Moments of Vision: HRM and the Individualisation of Academic Workers

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DECLARATIONS

I declare that this work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly global knowledge economy universities are recognised as strategically important institutions due to their knowledge creation potential. This has led to a period of significant change for higher education (HE) sectors across the world as national governments have sought to influence their strategic direction. In the UK the adoption of market principles and the creation of a mass system of HE delivery has caused universities to reform their long established operating practices and become more ‘business-like.’ In an effort to improve standards of people management in universities the government introduced the Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education (RDS) initiative in 2001. RDS required universities to produce HR strategies identifying detailed HR objectives and systems for managing the individual performance of staff according to a model of Human Resource Management (HRM).

This research, based on a study informed by ethnographic methods, provides a critical evaluation and analysis of RDS and considers the extent to which it reflects a specific neoliberal policy trajectory seeking to reconstitute the nature of academic work through a process of individualisation. My data points to the existence of such a strategy that has been only partially successful. Academics have gradually become enfolded into the discourse of managerialism, leading to an erosion of their status and authority and the collegiate traditions and practices from which it derived. There has been an evident transference of power to managers, a heightened presence and involvement of HR personnel and a growth in the size of HR departments. But the discourse remains contested, leading to a complex picture of resistance at different levels of the university. I conclude that RDS was an ultimately flawed strategy. The attempt to introduce a homogeneous model of HRM into an area of work that is characterised by complexity, not only misjudged the rather unique nature of academic work but also, as a consequence, risks damaging the core of the academy itself.
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## GLOSSARY

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUT</td>
<td>Association of University Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CVCP</td>
<td>Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FHE</td>
<td>Further and Higher Education Act 1992</td>
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<td>GATS</td>
<td>General Agreement on Trade in Services</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>HEFC</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council</td>
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<td>HEFCW</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for Wales</td>
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<td>HEQC</td>
<td>Higher Education Quality Council</td>
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<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
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<td>JNCHES</td>
<td>Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff</td>
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<td>NATFHE</td>
<td>National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education</td>
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<td>NPM</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
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<td>PI</td>
<td>Performance Indicator</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Principal Lecturer</td>
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<td>PRP</td>
<td>Performance Related Pay</td>
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<td>QAA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency</td>
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<td>RAE</td>
<td>Research Assessment Exercise</td>
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<td>RDS</td>
<td>Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education</td>
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<td>REF</td>
<td>Research Excellence Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFC</td>
<td>Scottish Funding Council</td>
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<td>SL</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
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<td>UCEA</td>
<td>University and Colleges Employers Association</td>
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<td>UCU</td>
<td>University and College Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>University Grants Committee</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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Moments of Vision

That mirror
Which makes of men a transparency
Who holds that mirror
And bids us such a breast-bare spectacle see
Of you and me?

Thomas Hardy (1917)
Chapter 1
The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

1.1 A Changing Landscape

For several years now the higher education (HE) sector worldwide has been responding to global forces which have affected universities in a variety of ways (Marginson 2007; Boden and Epstein 2006). The ability to participate in the global knowledge economy has become ‘an increasingly important policy imperative in developed and developing countries’ (Epstein 2007:1) and universities have become significant contributors to national economies by virtue of their knowledge creation potential. In the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands ‘governments have identified higher education export as a promising economic activity and an important source of national income’ (van der Wende 2003:195) and have sought ‘to reposition higher education as a global commodity’ (Naidoo 2003:249). Globally, demand for higher education has increased and it is no longer confined to an ‘elite’ audience (Vincent-Lancrin 2007:3).

In the UK, successive New Labour governments have, since 1997, sought to increase the participation rate in higher education to 50% of 18 to 30 year olds (DFES 2003). This example is illustrative of the belief, held by governments across the world, that the development of a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce is vital in order to obtain a competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy. Consequently, a process of massification and marketisation of HE has taken place, causing universities worldwide to re-think their long-established traditions and practices and to embark on a process of reform in an effort to become more ‘business-like’ in their affairs. As a result it has been suggested that a ‘fundamental shift has taken place in the organisational character
of universities’ to the extent that they have now become ‘big corporate bureaucracies’ (Scott 2000:8).

Previous studies have explored this changing global context for universities and possible responses to it (see for example Clarke 1998; Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and there has also been significant debate concerning the wider implications of a more commercialised, global HE sector. Such debate takes place around two polarised discourses, both of which are examined critically throughout this thesis. One is the neoliberal modernisation agenda, which was recently re-affirmed by Peter Mandelson, the secretary of state for Business, Innovation and Skills, when launching *Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy* (BIS 2009), the government’s new long-term vision for the future of HE. University reform, it is argued, is essential to the creation of a sector that is entrepreneurial, customer focussed and responsive to the needs of the new economy in a globalised world. According to this legitimising discourse, changes to the sector have vastly improved the quality and standards of HE ‘delivery’. As a result, a better-educated and more knowledgeable workforce generates greater wealth-creation, to the ultimate benefit of all in the wider society.

Such a modernisation discourse is integral to current UK government HE policy, which, as I explain in chapter 3, has followed a clear and distinct trajectory leading to the current neoliberal manifestation of the university. In *Higher Ambitions* (BIS 2009), the government emphasises the need for universities to forge ever-closer links with business, to equip graduates with employability skills, and to become even more responsive to student needs. Accordingly, academics are expected to internalise such logic, leading to improvements in standards for the student as consumer.

*Higher Ambitions* was foreshadowed by two previous reports. First, the *Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration* (HMSO 2003), commissioned by Gordon Brown and chaired by Richard Lambert, a former Director-General of the CBI, concluded that there should be a much greater degree of collaboration between universities and business. Following this, the *Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills* (HM Treasury 2006),
chaired by Sandy Leitch, the former Chief-Executive of Zurich Financial Services, concluded that there should be a culture change leading to universities becoming far more ‘business-facing.’ Employers should, according to Leitch, exert much greater influence over the design of university degree programmes to ensure that they produce graduates with the necessary skills that business actually wants. As a consequence, they should become more employable and more productive and, ultimately, British industry more competitive.

This popular discourse currently dominates debate concerning the role of universities in the UK and, as a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult to articulate alternative views. Yet there is a counter discourse that refutes neoliberalism and suggests that changes to the HE sector globally have led to the abandonment and degradation of traditional academic values, an attack on the professional autonomy of academics and a commodification of higher education that ultimately threatens to undermine the sector as a whole (Brown 2003; Shumar 1997; Miller 1995; Willmott 1995; Winter 1995; Wilson 1991). In the UK, Kline (2009) contends that the marketisation of HE has led to the creation of a highly controlled and stressful environment, where bullying has increased as a result of the ‘toxic combination of an intensification of work and reduced autonomy for academic staff’ (2009:23). Callinicos (2009) argues that recent developments are illustrative of an increasingly neoliberal approach to UK government HE policy, which has led to ‘the systematic subordination of universities to a logic of competition and the internalisation of that logic into the very way in which universities function… (2009:17).

In the context of these contrasting discourses the purpose of the university is now hotly debated. Critics of the changes argue that imported conventional management practices are not appropriate in academic institutions, given the unique nature of their work. Further, some argue that long established traditions and values of collegiality and learning as a social good are being challenged by neoliberal conceptions of business efficiency and managerialism, with suggestions that universities have been transformed into little more than knowledge production factories as the UK government has imposed ‘…an industrial-capitalist architecture of knowledge creation on the sector’ (Boden and Epstein 2006:225).
University decision making, it is argued, is increasingly based on managerial rather than educational considerations (Elliott 1998). At the time of writing in 2010, Elliott’s suggestion appears particularly prescient, given the number of UK universities that are considering the closure of whole departments in an effort to address the funding cuts resulting from the economic downturn (THE 2009), with many others proposing redundancies (UCU 2009).

The UK HE sector has moved from being one that was relatively autonomous to one that is heavily state-regulated (Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007). With neoliberalism driving economic policy-making in the UK, universities are now subject to a far greater degree of external control as the government has sought to increase its influence over the HE sector. Such control is achieved indirectly, or from a distance (Rose and Miller 1992), by the government giving significant powers to a variety of audit and regulatory bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA has considerable authority to issue and enforce guidelines which seek to direct the ways in which universities deliver their teaching and learning. Funding councils in England, Scotland and Wales also derive considerable power arising from their role in allocating funds for teaching and research, the latter via the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Hence, it has been suggested that a kind of audit culture (Shore and Wright 2004; Strathern 2000) has emerged with the QAA and RAE being the most obvious mechanisms of control (Keenoy 2005).

Such external changes to the organisation and control of the UK HE sector, have, in turn, led to changes in the way that universities are managed and organised internally. In the context of broader global shifts leading to greater local competition, universities have sought to implement a more corporate style, based on hierarchical systems of management. According to dominant neoliberal discourses the traditional approach to managing universities was outmoded and lacked the rigour to manage universities in a cost-effective manner. Under conditions of neoliberalism there is a need to gain greater control over the means of production, including academic labour. The creation of business units, with an emphasis on financial management and the monitoring of individual performance against corporate objectives, brings the control that is believed to be necessary.
As a consequence, academics have been ‘shaped’ by a process of neoliberal subjectification (Dean 2007; Rose 1996) and a growing managerialism (Deem et al 2007; Deem 1998) that restricts the autonomy of academics by changing the conditions under which they carry out their work.

