usually centred on financial matters and efficiency gains such as increased student numbers, reducing teaching hours for each subject unit, etc. These are the must achieve targets. If they are not achieved there are implications for staffing levels, resources, etc. Ultimately, the operational survival of my department depends on securing these hard targets. Secondly, firm targets: These are usually centred on business improvements, e.g. quality enhancement, use of ICT in delivery methods. These are generally must achieve targets. However, if they are not achieved the implications are not as serious as for missing hard targets. Thirdly, soft targets: these targets are considered the nice to have targets and generally, for most FE managers, the topic of research activities falls into this category. There are few implications if these soft targets are not achieved. They don’t impact on the operational

survival of my department, and I am sure that will be case for most of the other managers.⁹⁹ (Interviewed by author, April: 2009)

However, as stated before, individual, cultural and temporal properties as well as biographical histories intertwine and act in shaping meanings and responses to policy imperatives. From the study data, it seems that particular values and behaviours encouraged or underwritten by UHI policy makers (and articulated in strategic planning documents) are inevitably filtered through certain political, economic and social predispositions and thus open to re-interpretation. In some cases they may be simply ignored by both individuals and partners involved in research within the UHI. In other cases, UHI research expansionist policies are set against an actual institutional web of significance, which can – as the response above indicates – locate them on the periphery.¹⁰⁰

VI Conclusion

The analysis of the main research question of this thesis, namely **‘What are the emerging discourses arising from the policy drive to foster a research culture within the University of the Highlands and Islands?’** was guided by five subordinate questions, as set out in the introduction. The following account will first present the overall findings of this study within the context of these five questions and conclude by offering some recommendations which, it is hoped, may be useful in informing policy decisions on research expansion within the UHI.

⁹⁹ The author conducted one final interview with a respondent with managerial responsibilities within a FE stakeholder institution. The interview focused on one open-ended question: ‘Where do research activities feature within your overall responsibilities?’ This interview was used to determine if the main themes within the FE performativity discourse developed from the previous interview phases (2004-2007) were still valid at the time of writing (April: 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Despite considerable changes taking place with regards to research expansion, evidence of the overall lack of a research culture within the FE partners can be seen in a very recent survey conducted by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS). The survey states: ‘*The vast majority of UHI Partner College lecturers do not engage in any research or scholarly activity which HE lecturers do within the HE system*’. (EIS Response to the Government’s Consultation on Award of University title to UHI Millennium Institute, 19 November, 2010: 3)

Question One: How is the idea of a research culture perceived within the context of the UHI?

When discussing what they perceived as a research culture, all respondents involved in UHI research policy making, drew comparisons with their previous experiences working in HE or their involvement in research institutions and, as such, common features emerged. In other words, the study found that there were shared understandings of notions of a research culture among those respondents with past histories working for other HE institutions and research institutions. These shared understandings were more than a set of attitudes or value systems. They further incorporated professional relationships and climatic conditions such as structural and organisational supporting mechanisms to encourage and sustain research as well as to promote research expansion. Moreover, external performance indicators for funding were also seen to play a significant role in the shaping of a research culture. All the aforementioned factors were perceived as constituent parts of a research culture and generally associated with HE. It was also widely recognised by this group of respondents that the UHI's conception of research culture *per se* was not out of step with that found in other, more traditional, institutions. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the study found that for those located within the FE partners, their lack of previous experience of working in HE or involvement in research institutions was apparent and meant that they were less confident in describing the constituent parts of a research culture. The study further found evidence to suggest that a research culture existed in pockets only – with research institutions such as SAMS and ERI being commonly cited. The study also established that most respondents felt that a research culture was already embedded within these research institutions before they became absorbed by the UHI. Within this context, the role of the UHI has been perceived as sustaining or strengthening the already existing research culture.

Question Two: How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the policy aspiration of creating a research culture?