Universities in the UK have increasingly sought to introduce systems of human resource management (HRM) to ensure greater control over the management of staff. HRM is a strategic approach to managing people that is ‘individualistic rather than collective in its approach to employee relations’ (Armstrong 2006:11) that originated in the US in the early 1980s as a response to increasing foreign competition. Business organisations sought to become more competitive by stimulating their workers to deliver higher quality though the use of ‘high commitment work practices.’ Ideologically, HRM emphasises the importance of a tight fit between corporate and HR strategies to achieve a highly committed, high quality and flexible workforce (Guest 1997). The influential Harvard School of HRM (Beer et al 1984) originally suggested that HRM should be the concern of all managers, rather than simply being the preserve of the personnel function (Armstrong 2006). A central tenet of HRM is the stimulation of individual performance through the use of various ‘high commitment’ and ‘performance management’ systems. There is an underlying assumption that committed workers should be willing to ‘go beyond contract’ (Storey 1992) and, as a consequence, become a valuable source of competitive advantage.

The successful operationalisation of this strategic approach to HRM requires that the pluralist nature of organisations, and the predominantly adversarial nature of employee relations that traditionally existed in UK organisations¹, give way to a more harmonious, unitarist atmosphere. This concept, which is particularly significant in the context of my thesis, was originally developed by Fox (Kochan 2007) in his work in the 1960’s and early 1970’s. Fox argued that managements’ employee relations style might best be expressed as being typified by either a unitarist or pluralist frame of reference (Legge 2005). Those holding a unitarist frame of reference emphasise the common interests of employers and employees,

¹ see Blyton and Turnbull 2004 for a detailed critique of the troubled nexus of HRM and employee relations in the UK
usually with regard to the survival and growth of the organisation. Consequently, any conflict is perceived as ‘aberrant (dysfunctional, transitory and caused by ‘troublemakers’)’ (Legge 2005:73). Rather, unitarism characterises ‘a team unified by a common purpose’ (Fox 1966:2 quoted in Blyton and Turnbull 2004:31) where the legitimate authority of leaders – the managerial prerogative – is recognised as absolutely necessary in order to guide the organisation in pursuance of its goals.

In contrast, a pluralist frame of reference understands an organisation as ‘a miniature democratic state composed of sectional groups with divergent interests...’ (Fox 1966:2 quoted in Blyton and Turnbull 2004:31). Far from believing an organisation to be a unified team, a pluralist frame of reference accepts that an organisation contains a variety of groups, legitimately holding different interests and opinions concerning the strategic direction and operation of the organisation. Here conflict is to be expected as these different groups compete and bargain ‘to achieve a negotiated order out of diversity’ (Legge 2005:73). Significantly, conflict is not always deemed dysfunctional but, rather, is perceived as a healthy means of expressing opinions, airing differences and, ultimately, understanding, learning and moving forward.

That HRM is a unitarist approach to management does, then, raise a number of questions which I explore in this thesis. For unitarism and pluralism represent two extremes of a continuum, leading Fox to develop a typology of management/employee relations patterns emphasising the combination of the original frames of reference. As Legge (2005) explains, the traditional pattern existed where managers and employees both held unitary frames of references and sophisticated paternalism existed where employers were pluralist and employees unitarist. Yet unitarism remains central to HRM, suggesting ‘that it supposedly has little tolerance for the multiple interest groups and multiple expressions of interest’ (Storey 2001:12) that exist in the large majority of organisations - including universities.
In order to create such a unitarist environment, HR work ceases to be seen as a separate activity carried out by a support function, but is rather devolved to line managers who assume a vital role in motivating staff to peak performance. The role of a line manager is to focus on the ‘soft’ aspects of management – nurturing and developing - rather than monitoring and control. Individual performance management and regular use of staff appraisal are central to the approach. Reward schemes are designed to promote a strong identity with corporate goals and a range of individualised strategies are used, such as profit-related pay, performance-related pay and competence-based schemes (Waring 2007:143).

However, there remains a fundamental tension at the heart of HRM that has yet to be resolved which I discuss in detail in chapter 2. For these soft aspects of HRM must inevitably be balanced with harder, rational issues of budgetary control and cost constraints, leading some to argue that HRM is more ‘rhetoric than reality’ (Legge 2005). Others contend there is little evidence of a clear link between HRM and improved organisational performance (Keenoy 2007).

Notwithstanding such concerns, universities in the UK have, over the last ten years, been turning to HRM to facilitate enhanced control over academic labour by implementing systems based on individual performance management. A major operationalisation of HRM in universities was initiated by the ‘Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education’ (RDS) initiative. RDS was introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2001 (HEFCE 2001) following the Dearing (NCIHE1997) and Bett (IRHE1999) reports into the future of UK HE, both of which argued there was a need for better leadership and a more effective approach to people management in universities. The scheme made a percentage of universities’ funding contingent upon the production of a detailed HR strategy that identified specific and costed HR objectives.

RDS specifically emphasised individual performance management. Such a notion, and indeed the particular system of HRM itself, remains potentially problematic in a university setting. For alongside the inherent tensions explained above, it is argued, there is a more insidious aspect to HRM (Legge 2005; Townley 1993). Whilst HRM is ostensibly about mutuality and the need to
develop vital human assets in a unitarist environment, it can also be seen as a tool for controlling and manipulating the actions of workers through compliance (Willmott 1993) and as ‘a wolf in sheep’s clothing’. (Keenoy 1990:3) It also betrays a rather disturbing belief that people can be managed as ‘objects’ (Grey 2009:150) in the same way as any other resource of the business. One of the principal questions I address in this thesis is whether or not the use of HRM in HE is actually part of a wider neoliberal strategy that aims ‘to undercut the power and control of academics over knowledge production and reproduction…’ (Naidoo 2003:250).

These issues highlight concerns over a growing level of managerialism in universities that runs counter to the values of an environment built on democratic structures and traditions of collegiality underpinned by high degrees of trust. Urged by government, universities have taken an increasingly corporate approach and become much more ‘managed’ institutions, in order to meet the challenges of the modern environment. Recent examples illustrate the types of managerial practice that are emerging throughout the UK sector. At Keele University in 2007 a senior lecturer was reprimanded for circulating an open letter that, it was asserted by the university, contravened his colleagues’ ‘right’ not to have their ‘confidence in senior management’ undermined (THE 2008). The HR department also warned him that disciplinary action would be taken against him if he should circulate any further material of that nature. This follows the case of a senior lecturer dismissed by Wolverhampton University for, amongst other things, making allegations of bullying by the university’s management (THES 2007).

Taken as isolated incidents such cases may represent no more than the routine tensions and conflict of any employment relationship. However, it is apparent that there have been significant changes in the way that people are managed in HE and there is a growing incidence of HRM techniques, promoted by the government’s RDS initiative. Given the national strategic importance of the HE sector in an increasingly globalised economy it is important to investigate more closely the effect that HRM is having by means of a detailed case study. Accordingly, in the next section I discuss the research questions that I address in this thesis and which shape my subsequent analysis.
1.2 Research Questions

Section 1.1 showed how changes to the global landscape of HE had affected the UK HE sector. With neoliberalism informing government policy making, the UK HE sector has become highly regulated (Deem et al 2007). Externally, by creating a number of audit and regulatory bodies, the government has established a system that enables it to maintain a form of arms length control over the sector (Rose and Miller 1992). Internally, universities have implemented more corporate and hierarchical systems of management in an effort to become more ‘business-like’ in their affairs in the face of increasing marketisation and massification of the sector. In order to achieve a greater degree of control over academic workers universities have turned to HRM, following the government’s RDS initiative. As a consequence, academics find themselves subject to an increasing level of managerialism that challenges long established collegiate traditions and accepted norms of professional practice. The professional autonomy of academics and the ability to self-manage has long been seen as the most appropriate means of enabling ‘knowledge workers’ to effectively carry out their work, which often involves working with high degrees of complexity and subjectivity. Yet the introduction of such a controlling technology as HRM, dedicated to individual performance management, is likely to compromise that ability.

In the context of such change the purpose of this research was, then, to consider the local impact of a global phenomenon. By concentrating specifically on the implementation of RDS in the UK HE sector I investigate the extent to which management were able to implement their HR strategies and the impact this all has on the management of the employment relationship. The critically important issue that I address concerns the extent to which the professional autonomy of academics is challenged by HRM and that, as a consequence, has further implications for the UK HE sector as a whole.