The study has aligned itself with the notion that cultures are generally fluid and that members of a cultural group cannot be perceived as *automata* or passive entities soaking up cultural imperatives in a simple one-way process of memorising, mimicking or reproducing. Instead, it has been argued that cultural codes, values and behaviours are filtered through certain political predispositions and are continually re-interpreted and re-inscribed by individuals immersed in a culture. Against this backdrop, it has been argued that particular values and behaviours encouraged or underwritten by UHI policy makers (and articulated in strategic planning documents) would inevitably be informed by certain political, economic and social predispositions and thus open to re-interpretation. All of this would make the idea of unified research culture problematic. Indeed, on the question of the UHI's ambition to generate a unified research culture – perceived here as the creation and embedding of structures, norms and values that encourage research activities within and between the UHI partners – the study found that this had failed to materialise across the UHI partners. The study further found that, although policies to encourage and expand research activities may well have woven themselves through different institutions and groups linked to the UHI, they did not seem to have been compelling and resilient enough to pacify or obliterate potential or actual sites of resistance in the form of counter-cultures and therefore embed themselves sufficiently to constitute what might be referred to as a unified culture throughout.

Question Three: How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive both the barriers and driving forces in promoting a research culture?

The study found both structural and socio-cultural barriers to overcome. Perception of poor communications between the different partners and the Executive Office were identified as part of the structural barriers. Moreover, the FE contract was perceived as having a significant influence in contributing to the structural barriers as it failed to open up a space for research. Further, the study gained evidence that the FE partners' performativity discourse – with its plethora of prescribed policy directives designed to classify, monitor, inspect and judge FE activities – had a prevailing influence in constituting a normative space that did not create a positive climate in which research might embed. With respect to socio-cultural barriers, the study found that the FE performativity discourse tended to confer values, beliefs, social structures and identities that emphasised teaching delivery over and above research activities. With FE partners being organisationally and culturally predicated on generating their income from the provision of a taught curriculum, teaching delivery was identified as the shared touchstone and not research.¹⁰¹ The study also noted evidence to suggest that some managers within the FE partner institutions lacked the self-confidence to engage in research in any meaningful way. As a consequence of being conditioned by FE performativity, some managers were found to be reluctant to encourage staff to become involved in research.

¹⁰¹ The emphasis on teaching at the expense of research was also noted in a very recent EIS survey of UHI staff. The survey found that high teaching commitment in the UHI FE colleges '*effectively prevents research and other scholarly activities.*' (EIS Response to the Government's Consultation on Award of University Title to UHI Millennium Institute, 19 November, 2010: 3)

Question Four: How do individuals within the UHI Executive Office and stakeholders affected by the UHI research strategy perceive the impact of the Research Assessment Exercise on the organisation and structure of policy drivers aimed at expanding research?

There was a shared perception amongst the respondents that the RAE performativity discourse has had a prevailing influence in constituting a normative space for research expansion within the UHI from 2001 to 2006. The RAE drive had increased research expansion and, as such, could be seen as a success. However, it was also felt that the increasing importance of the RAE within the UHI had served to exacerbate rather than allay any potential misgivings harboured about the FE partners' ability to foster research from within their own institutions. In other words, the study found evidence suggesting that the RAE had been instrumental in highlighting how the FE performativity discourse created a normative space that placed little value on research being carried out. The study also showed that the new normative space resulting from the RAE policy drive impinged on research choices, agendas and researcher identities – ultimately creating a value framework of what constituted research and who was a researcher.

Question Five: What are the emerging researcher identities within the UHI?

The study has found evidence to suggest that the dominant discourses of RAE performativity and FE performativity can be seen to have set up a normative space privileging certain identities, subjectivities and associated actions. As such, the RAE performativity discourse created a normative space placing research and researcher within a specific value framework. Naturally, those areas that are set to score the highest rating on the RAE would occupy the upper end of the framework, whilst those with only future potential for RAE occupied the lower end. In a sense, the RAE was being used as a yardstick to measure the potential “worth” of research.

Under this performativity framework, those who would or could not follow the script set by the RAE criteria were excluded from the value framework and, as such, not perceived as a researcher. As a consequence, the RAE performativity discourse rendered the FE partners' contribution as lacking in terms of growing researchers. This exclusionary perspective was encapsulated by Derek [UHI Executive Office] quoted earlier:

When it comes to the colleges, there is a lack of a wider understanding of the levels of research. This is partly because they are doing something unusual in the FE college or FE setting but it's not the same level of research of the average academic working at Dundee University. The researcher in FE would not get in the door at Dundee University. There are different perspectives on what they [the FE researcher] are doing and how good it is compared to other researchers working at other HE institutions. (Interviewed by author, April: 2004)