The principal research question I address is therefore: to what extent and how do contemporary HR strategies in HE reflect a neoliberal policy trajectory that seeks to reconstitute academics’ role and the nature of their employment relationship? I answer that principal question through a critical evaluation and analysis of the
implementation of RDS, based on case studies of three UK universities, in which I address the following specific research questions.

First, what is the policy context of HE in the UK that impacts ultimately on academic staff and how has this been translated into HR strategies, notably the RDS? Clearly universities do not operate in a vacuum and it is important to be aware of the broader global context within which changes to UK HE have taken place in order to gain a clearer understanding of the justification for such changes. The purpose of this question is to evaluate the significance of emerging neoliberal discourses of modernisation, arguing that in order to improve overall organisational performance, universities need to manage the individual performance of their human resources more effectively. I consider this question in chapters 2 and 3.

Second, how have the processes of reform of HR in HE been implemented and managed and to what effect? This question is designed to consider the extent to which reform of HE has actually been influenced by discourses of modernisation. It will lead to an analysis of the form and content of each university’s HR strategies and associated policies and the manner in which these were operationalised and by whom. This question also explores the changes that followed RDS and how these impacted on academics and the manner in which they carried out their work. These issues are addressed in chapters 5 and 6.

Third, how have staff responded to these HR strategies and their attempted implementation? Consideration of the impact of HR strategies on academic staff is a central issue in my thesis that this question addresses. The attempted introduction of HRM, an inherently individualistic system of people management, represents a significant challenge to the traditional collegiate and democratic approach to managing people in universities. As a consequence, such a challenge could lead to an element of tension, conflict and, potentially, resistance. The aim of this question is, then, to explore such issues and is addressed in chapter 7.

Fourth, what discernible impact have HR strategies and initiatives had on universities as institutions and academics as employees? This question seeks to
evaluate the degree of change that has resulted from the UK government’s RDS initiative. This is important, for the extent to which HR strategies have changed the conditions under which academics perform their work is central to understanding the significance of RDS in the context of neoliberal discourses of modernisation. The consequences of such findings will clearly inform further analysis of the broader implications for the UK HE sector. I consider this final question in chapters 5, 6 and 7 before drawing together in chapter 8, the conclusion.

1.3 Autobiography of the Question

It was my own personal experience of change that originally stimulated this research study. Since joining the lecturing profession in the UK in 1992, the year of the Further and Higher Education Act, I have been subjected to a considerable degree of change in my own institution. The 1992 Act was intended to remove the binary divide in HE by allowing many colleges and polytechnics to acquire university status and, as a consequence, 1992 can be regarded as a critical turning point in the evolution of the HE sector in the UK. Although the sector had been changing prior to 1992, from then on the pace of change accelerated. For individual academics like myself, the perception of constant change is likely to create a degree of uncertainty and insecurity, leading me to question the implications of such conditions. In this section I explain the nature of my own career and show how the changes that I have experienced influenced me to shape my research questions.

I define my own career according to three co-existent roles. First, I am a lecturer undertaking teaching, scholarship and associated administration in the particular setting of a post 92 university. Since 1992 I have observed and experienced a number of developments which have fundamentally altered the nature of my job, including my relationship with students and with university managers. Such developments include inter alia; a huge increase in student numbers and a concomitant rise in class sizes; growing pressure from university managers to
increase not only pass rates, but also the numbers of ‘good degrees’ (defined as 2:1 and first class) that are awarded; an escalation in the amount of administration and form-filling to ‘prove’ that a task has been performed; the expansion of management hierarchies and a decline in the atmosphere of trust and goodwill that existed when I was first appointed.

Second, as a lecturer specialising in HRM and Employee Relations I naturally spend a significant proportion of my working life rehearsing the theories, concepts and critical debates associated with the rising tide of HRM in the workplace. Such debates, central to the teaching of HRM, are based around empirical work indicating a lack of substantial evidence that HRM actually leads to enhanced performance and, hence, suggesting that the primary motivation is control of the workforce. There are serious questions that arise pertaining to the use of such a homogeneous approach to managing people given the increasingly diverse and complex nature of business organisations. Yet, as an employee of a rather unique and complex organisation that is a university, I find myself being subjected to an increasingly HRM-led style of management, with all the trappings of staff appraisal, performance management and quality assurance mechanisms. As a consequence, my daily working life has come to resemble a rather disturbing form of participant observation, requiring ongoing self-reflection and analysis.

Third, I am a committed trade union member and activist. I believe strongly in the rights of workers to be represented collectively in the workplace. I was, until recently, a school union representative and I am currently chair of my local university branch. The latter role brings me into regular contact with senior university managers and HR personnel as a union negotiator, via the formally constituted consultation and negotiation machinery. At the school level I had regular meetings with the Dean and other members of the management team. As a result, I am closely involved in dealing with the effects of the ongoing changes to my own institution, and also at the regional level, that arise from broader developments to the HE sector.

The combined effect of these three areas of my work has been to give me a fascinating multi-dimensional perspective on the changing landscape of HE. I
openly acknowledge that such an experience is likely to influence my views and judgement of exactly what is taking place in HE and make no apologies for that. However, as an academic, it is this background that provides the context for my research and leads me to want to step back and reflexively consider the many implications of the changes that I have experienced at first hand and which are being played out across the wider HE sector. I did this by undertaking a case study of three universities in which I interviewed people at all levels of the university hierarchy. Such an approach (explained in chapter 4) allowed me to gain a clear understanding of the sort of changes that had taken place and the various reactions to, and implications of, such change. This qualitative approach enabled me to generate sufficiently rich data to inform a critical analysis of the issues arising from the research questions, leading to a clearer overall understanding.

My main concern is that the changes that have occurred in the name of modernisation could be having quite the opposite effect to that which is claimed. For the growing level of managerialism and attempted introduction of HRM represents a significant ideological challenge, threatening to fundamentally alter the manner in which academics have, hitherto, carried out their work. Such is the scale of this threat that it could potentially lead to a decline in the overall quality of higher education provision in the UK. This, then, is the critically important issue that initially inspired me to undertake this research.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This initial chapter is followed by two more, which together constitute the literature review. I begin chapter 2 with a discussion of globalisation in order to explain the nature of the wider context within which changes to UK HE have taken place. I follow this by considering the ideology of neoliberalism that has informed the responses of many national governments across the world to the challenges of globalisation. Neoliberalism is underpinned by an unswerving belief in the value of free markets as a means of distributing resources efficiently. As a consequence, there has been a considerable degree of social, economic and
political change as national governments have sought to create the conditions necessary to enable markets to function effectively. Privatisation, economic deregulation, ‘rolling back the state’ and competition are integral parts of the modern environment and are routinely presented in virtuous discourses of modernisation.

There is, however, another story of global markets and it is the one that fuels my personal concerns about current developments in HE. The efficient operation of market economies is reliant upon the engagement of individuals making free choices and demanding higher standards of quality and service. Such is the dominance of this broad global discourse that there has been an evident individualisation of society, where individuals are now forced to organise and take greater responsibility for a much greater part of their own lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Collective support mechanisms – family, class, state-welfare – have all been individualised and fragmented according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, creating a society where there are inevitably winners and losers. I discuss individualisation in some detail before turning to consider how such societal changes impact on the organisation of work.

I explain how work has been ‘modernised’ in response to global changes. There has, for example, been a growth in the use of flexible working methods that transfer a greater burden of risk to the individual as well as an increase in the use of individual performance techniques such as HRM (section 1.1). I discuss these developments in the context of discourses of modernisation. I complete the chapter by concentrating specifically on the HE sector, and consider how such changes have affected the organisation of academic work and the impact on academics themselves.

In chapter 3 I show how UK HE became enfolded into that broad global discourse of modernisation and individualisation leading to a period of significant change, both to the external organisation of the sector and to the internal operations of universities. The current manifestation of the modern university is the result of a gradual process of change that has gathered momentum in the last ten years and was underpinned and informed by a specific policy discourse. The purpose of this
chapter is to demonstrate how successive UK governments’ HE policy-making has followed a clear and identifiable trajectory towards a modernisation of HE reflecting neoliberal discourses. The change that has resulted has been so significant that questions now arise concerning the role of the academic and indeed the purpose of the university under conditions of modernity and neoliberalism. Long established collegial traditions of academic freedom and notions of learning as a social good are challenged in the modern environment which, potentially, creates tension and conflict in the academy. Accordingly, I begin the chapter with a discussion of collegiality, explaining how it is a vital aspect of academic identity.

I follow this with a chronological review of UK government policy and reports, starting with the Robbins Report of the early 1960s that is the point at which it is possible to discern a clear policy trajectory. I review recent policy from the 2000s and in particular I consider the individualising effects of the 2004 Pay Framework Agreement. Throughout the chapter I consider the nature of the government policy discourse by drawing on the work of Nikolas Rose, Mitchell Dean and others. I complete the policy review by considering in detail the RDS policy initiative, the critical incident that I investigate in this thesis. I conclude chapter 3 by discussing the critical themes that have emerged and explain how they constitute the framework around which I structure my analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In chapter 4 I outline the research design of the study and explain how the study was carried out. The research methods used will be introduced and justified and in particular I explain the case method of research and why it is the most appropriate means of generating the necessary qualitative data in the context of this research. In this chapter I introduce the three case-study institutions and provide a brief profile of each. I also discuss a fourth institution that was not ultimately included in this thesis, explaining why the reasons for not doing so are significant. All institutions have been anonymised and given a pseudonym as have all of the individuals who were interviewed.
The following three chapters provide the results of the fieldwork integrated with the critical discussion and analysis. Each of these chapters is structured according to the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3. Accordingly, these chapters are organised as follows. Chapter 5 considers the powerful influence of discourses of modernisation and shows how the conditions were created at each university to enable a process of change to take place following the RDS initiative. Chapter 6 turns to matters of implementation and operationalisation of HR strategies, including individual performance management, concentrating on the ways in which discourses of modernisation were enacted. Chapter 7 considers the responses of academic staff and the challenge posed to existing orthodoxies and collegiate traditions by RDS and the inherently individualistic technology of HRM.

Finally, in the conclusion I draw together the outcomes of the research in the context of the initial questions. Here, I offer my overall analysis of the situation in HE and show how this original piece of work provides a new insight into the field of study. RDS was the product of a distinct neoliberal policy trajectory designed to gain control over academic workers through a strategy of individualisation, resulting in a complex picture of contestation and resistance and, ultimately, further erosion of collegiate traditions and academics’ identities.
Chapter 2
Globalisation and Modernisation

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the global context within which changes to higher education (HE) sectors around the world have taken place. I explain how HE became enfolded into a broad global discourse and how this has led to a gradual process of modernisation and individualisation, driven by neoliberal ideology. Accordingly, I begin section 2.2 by discussing the concept of globalisation and consider discourses of neoliberalism which have informed the responses of many national governments to global challenges. I then turn to a consideration of the societal changes associated with neoliberalism. In particular, I discuss the process of individualisation and modernisation that has led to significant changes in the workplace, including the manner in which people are managed. I also discuss the changing context of work and the extent to which it has become individualised with a commensurate diminution of workers’ control over it. I complete the section with a discussion of HRM, which was briefly outlined in chapter 1, as the technique that is increasingly being used to manage and, indeed, individualise academics in universities.

In section 2.3 I provide an evaluation of how globalisation, modernisation and individualisation have impacted on higher education globally. I begin the section by considering the ways in which universities have been affected locally by globalisation. I explain how the growing recognition that universities play an important part in the global economy has led neoliberal governments to take an increasingly directive approach to the operation of their higher education institutions, according to a discourse of modernisation. In the UK that approach has been characterised as a form of new public management (NPM) (Diefenbach 2009; Dunleavy and Hood 1994). I provide a brief outline of NPM before moving
on to explain its manifestation in the HE sector and the extent to which it has created an environment characterised by control and regulation. In the final part of this section I turn to the marketisation of the HE sector that is a product of such neoliberalism and associated discourses of modernisation.

In section 2.4 I discuss the ways in which academic labour is affected by globalisation and modernisation. I begin by considering the notion that the changes which have taken place in universities have led to a significant reconstitution of academic work, often characterised as proletarianisation of academic labour. Consequently, I discuss the extent to which academic work has been de-professionalised and academics’ autonomy reduced. I then turn to the ways in which the management of universities has changed and consider, in particular, the emergence of managerialism (Deem 1998). Accordingly, I explore the argument that academics are now subject to an increasingly directive and regulatory environment, characterised by a variety of control mechanisms. HRM, including individual performance management, is one such mechanism. This is followed by some conclusions.

2.2 A Changing World

Globalisation is one of, if not the, dominant political and academic discourses of the last twenty years and has become a key concept in the social sciences (Beerkens 2003). In this section I explain the nature of that global discourse, and show how it has led to a gradual process of modernisation and individualisation, driven by neoliberal ideology. As a consequence, there have been significant changes in the workplace and the manner in which workers are managed, according to the controlling and individualistic technology of HRM.

There are many and varied analyses of globalisation and for some the debate has now reached the stage of ‘post-globalisation,’ where ‘the world is witnessing the demise of globalisation as description, explanation and ideology’ (Held and McGrew 2007:6). Globalisation is not a distinctly modern concept: as we are reminded by Appadurai, long distance cross-cultural interaction has been taking
place for many hundreds of years ‘...between travellers and merchants, pilgrims and conquerors, the world has seen much long-distance (and long-term) cultural traffic’ (1996:47). Significant developments throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century in transport, combined with increasing standards of literacy, helped to reduce barriers of space and opened people up to new degrees of awareness. Further innovations throughout the twentieth century, particularly in communications and computer technology, speeded up this process dramatically, compressing space and time and, thus, facilitating the further growth of international trade. Developments in such technologies ‘shrink time-space and in part at least, transcend societal control and regulation’ (Urry 1998:5). As a result, it is suggested, we now live in a world of ‘overlapping communities of fate where the trajectories of all countries are deeply enmeshed with each other’ (Held 2005:1). For Held, it is an opportunity for a new global consensus to be developed in order to tackle the world’s major crises – poor countries and ill-health, climate change and terrorism.

There is some debate concerning the extent to which globalisation differs from internationalisation. The latter, Scott (2000) suggests, reflects a world order dominated by established nation states whereas the former;

implies a radical reordering of this status quo as new regional blocs emerge and old enemies become new allies (and vice versa); and as national boundaries are rendered obsolete by the transgressive tendencies of high technology and mass culture (Scott 2000:4).

Held and McGrew (2003), in a wide-ranging review show how globalisation goes beyond internationalisation, and suggest five areas of general agreement amongst contrasting definitions. First, that there has been a growth in economic interconnectedness within and across regions, albeit with uneven consequences. Second, global competition challenges old hierarchies and generates new inequalities of wealth, power and knowledge. Third, trans-national and trans-border problems, such as terrorism, raise questions over the traditional roles and accountabilities of national governments. Fourth, there has been an expansion of international governance, from the European Union (EU) to the World Trade
Organisation (WTO), which raises significant questions about the emerging world order and whose interests it serves. Fifth, and perhaps most significantly, that such developments require completely new modes of political, economic and cultural thinking and demand imaginative responses from politicians and policy-makers. (Held and McGrew 2003)

**Neoliberalism and Modernisation**

The phenomenon of globalisation prompts consideration of the ways in which governments have responded to the challenges it poses. Significantly, those responses have been informed and driven by the powerful discourses of neoliberalism and modernisation demanding ‘that business organisations are able to operate unfettered by bureaucratic government regulations’ (Waring 2009:259). Neoliberalism ‘has been pushed by multilateral agencies and most powerful states as the major global project for economic growth and development…’ and significantly, it ‘has not been deeply challenged as the dominant economic doctrine for growth and distribution…’ (Bonal 2003:163).

Central to the neoliberal discourse – as advocated by the Washington Consensus and pursued vigorously by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the US and UK (Held 2005) - is a fundamental belief in the virtues of the free market as a means of distributing resources efficiently. Economic deregulation, privatisation and a reduction in state intervention are all designed to enable entrepreneurial, innovative businesses to thrive in a competitive arena where only the fittest survive. In such a market led environment, new regulatory bodies and agencies replace direct state control. Operating at a distance, such bodies supposedly ensure that the market operates effectively, where the dominant discourse of competition requires that standards of quality are constantly improved. For, underpinning neoliberalism, is the belief that ‘the processes and practices of government are concerned with shaping human conduct in a rational and calculative manner towards economic goals’ (Boden 2005:78). Dean (1999) described these government processes as regimes of practice which, crucially, ‘are more than the actual actions; they also include their sustaining discourses (Boden 2005:78).
Such is the hegemony of these sustaining discourses in neoliberal states that it becomes difficult to put forward counter-arguments. Hence, neoliberalism now extends into the public sector and there is a belief that public services are better organised and distributed under market mechanisms. In the UK for example, the National Health Service was reformed into a kind of quasi-market system following the Griffiths Report of 1983 (Day and Klein 1983). The HE sector also exhibits these trends: following the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) of 1992 a system emerged with the creation of ‘new universities’ that were enabled to compete in the same ‘education market’ as the more established institutions. Under such neoliberal conditions knowledge production is no longer ‘confined to higher education institutions; it is shared with a growing number of institutes, companies, R&D start-ups and self-employed experts’ (Marginson 2007:42). Consequently, in the UK in 2007, the BPP College\(^2\) was granted degree-awarding powers by the Privy Council, becoming the first commercial company permitted to do so (BBC News Online 2007).