This sense of forging an identity around research performativity has been noted by Edwards *et al.*:

Many academics welcome and applaud the very emphasis now placed on research by governments and universities. As Ball points out, with this emphasis academics can fashion themselves as 'triumphant selves' with subjectivity that encompasses feelings of pride and achievement. Ball argues that there is something very seductive about being ascribed excellence, being relevant, and about performing well, having that recognised. [...] what this implies is that research performance economy is more than calculation. It is also about building a culture and forging an identity [...]. Another way of putting this is that the research regime stimulates and is stimulated by desire, one powered by signifiers of excellence and relevance. (Edwards *et al.*, 2004: 126-125)

This study further found evidence to suggest that the RAE performativity discourse can be seen to have both stimulated and circumscribed debates on research expansion. On one level it can be described as having been instrumental in changing what many respondents described as an *ad hoc* approach to a more focused outlook on research development, generating in turn the all-important income for further growth. However, on another level, this performativity discourse may have reinforced certain misgivings about the FE sector and, as such, may have closed

down or delayed any potential debates surrounding the actual role and contribution of FE in the drive to expand research. In fact, in the context of research expansion, the RAE framework can be seen to have exposed specific weaknesses of the FE sector. This study has shown that in the light of FE performativity criteria, the identity of the researcher is seen to attain a somewhat alien or even transgressive status, as being outside the FE normative space. As cited earlier, this sense of exclusion/inclusion was encapsulated by a researcher/lecturer working for a FE partner institution who claimed: *'I am seen as a maverick, which I think says something about how research is perceived within my institution. I know that [name of other researcher/lecturer in different FE partner] is also seen as a maverick within their institution.'* Set against the wider backdrop of evidence cited in this study the signifier 'maverick' seems apt as it is generally referred to as a non-conformist, a person seen as unconventional and detached from the customary practices, cultural norms and values of the group.

Reflections and Recommendations

As stated elsewhere, discourses in this study are seen in terms of their social setting in which they simultaneously create conditions of possibility and constraint. They produce certain interpretative realities, hierarchical power relationships as well as individual and communal identities of consent and dissent. Guided by these broad questions this study has identified a number of emerging discourses, each of which, it is argued, should be read as providing a partial understanding of the impact of the overall policy drive to foster a research culture within the UHI. Their importance relates to the way they show how the policy drive has been absorbed and interpreted by the respondents. In doing so, they show how different actors are producing

meanings, investing individuals and groups with certain identities and attributes, contesting and constructing responses when dealing with research expansion policy.

This study has argued that the performance imperative with its attendant RAE and FE performativity discourses has emerged to occupy a dominant place in the understanding on research expansion within the UHI. However, it is important to underline that it is not claimed that these discourses have operated, or are operating, to wield coercive power, imposing unnecessary bureaucracy on everyday events or their will on the part of one dominant group upon an unwilling and subordinate other. Rather, taking a lead from Foucault (1980), it is argued here that discourses operate in a more subtle capillary fashion – depending upon the specific context – penetrating into the very core of individuals constructing their meanings and realities. The RAE performativity discourse, for example, can be seen to have created webs of significance where inclusion and exclusion appear to have shaped attitudes on research and researcher identities. The FE performativity, on the other hand, with its focus on teaching delivery, has failed to open up a space for research activities to become enshrined in the form of mission goals whereby research would no longer be a matter of individual pursuit – carried out by ‘mavericks’ – but of collective interest to the organisation instead.

The study had two aims: firstly, to lend insights into debates surrounding the strategies for building research capacity and the development of research cultures in dual sector or hybrid institutional setting. Secondly, in terms of offering direct benefits to the UHI, by exposing the different sorts of assumptions and realities that shape and inform the meaning of a research culture, the study may help to inform

future policy making on the expansion of research within the partners. Considering the latter, the study concludes by making two practical recommendations which the author believes will help move research from the periphery to a more central stage within the FE partners. Firstly, there seems to be a strong case to argue that a working contract similar to that found within other Scottish HE institutions should be offered to those teaching HE within the FE partners. It is argued here that replacing the current FE contract with an HE contract would be an important first step in creating a climate for research to grow and flourish. In other words, an HE contract – incorporating an actual focus on scholarship and research – would be a shared touchstone among the different FE partners, and through time would contribute towards the creation of new research related networks and collaborative ventures. Secondly, current staff development appraisal schemes within the FE partners should include a research orientation. This should be conducted with a research active member of staff or research active subject specialist brought in as a consultant from elsewhere. The staff development appraisal process should result in an action plan attending to particular research interests, current or future research activities and staff development needs required to develop and sustain a research profile. Moreover, opportunities for sabbaticals should also be available. The agreed outcomes of this staff development appraisal should be made available to the UHI Research Office.