Notions of individual freedom are central to this neoliberal discourse. The efficient operation of market economies is predicated on the notion that individuals must be free to make informed choices. The dominance of this discourse and the increasing focus on the individual has led some to argue that there has been an evident individualisation of society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Yet there is an inherent contradiction at the heart of the neoliberal discourse: although we may be encouraged to organise our own lives and make individual choices, those choices are constrained by conditions not of our own choosing (Rose and Miller 1992). A form of ‘governamentality’ has developed (Dean 1999:16) where governments following neoliberal policies, on the one hand empower and activate forms of agency, liberty and choices of individuals, while, on the other, they set norms, standards, benchmarks, performance

\(^2\) BPP offers a large range of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional programmes in areas including Law, Accounting, Finance, Business and Management, HRM and Marketing (bppuc.com)
indicators, quality controls and best practice standards, to monitor, measure and render calculable the performance of these various agencies (Dean 1999:165).

So government in neoliberal states should not simply be thought of in terms of its institutions and organisations. Instead, it should be understood as an all-pervasive set of beliefs and opinions that ‘combine into a collective mentality about how we should and do rule ourselves, or conduct our conduct’ (Boden 2005:78).

The dominance of neoliberalism should not, then, be under-estimated. Its impact has been far-reaching and, according to Stiglitz (2002), many of the adverse effects of globalisation have come about as a result of the liberalisation of finance and capital markets, a key aspect of neoliberalism. The ensuing global speculative investment activity has created very volatile domestic markets, characterised by regular mini booms and busts and as such ‘the problem is not globalisation but the way it is managed’ (Stiglitz 2002:295). Accordingly, the local impact of this global phenomenon is variable and opens up the possibility of new ‘inequalities of mobility’ (Urry 1998:16). In this context, many individuals now exist in a society with few rules and an inherent short-termism, where a degree of uncertainty and risk is transferred from the institutions of the state and firmly placed on the shoulders of the individual (Beck 2000).

Such changed circumstances are characteristic of a period that some term ‘modernity’ or others a second-modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Watson (2002) explains, that ‘modernity’ is the historical era that witnessed the emergence of an industrialised world and ‘modernism’ refers to the ideas and principles that underpin it. In the UK these have largely been informed by capitalist priorities of wealth creation where ‘production and distribution form core components of modernity’s institutions’ (Giddens 2005:5). Hence, modernisation is the product of a neoliberal discourse and is presented as an entirely rational and logical response to the challenges of globalisation. As a consequence, business organisations have modernised their operations and working practises in order that they may compete more effectively in market economies. The associated individualisation at work, where market imperatives
have led to short-termism and increased flexibility, creates greater pressure on the individual to survive. The result could be greater social inequalities (Shaoul 2008; Levidow 2002) leading to a corrosion of character (Sennett 1998). Accordingly, some now consider the nature of the risk society (Beck 2000) that has developed under conditions of modernity, where the self becomes a ‘reflexive project’ (Giddens 2005:32).

Neoliberal inspired modernisation has simultaneously led to an intensification of workplace competition and an individualisation of work. As a consequence, there has been a significant change in the way that people experience their work. The growing use of flexible working and non-standard working arrangements, plus the increasing focus on individual performance, mean that, for many, work has become an increasingly risky occupation (Sennett 1998). Yet such individualisation of working practices brings the management control that is deemed necessary under conditions of neoliberalism.

I now turn to consider the broader individualising aspects of neoliberalism at a societal level, before discussing how the associated modernisation has led to individualisation at the workplace and the techniques of managing and controlling workers, through the use of HRM.

**An Individualisation of Society?**

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim contend that we have seen ‘the disembedding of the ways of life of industrial society (class, family, gender, nation) without reembedding’ (2002:203). The ‘liberating’ process of individualisation apparently sets people free from the traditional institutions of society – class, religion, gender-roles and family. Such collective notions, it is suggested, are no longer relevant, coming as they did, out of the ‘modern’ era that was itself a consequence of the emergence of capitalism. The institutions of the welfare state are geared toward individuals rather than families and demand that individuals take an increasing responsibility for themselves. In what has been termed a ‘risk society’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), people are now forced to actively organise much of their own lives (health, education and the labour market) as responsibility is shifted from the state to the individual.
Individualisation requires that people must become more adaptable and show greater initiative to survive. No longer can one automatically assume support from friends and family, class solidarity or societal norms: such things are now ‘zombie categories’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:203) – still with us but increasingly irrelevant in the modern world.

Although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s analysis has attracted significant criticism (Mythen 2005), it does present an intriguing picture of modern society in which several strands are clearly observable and identifiable. In the work context, the apparent transfer of risk to the individual does signal a major change in the nature of the employment relationship where, in response to neoliberal market conditions, employers have made a concerted effort to drive down costs through the use of non-standard, flexible, and, therefore, more insecure forms of employment. Such flexible arrangements enable employers to transfer certain employment costs, for example pension provisions and training, to the individual employee. It is this aspect of neoliberalism that, according to Shaoul (2008), has led to greater social inequalities, characterised by job losses and wage cuts, and where there has been an enhancement of the few. Levidow (2002), in a comparison with the original nineteenth century liberalism gives this powerful critique of modern neoliberalism

…today’s neoliberal project undoes past collective gains, privatises public goods, uses state expenditure to subsidize profits, weakens national regulations, removes trade barriers, and so intensifies global market competition. By fragmenting people into individual vendors and purchasers, neoliberalism imposes greater exploitation upon human and natural resources. (Levidow 2002:2)

Clearly, Levidow and Shaoul’s analyses of neoliberalism paint a starkly different picture to that of Beck, particularly with regard to the assertion that traditional notions of class are redundant and have been superseded by a homogenous process of individualisation. That the process is universal may be agreed, but ‘experience of this process is likely to be heterogeneous’ (Mythen 2005:138). So
whilst we may all be more insecure, now in reality, it is still those at the lower end of the traditional class stratifications who suffer the worst effects of this risk society. Sennett discusses the current system of what he calls ‘flexible capitalism’ (1998:9) and recognises the individualising trend that threatens to dislocate communities. As organisations become more transient, so to do the people who work in them. With organisations placing an emphasis on contracting out, and with projects replacing jobs, short-termism rules. Therefore, individuals do not put down roots, instead beginning to lead fragmented lives and fending for themselves. Not all can survive without a strong network of support, and this gradual erosion of all that ties people together and out of which grows loyalty and sustainable collective spirit results in what Sennett terms the ‘corroding of character’ (1998:31).

Here then is further evidence of the rather polarised discourses associated with neoliberalism. On the one hand there is the legitimising discourse of management and neoliberal governments that modernisation and increased flexibility will enhance the ability of organisations to respond to change and operate cost-effectively in a turbulent environment. Accordingly, organisations are cast in a virtuous role, creating greater wealth that ultimately benefits society as a whole. An alternative view suggests that such an approach is deeply damaging to wider society and is counter-productive, as those who deliver the flexibility suffer due to the lack of security. Flexibility is not inherently destructive; those at the top of organisational hierarchies are likely to see flexibility in terms of a challenge – more of a stimulating and non-routine experience (Sennett 1998). More people are taking advantage of the ability to work in a flexible manner and this could be seen as one of the more positive aspects of a neoliberal individualisation of society. The autonomy that comes from being able to organise one’s own working hours may enhance levels of job satisfaction. But this can be contrasted with the dissatisfaction arising from insecurity caused by the removal of the collective safety nets.

This process of workplace individualisation has differing manifestations according to the global context and, therefore, the concomitant societal impact is variable. According to Sennett (1998) there is a clear distinction between the
Anglo-US model of neoliberal capitalism and the Rhinish model, characteristic of German, French, Italian and Dutch economies. In the latter there is an emphasis on cooperative industrial relations with a strong programme of state welfare support. However, in the UK and the US it is the more overtly neoliberal model, with its heavy emphasis on free market capitalism, increasing power to managers and a general loosening of state-provided welfare support that has been adopted. Thus, these countries have systems that ‘treat those who are dependent on the state with the suspicion that they are social parasites, rather than truly helpless’ (Sennett 1998:139).

Having explained how the neoliberal response to globalisation has led to a process of societal individualisation that, in turn, affects the organisation of work, I now turn to a more detailed discussion of how neoliberal modernisation has led to workplace individualisation.

**Individualisation at Work**

As I explained in the previous section there have been massive changes in the organisation of work and, indeed, to the whole experience of work for many over the last twenty years (see for example Blyton and Turnbull 2004; Noon and Blyton 2002; Heery and Salmon 2000) as organisations have sought to modernise in line with neoliberal ideology. Global competition means that labour costs increasingly come under downward pressure, and the use of an ever more flexible labour market allows firms to achieve cost savings whilst maintaining tight control over their human resources. The creation of core and periphery flexible workforces has seen the expansion of the latter, as the service sector grows and traditional industries decline. More lower skilled, lower paid and less secure jobs have been the result.

In this neoliberal market context it seems that, not only are managers still firmly attached to the idea of giving customers the goods and services they want, at a price they can afford, whilst maximising profits they also want ‘…workers to be both dependable and disposable…’ (Hyman 1987:43). Accordingly, for workers in contemporary workplaces, job insecurity is likely to become a growing phenomenon, as organisations continue to downsize to survive in the global
marketplace. The 1990s saw an ever-increasing number of mergers and acquisitions, which led to a proactive strategy of delayering and downsizing that clearly impacted on individuals throughout the organisational hierarchy (Littler, Wiesner and Dunford 2003). By 2010, in the context of a serious global economic downturn, that trend appears unchanged. Sennett’s suggestion that the whole system of modern capitalism ‘radiates indifference’ (1998:146), and his conclusion that ‘a regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy’ (1998:148), seems particularly prescient.

Certainly work for many is becoming an increasingly precarious occupation, yet there are potential benefits for individual workers. Advances in information technology have clearly changed the way that work is organised for some and has led to an automation of many routine tasks. Individuals are now increasingly able to organise their own affairs far more than ever, in what Castells (1989) has termed a ‘new technological paradigm’ (1989:175). Handy’s (1990) notion of portfolio working is now a reality for many, such are the conditions of flexible working and advances in information communications technology. In this new ‘network society’ (Castells 1996), knowledge becomes a valuable currency. In the UK there has been a concerted effort by the government to promote a learning and skills agenda and to encourage more young people into higher education (see chapter 3 for a fuller discussion). As Legge (2005) has noted, ‘knowledge worker’ has become a very fashionable term which ‘owes much to the conceptualisation of the knowledge worker as the wealth generator of the networked ‘information society…’ (Legge 2005:13).

But despite the ubiquitous nature of the knowledge economy ‘the precise meaning of the various terms related to knowledge work and societies is not always readily apparent’ (Deem et al 2007:68). Further, Castells (1996) notes the potential for organisations to increase their power over labour through the use of new technologies that facilitate the automation of productive processes. Thus, work that involves processing and storing large amounts of information has been likened to ‘digital Taylorism’ which
involves translating knowledge work into working knowledge through the extraction, codification and digitalisation of knowledge into software prescripts that can be transmitted and manipulated by others regardless of location (Brown, Lauder and Ashton 2007:201).

To follow through the analogy, in the knowledge society there is an apparent distinction between a small, elite knowledge bourgoisie and the large information-processing proletariat.

If the nature of work has changed, it is also important to consider the extent to which traditions of workplace collectivism and the influence of trade unions are declining under the inexorable pressures of individualisation. There has certainly been an individualisation of employment contracts, the traditional concern of trades unions, within business organisations. The motives for this, according to Brown, Deakin, Hudson, Pratten and Ryan (1998), are driven by economic, rather than ideological reasons. Brown et al’s (1998) study found that the employers were mainly concerned with procedural individualisation (the removal of collective mechanisms for determining terms and conditions of employment), rather than substantive (the differentiation of individual pay and conditions). Organisations were found to be pursuing a strategy of cost minimisation in response to competitive pressures, deriving essentially from deregulation and privatisation, increased competition in product markets and increased shareholder pressure.

There appears to have been a substantial shift of power away from trade unions across the board, and that even where unions continue to be recognised, the scope of bargaining has been reduced (WERS 2004). Collective bargaining, where it does remain, seems to have become more of a forum for consultation and information provision than for negotiation. It seems that many organisations are now experimenting with representative structures which depart from the traditional union model and that the impetus is towards a wholesale reduction in trade union influence (Brown et al 1998). Partnership agreements are one of the ways in which employers have sought to create a modern, less confrontational
approach to industrial relations and are fully in line with the neoliberal agenda of social partnership, pursued by New Labour when in office.

This development helps to provide further insight into the process of individualisation. A partnership agreement is one in which both parties (management and the trade union) agree to work together to their mutual advantage and to achieve a climate of more cooperative and therefore less adversarial industrial relations (Armstrong 2006:784).

Such agreements clearly fall short of the traditional notion of collective bargaining, but it has been suggested they ‘might simply be interpreted as a pragmatic union response to new and more difficult circumstances’ (Kessler and Purcell 2003:325). Accordingly, Samuel (2005) argues that partnership ‘is founded on union weakness and is unionism on management’s terms’ (2005:74). Yet others (Kelly 1999) see partnership agreements as no more than a cynical employers’ strategy to gain greater control over the direction of the employment relationship. Smith and Morton (2001) suggest the Labour government’s social partnership agenda was underpinned by particular (neoliberal) values which support a continued dominant role for the employer and showed ‘hostility to the politics and practice of trade unionism conceived as the mobilization of workers’ collective power’ (Smith and Morton 2001:135).

Employers that do enter into partnership agreements fall into two categories according to Brown and Oxenbridge (2003). First, the nurturing group of small to medium production employers, characterised by largely harmonious management-union relations. Second, a containing group of service sector employers where unions are provided with fewer substantive rights and there is generally less cooperation. Oxenbridge, Brown, Deakin and Pratten (2003) suggest that although there is evidence of a closer relationship between management and unions generally, it is still far removed from the traditional notion of collective bargaining. What appears to be developing is a form of collective consultation, largely driven by managerial choice in terms of the extent of union influence, and
where unions exercise limited influence over the key bargaining issue of pay (Oxenbridge et al 2003).

So although there has apparently been something of an improvement in the relationship between management and unions, there is an imbalance of power. Although we do live in a changing world, where the nature and experience of work has clearly radically altered, the essential tension and conflict at the heart of the struggle between labour and capital appears to remain the same. It would seem that although employers may be more willing to consult on certain issues, there is little evidence of any shift in their attitudes (Oxenbridge et al 2003) as they persist in their use of individualistic management practices. There is little evidence of any shift in underlying values and beliefs from the very traditional motivation of cost-minimisation and an opportunistic approach to employees high productivity achieved in the most cost-effective manner possible (Kessler and Purcell 2003). Consequently, Kelly (1998) for example, has questioned the decline of collectivism, suggesting that collective action does not go away but is subject to cyclical waves in the same way that the economy experiences upswings and downswings. Colling (2003) argues that we have not so much seen an increase in individualisation but rather a process of de-collectivisation driven by the power of the state and employer preference. Although union membership has declined, this does not necessarily indicate an increasingly individualistic preference amongst the majority of workers.

Clearly this is a very complex process and the impact of individualisation is heterogeneous and, indeed, still much debated. For example, it has been suggested that whilst there has been something of a transformation in the conduct of industrial relations, there is little actual evidence from the workplace to support the notion that a process of de-collectivisation, or individualisation has taken place (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000). Yet there does appear to be general agreement that the workplace remains a contested terrain. Whilst management in business organisations enjoy a far more dominant position today, policy and decision making generally remain matters of constrained choice and the implementation of strategy is still underpinned by tensions and conflict and resistance to control (Hyman 1987; Child 1985).
Organisational strategy faces many barriers to successful implementation which, arguably, become more intense under conditions of neoliberalism and an apparent modernisation of working practices. Such practices as decentralisation, strategic alliances and collaborations, outsourcing, flexibility and team-working are now commonplace and all add to the complexity of business organisations. The use of HRM and its associated techniques is widespread throughout many public and private sector organisations. In the context of neoliberal modernisation of working practices and an individualisation of work, HRM has become the guiding philosophy in terms of managing people.

In the following section I explain how the management of people in business organisations has been ‘modernised’ according to the ideology of HRM. Although supporting neoliberal discourses present this as entirely necessary in the context of increasing global competition, questions arise concerning the individualising aspects of HRM.

**HRM and Individual Performance**

I explained in section 1.1 that HRM is a fundamentally unitarist ideology that seeks to promote workplace harmony and to stimulate and reward individual performance. I also explained that problems may arise when adopting a unitary frame of reference due to its implicit assumption that conflict is dysfunctional and that employers and employees are unified by a common purpose. In organisations in general and universities in particular, that are characterised by diverse groups with legitimately competing agendas and interests, such a view appears, at best, optimistic. Indeed Fox, who originally developed the concept of pluralist and unitarist frames of reference to describe managements’ employee relations style argued that unitarism has long since been abandoned by most social scientists as incongruent with reality and useless for the purpose of analysis (Fox 1966:4 quoted in Blyton and Turnbull 2004:32).
According to Storey (2001), most organisations are actually pursuing what he terms a ‘dualist’ (2001:12) approach. Such an approach means that organisations broadly maintain trade union relations and collective bargaining processes whilst also introducing some HRM initiatives outside and alongside those processes. Yet despite the apparent existence of such pragmatism and recognition of the pluralist nature of organisations unitarism remains one of the principal aims of HRM. The continued pursuit by organisations of such an apparently unrealistic goal does, then, suggest that the motive for adopting HRM is not so much inspired by a commitment to improve standards of people management, but is more likely the product of a neoliberal influenced modernisation agenda.