At the time of writing the RAE is being replaced by a new performativity framework – namely the Research Excellence Framework (REF).¹⁰² Inevitably,

¹⁰² The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It will replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and will be completed in 2014. The REF will be undertaken by the four UK higher

the UHI policy makers will have to alter their structures and thinking to absorb the new framework. Within this context, it is hoped that the findings from this study may help stimulate debates on how any new policy initiatives on research expansion within the UHI should progress.

education funding bodies. The exercise will be managed by the REF team based at HEFCE and overseen by the REF Steering Group, consisting of representatives of the four funding bodies.

VII Appendices

Appendix 1

Extracts from UHI research policy documents and strategy planning documents.

In undertaking research, the UHI seeks to:

- Address the perceived research needs of national, European and international society, commerce and industry and, in particular, produce knowledge which will enhance the Scottish Highlands' and Islands' educational, social, cultural and economic life.
- Expand and intensify research activities to ensure controlled growth across a breadth of discipline areas in a balance of fundamental, applied and inter-disciplinary research.*
- Develop a research portfolio and sustain a research culture which makes the quality of its research expert, professional, responsible and relevant to the needs and ambitions of the diverse region of the Highlands and Islands.
- Promote personal research development of academic staff throughout the UHI network.*
- Achieve cost effectiveness with due accountability.
- Support student learning and inform the UHI curriculum.*
- Provide a framework for the institutional and network-wide management of research, and harmonise best practice across the network.*
- Promote the ethical basis of research in higher education in line with UHI's Code of Ethics.

(Para A2, Research Policy, UHI Website, March 2009)

The current research strategy within the UHI Research Policy has many statements of intent that can be seen to be orientated towards the longer term development of intellectual growth, a number of which can be seen to have originated in the early Strategic Plan (1998–2001):

Whilst continuing to build on established research strengths in its network, the UHI will develop its research profile in line with its stated research policy by:

- Strengthening the research infrastructure.*
- Developing internal research funding strategies appropriate to the goals of the UHI.*
- Concentrating on areas which are likely to attract external funding.
- Using the intellectual energy of staff, which is a prime asset.*
- Incorporating adequate training provision and support documentation.*
- Expanding on collaborative links with industrial/commercial organisations throughout the Highlands and Islands and other academic institutions.

- Demonstrating the links between research and teaching.
- Addressing staff career planning and research training.*
- Recruiting, training, supervising and assessing postgraduates.
- Providing a UHI network-wide position on Intellectual Property Rights.*
- Commercialising and protecting research.
- Publicising and promoting research.

(Para A3, Research Strategy, UHI Website, March 2009)

Statements with an asterisk (*) can be traced back to the 1998–2001 Strategic Plan.

Appendix Two

Scale of Expectations

	Staff Teaching at the Level Of					
	HNC/ D (Degree Years 1 & 2)	Ordinary Degree	Honours Degree	Taught Masters	MPhil	PhD
Scholarship/Research Activities						
Membership of a relevant professional body	E	E	E	E	E	E
Membership of HE Academy	M	M	M	M	M	M
Attended academic/ professional conferences	E	P	M	M	M	M
Published in relevant professional journals	E	P	P	M	M	M
Presented paper(s) at conferences		E	P	M	M	M
Taken part in collaborative research project(s)			P	M	M	M
Published in relevant academic journals			P	P	M	M
Secured funds for research project(s)					P	P
Expectation	M – minimum	P – preferred	E - encouraged			

Appendix Three

Ethical Statement

Doctorate Research on the Policy Drive to Foster a Research Culture within the University of the Highlands and Islands

**Researcher: Patrick O'Donnell
Interview Request Form**

Brief description of Doctorate Research

This doctorate study will explore the emergence of a research culture within the now established University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHI Millennium Institute). The study will contribute to debates about the changing nature of universities and university research. The fieldwork includes interviews with UHI staff. All data gathered will be anonymised and the identity of individuals will be kept confidential.