HRM is an inherently individualistic approach to managing people (Storey 2001). It is predicated on the notion that by integrating corporate and HR strategies and empowering line managers to motivate their staff through regular performance monitoring, individual staff appraisals and the use of high commitment work practices, the result will be an overall improvement in organisational performance. Appropriately, much of the recent HRM research has focussed on the ‘search for the Holy Grail of establishing a causal relationship between HRM and performance’ (Legge 2001:23). However, there is a fundamental tension at the heart of HRM that has yet to be resolved. For on the one hand there is the rhetoric of the soft, developmental aspects of managing people, yet on the other, this has to be balanced with hard, rational issues of cost-effectiveness and tight budgetary control. Hence, performance management becomes more of a system for monitoring and control of individuals and has less to do with motivation and reward.

There have been varying degrees of success in establishing a link between the implementation of HRM and improvements in individual and organisational performance. It is suggested that the whole exercise is futile anyway, due to the imprecise nature of HRM and lack of agreement over what constitutes ‘improved performance’. Accordingly, Legge (2001) poses three critical questions: ‘how are we to conceptualise HRM, how are we to conceptualise performance, and how are we to conceptualise the relationship between the two?’ (Legge 2001:23). Keenoy, an ardent critic of HRM, has likened it to a hologram which
changes its appearance as we move around its image...As a fluid holistic entity of apparently multiple identities and forms, it is not surprising that every time we look at it, it is slightly different (Keenoy 1999:14).

More recently, Keenoy (2007) has argued that, even after twenty years of research, there is still no evidence of a clear link between HRM and improved organisational performance. Guest, Michie, Conway and Sheehan’s (2003) cross-sectional study of 366 UK companies is one of the more comprehensive undertaken and drew on longitudinal financial performance data in an effort to explore the HRM/performance relationship. The results did show an association between HRM and lower labour turnover and higher profitability ‘but fails to provide any convincing indication that the greater application of HRM is likely to result in improved corporate performance’ (Guest et al. 2003:311). Similarly, a study of 50 business units of a large food service corporation in the US and Canada did appear to indicate a positive correlation between HR practices and improved commitment and unit performance (Wright, Gardner and Moynihan 2003). Yet, the authors acknowledge that the highly statistical nature of the analysis does not allow for an assessment of more subjective, behavioural constructs and as such they could not ‘draw firm causal conclusions’ (Wright et al. 2003:34). Gibb’s study (2001) did attempt to consider employees’ attitudes and responses to HRM practices in a survey of 73 UK companies. There were mixed results, with some aspects of HRM being appreciated more than others but, as with Wright et al. (2003), the authors acknowledge that the results of their survey only provide one snapshot of opinion and that ‘further interpretation would require supplementary interviews and case-studies to reinforce the validity and reliability of the results’ (Gibb 2001:332).

A problem faced by researchers in the field is a lack of an agreed definition of HRM:

no consensus has emerged on what employee management activities should be in a comprehensive ‘HRM checklist’, since no widely accepted
theoretical rationale exists for selecting practices as definitively essential to HRM (Boselie, Dietz and Boon 2005:72).

For the same reasons, it has been suggested that ‘existing evidence for a relationship between HRM and performance should be treated with caution’ (Wall and Wood 2005:454). In a comprehensive review of 104 studies into the HRM performance link Boselie et al (2005) conclude that ‘it remains the case that no consistent picture exists on what HRM is or what it is supposed to do’ (2005:81). The authors go further and suggest that ‘because of the sheer variety of methods used for measuring HRM, performance and the relationship between the two, it is not possible to compare results from different studies’ (2005:81). It is this ambiguity that leads Legge to conclude that much of the previous research is ‘at best confused and, at worst, conceptually and methodologically flawed’ (2001:31). Others have commented on the overtly scientific approach to empirical research on the HRM/performance link and argue that the current debate ‘is almost completely devoid of philosophical discussion, the lack of theory and explanatory power is simply not being addressed’ (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006:1978).

Such methodological concerns would seem to explain a growing acceptance of the so-called ‘black box’ (Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton and Swart 2003) – the contents of which are a mystery, but which somehow hold the key to understanding the HRM/performance link. Both Legge (2001) and Keenoy (2007) have called for more longitudinal and qualitative studies of the kind carried out by Hope-Hailey, Farndale and Truss (2005) to gain a clearer insight. This study of a large UK retail bank, carried out over a seven-year period, considered the role of the HR department and its impact on organisational outcomes. Key amongst the findings was the crucial role played by line managers in implementing HR policy who, in this study, ‘were neither capable nor motivated to take on these issues’ (Hope-Hailey et al 2005:64). Hence, otherwise well-designed policies did not generate the commitment expected and showed that ‘HRM, as well as contributing to organisational performance, can under certain conditions be a driver of both firm economic decline and employee alienation’
(Hope-Hailey et al 2005:64). More recently it has been suggested that while a firm may have particular high performance work practices in place, it could be ‘in a very demoralised or dysfunctional condition’ (Boxall and Macky 2009:7), leading these researchers to conclude that we are still unable to infer a clear link between HRM practices and improved performance, such is the complexity and variability between organisations.

In this section I have discussed globalisation and shown how the response of governments to this phenomenon have been informed and driven by the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism. In turn this has set in train a process of individualisation that has created heterogeneous changes throughout society as a whole. This has led to change and modernisation at the workplace as employers seek to gain control over their workers in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Increasingly, HRM is the individualistic management technology that is employed to bring that control, creating tensions and conflict for the individual worker arising from the uncertainty that surrounds HRM itself. In the next section, I consider the effects of these shifts on the HE sector.

2.3 Globalising the Academy

Globalisation then has far-reaching social, economic and political implications. Consequently, the nature of work has been radically altered and individualised, causing heterogeneous effects across a variety of sectors, underpinned by an environment of risk and uncertainty. With this in mind I now turn to the significance of globalisation for the HE sector, which it is suggested ‘…is perhaps the most fundamental challenge faced by the University in its long history’ (Scott 2000:3), and where ‘the growing impact of the global environment in and through higher education systems and institutions is inescapable’ (Marginson and van der Wende 2007:306). There has been a huge expansion in the flow of international students due to a heightened awareness of the benefits of international experience for individual career plans in a competitive environment (Bruch and Barty 1998). As explained in section 1.1, there is now a huge demand globally for access to knowledge and, in the context of the ‘information society,’
universities have emerged as strategically important institutions ‘as knowledge producers and the trainers of knowledgeable workers…’ (Boden and Epstein 2006:225). Consequently, neoliberal governments have sought to gain greater control over the operation of universities to ensure the cost-effective use of resources and to maximise their economic utility.

In this section I describe how globalisation has affected universities and show how the UK government’s neoliberal response has led to the emergence of a highly regulated and controlled environment. Consequently, universities and their academics are subject to a variety of audit technologies, designed to ensure the quality of teaching and research. The pressures of such an approach are compounded, as universities attempt to modernise and become more appealing to students, as they seek to compete in the HE marketplace. For academics, such changes raise serious questions concerning their roles and academic identities in the modern, neoliberal university.

**Globalisation and Universities**

Globalisation, in the context of HE, has been characterised as flows across national boundaries of ‘people, research knowledge and management technologies’ (Boden and Epstein 2006:229). Those people include academic staff and, significantly, students. Universities are increasingly reliant on fee-paying overseas students (Bruch and Barty 1998), who are treated in the manner of ‘paying customers’ (Boden and Epstein 2006:230) purchasing a service. As a consequence university league tables have become an ever-present phenomenon. For neoliberal governments, league tables are presented as an important way of providing information that helps the individual ‘customer’ make an informed choice in the ‘education marketplace’. Such notions also figured prominently in the outgoing Labour government’s strategy for the future of HE in the UK, *Higher Ambitions*, which called upon universities to publish information setting out what students can expect on their programme that should

…set out how and what students will learn, what that knowledge will qualify them to do, whether they will have access to external expertise or
experience, how much direct contact there will be with academic staff, what their own study responsibilities will be, what facilities they will have access to, and any opportunities for international experience. (BIS 2009:12)

Global developments are increasingly having an impact at the level of individual institutions and university rankings now play a big part in the global higher education market to the extent that ‘…national higher education systems and HEIs are judged by where they stand in global terms’ (Marginson and van der Wende 2007:307). The Shanghai Jiao Tong and the Times Higher are ‘the most globally influential [university] rankings’ (van er Wende 2007:280) and in the UK there is an increasing number of tables of varying degrees of influence (THE 2008). Given the obvious diversity of institutions throughout the world system the validity of global ranking systems may well be questionable, yet they have ‘a compelling popularity … and have quickly become part of the commonsense knowledge of the sector’ (Marginson and van der Wende 2007:326) and, in effect, act as a neoliberal control mechanism. Nevertheless, as Deem (2001) reminds us, such global pressures are likely to be variable in their impact at the local level.