I am happy to be interviewed about the University of the Highlands and Islands
yes/no

I do/do not give permission for my interview to be audiotaped for subsequent anonymous transcription and analysis (please delete as appropriate).

I understand I am free to withdraw from any or all of these at any time.

I understand that any information I give will be anonymised and my identity as provider of this information will be kept confidential.

NAME..... **SIGNED**.....
DATE.....

Appendix Four

The overall respondent sample interviewed during the period 2003–2008 included:

- Senior staff members from the UHI Executive Office contributing to policy making on research expansion;
- Those working for the UHI Executive Office who contribute to policy making on research and related issues and also work on certain curriculum areas as acting intermediaries between the UHI and the other partners in promoting research;
- Members from the UHI partners involved in the UHI Research Committee and/or heading/leading research units within partners;
- College leaders from UHI partners (some of whom are actively involved in the UHI Research Committee);
- Individuals from UHI research institutions;
- Individuals from the UHI involved in promoting research within the partners;
- Lecturers in FE institutions either actively involved or trying to be involved in research;
- Founding members of the UHI project.

Appendix Five

Respondents in the first round of interviews:

1. Senior policy maker involved in research within the UHI Executive Office. (August: 2003)
2. Senior staff member of a research unit at an FE partner institution and involved in the research committee within their FE institution. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (August: 2003)
3. Policy maker at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for faculty networking and involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. This individual was also research-active at the time of the interview. (February: 2004)
4. Researcher within the UHI partner research institution and involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (February: 2004)
5. Founding member of the UHI and academic advisor. (April: 2004)
6. Researcher/lecturer at FE partner and involved in the research committee at their institution. This respondent was also involved in UHI Executive Research Committee meetings. (April: 2004)

Appendix Six

Respondents in the second round of interviews:

1. Senior staff member within the UHI Executive Office with responsibility for providing funding for staff development including research degrees. This individual was also active in supporting research students within the UHI and involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (May: 2004)
2. Researcher within a UHI partner research institution and involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee (already interviewed during the first phase). (May: 2004)
3. Researcher from a UHI partner research institution employed as researcher and involved in developing policy and supporting PhD students. (May: 2004)
4. Senior leader at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for the running of the UHI and, as such, member of a number of committees including the Research Committee. (May: 2004)
5. Leader of an FE partner and member of the UHI Research Committee. (July: 2004)
6. Senior staff member of a research unit at an FE partner and involved in the research committee within their institution. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee (already interviewed during the first phase). (August: 2004)

Appendix Seven

Respondents in the third round of interviews:

1. Leader of an FE partner of the UHI and long term supporter of the UHI project, chairing and serving on a number of committees and working groups. (December: 2006)
2. Senior staff member at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting intermediaries between the UHI and the other partners. Responsibilities include to encourage and support research activities within partner institutions. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (July: 2006)
3. Senior staff member at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting intermediaries between the UHI and the other stakeholders. Responsibilities include to encouraging and supporting research activities within partner institutions. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (August: 2006)
4. Senior staff member at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting intermediaries between the UHI and the other stakeholders. Responsibilities include to encourage and support research activities within partner institutions. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (August: 2006)
5. Senior staff member at the UHI Executive Office with overall responsibility for curriculum design in specific areas, acting intermediaries between the UHI and the other stakeholders. Responsibilities include encourage and support research activities within partner institutions. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (July: 2006)
6. Researcher and lecturer at FE partner of the UHI and involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (Aug: 2006)
7. Leader of an FE partner of the UHI. (November: 2007)
8. Lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner of the UHI. (December: 2006)
9. Lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner of the UHI. (January: 2007)
10. Lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner of the UHI. (January: 2007)
11. Lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner of the UHI (January: 2007).

12. Lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. (February: 2007).
13. Senior staff member at a research unit attached to an FE partner and involved in the research committee within their institution. Also involved in the UHI Executive Office Research Committee. (September: 2006)
14. Former lecturer teaching HE at an FE partner. At the time of the interview teaching at a Scottish university. (December: 2005)

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