The influence of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is also significant and further illustrates how national HE systems are becoming incorporated into the global discourse. The WTO is a global regulatory body that is committed to trade liberalisation and the elimination of barriers to trade in services by its member states. Should the current proposals to include HE into the scope of the WTO under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) be adopted, there will be an even greater liberalisation and concomitant intensification of global demand for HE (Verger 2007). This is particularly significant in the UK, where universities are already feeling the pressures of a mass system of HE provision, and creates an interesting tension for the government. For the GATS negotiations illustrate ‘the paradox of the competition state, in which opening up [borders] both offers opportunities for increasing national strengths but also presents severe threats to the authority of nations over its higher education’ (Beerkens 2003:143).
The situation in the UK is further complicated by its membership of the EU and being a signatory to the Bologna Declaration of 1999. The Bologna initiative is a voluntary intergovernmental agreement aimed at creating a European higher education area by 2010, where there is greater collaboration between universities and an increase in the mobility of academic staff and students (Verger 2007). One of the main aims of Bologna is to ‘enhance the international competitiveness of European higher education’ (van der Wende 2003:200). Yet the notion of greater cooperation at the European level is potentially problematic due to the implied diminution of government control at the national level. For individual universities, conscious of the opportunities open to them in a globally competitive education market, such a constraint is likely to further complicate strategic decision-making, leading to difficult operational choices.

Following this brief outline of the ways in which universities have been affected by globalisation, I now turn to a consideration of the ways in which national governments have responded to the challenges that are posed by this phenomenon. In section 2.1 I explained how those responses have been informed and driven by neoliberalism. In the UK the neoliberal response that emerged was manifested as a particular form of New Public Management (which I explain below). Consequently, HE has become enfolded into the neoliberal discourse, resulting in an environment characterised by audit, regulation and a variety of institutional and individual control mechanisms.

New Public Management

The neoliberal public sector reform process in the UK is characterised by tension and conflict and created a significant ideological challenge, as market principles and individualisation entered an arena traditionally characterised by a strong collective ethos with notions of public service, probity, risk aversion and fairness (Corby and White 1999). The changes to HE have been part of a broader political experiment influenced by New Right ideology (Farnham 1999) that sought to decentralise and create market (or quasi market) conditions in the belief that this would foster innovation, lead to greater consumer choice and, ultimately, provide a better service throughout the public sector (Exworthy and Halford 1999).
The changes have been well documented (Diefenbach 2009; Bach, Bordogna, Della Rocca and Winchester 1999; Corby and White 1999; Farnham and Horton 1996) and described as a ‘new public management’ (NPM). This means that there is a focus on markets, quality, flexibility and cost-minimisation, with staff being managed according to the principles of HRM. Bach et al (1999) argue that changes to the public sector have led to work intensification, limited prospects and greater insecurity, in common with the private sector. Public sector workers are now employed in complex organisational forms where, according to Morris and Farrell, there is a far more intensive work environment characterised by job insecurity and pay systems that ‘have become more individualized and again, hence, ‘less secure’ (2007:1585). Lawler has considered the emergence of a model of individualised leadership that is itself a reflection of an individualised society but is one that ‘prevents exploration of many other aspects of leadership which may be more applicable in the public sector context’ (2008:31).

In such a marketised environment, the presence of trade unions became problematic and consequently there was a sustained programme of legislation throughout the 1980s to reform and, ultimately, reduce the power of the unions to organise and to take industrial action Bach et al (1999). Over the period of the changes, union membership in the public sector has become an increasingly large proportion of all union membership and density has declined to a lesser degree than in the private sector (Mathieson and Corby 1999).

Significantly for the HE sector, although reform began under the Thatcher administration, it has recently been suggested that what is distinctive about the New Labour brand of new public management is that it has been delivered on a scale and intensity that represents a more significant challenge to the traditional public sector than ever did the Conservative reforms’ (Entwistle, Marinetto and Ashworth 2007:1574).
According to Reed, this is consistent with an ideological shift to a kind of neo-
technocratic managerialism that emerged in the New Labour era that ‘places rather greater faith in metrics than it does in markets’ (2007:11). For Reed, the New Labour approach to managing public services, including universities, was underpinned by a modernizing agenda that:

strives to integrate the rationality of strategic managerial direction and localized managerial control with the reality of, national and international, competition within a globalized market for public service provision…’ (2007:13).

Consequently, academics find themselves subjected to an increasing array of managerial systems that seek to quantify and monitor individual performance, a situation characterised by Strathern (2000) as an audit culture.

**Controlling the HE Sector**

Under conditions of neoliberal government policy-making and the influence and rhetoric of NPM, a huge variety of audit and regulatory bodies have been created. In this section I explain the nature of these bodies and the manner in which they monitor and regulate the UK HE system. I also explain the implications of a growing audit culture for academics and the manner in which they carry out their work.

The funding councils of England, Scotland and Wales (HEFCE, SFC and HEFCW) are highly influential regulatory and advisory bodies which offer, it is suggested

an extensive and ever-elaborating stream of advice on everything from governance to purchasing and, every year, conducts an intrusive audit which scrutinizes every aspect of managerial policy, procedures and performance’ (Keenoy and Reed 2008:188).
Through these funding councils the UK government seeks to maintain a high degree of control, albeit at arms length, over individual institutions, despite their ostensibly independent status. This is largely achieved via funding controls.

The current funding mechanism differs significantly from the system that existed for the majority of the previous century up until the late 1980s. Block grants for teaching and research were allocated to UK universities by the University Grants Committee (UGC), established in 1919 (Seville and Tooley 1997; Willmott 1995). Around that time there was a growing awareness of the important strategic contribution that universities could make to the national economic interest. So whilst it was acknowledged that universities should receive state-support, there was an essential underpinning principle that ‘government should not be able to exercise an undue influence over what they did’ (Nedeva and Boden 2006:273). Such an arrangement is usually referred to as the Haldane Principle, after the politician who introduced it (Boden and Nedeva 2010). UGC members were senior academics who advised the government and so essentially administered their own funding. Neave (1988) argues that this very gentlemanly arrangement effectively distanced universities from competitive pressures, or any realistic state control. Hence, the UGC has often been described as a buffer between the state and its universities (Mayhew et al 2004; Willmott 1995).

By the 1980s the UGC was seen by the Conservative government as inefficient and lacking sufficiently rigorous tools and techniques to enable effective monitoring of universities’ spending. In the context of NPM and neoliberal policy-making, such a system of allocating block grants did, then, run counter to the government’s ideological beliefs. Hence, the 1988 Education Reform Act abolished the UGC, replacing it with the University Funding Council and the Polytechnic and Colleges Funding Council (Nedeva and Boden 2006), which were subsequently replaced by the regionally based funding councils following the 1992 FHE Act. The funding councils drew at least half of their members from outside higher education. Grants were replaced by contracts that were allocated on the basis of something for something.
The removal of the UGC buffer is a particularly significant neoliberal event. It has enabled the state to exercise very real and direct control over the operation of universities. The funding councils have moved from being buffer bodies to executive arms of government run on managerialist lines’… [whose primary function is to]… ‘promote and implement government policy’ (Nedeva and Boden 2006:274).

Willmott (1995) argues that state intervention into universities has gathered pace since the demise of the UGC. The traditional collegial approach has been devalued and replaced by a corporate style of management with a focus on a variety of neoliberal control mechanisms.

For Strathern (2000) this controlling, audit led culture that has emerged in the era of NPM marks a significant socio-cultural shift in the professional, white-collar workplace, including HE. Strathern argues that the rise of audit regimes are themselves part of the globalisation phenomenon, discussed above, that have fundamentally altered the culture of HE. Underpinned by a rational logic of transparency and accountability holding out the possibilities of a globalising professional consensus, audit is almost impossible to criticise in principle – after all, it advances values that academics generally hold dear, such as responsibility, openness about outcomes and widening of access. (Strathern 2000:3)

But this explosion of audit (Power 1997) and its associated technologies goes beyond an attempt to establish standardised procedures for checking work and seems to be motivated by a desire to impose on academics ‘new norms of conduct and professional behaviour’ (Shore and Wright 2000:57).

At one level there appears nothing particularly sinister about audit. As Power (1997) reminds us people are constantly checking up on one another in what is effectively a moral and largely unconscious process and financial auditing is a long-established and accepted practice. But following the emergence of NPM,
Audit has spread to a variety of sometimes unexpected areas, including schools and universities.

Auditing is the explosion of an idea, an idea that has become central to a certain style of controlling individuals and which has permeated organisational life. (Power 1997:4)

Central to the notion of audit is a perfectly reasonable argument that greater transparency and accountability is likely to lead to a situation in which organisations ‘emerge as legitimate, safe, efficient, cost-effective and so on’ (Power 1997:8). As a consequence an entirely new external organisational environment is created - Power’s audit society - explained as

A collection of systematic tendencies and dramatises the extreme case of checking gone wild, of ritualised practices of verification whose technical efficacy is less significant than their role in the production of organisational legitimacy. (Power 1997:14).

From this it may be inferred that audit is a product of neoliberal inspired NPM. But the problem that arises in HE concerns the very subjective nature of academic work, which does not fall into easily defined and auditable categories. The consequence is a system that measures only what can be measured and is not, therefore, a true measure of academic performance and has potentially dire consequences for ‘intellectual production’ (Strathern 2000:3). For such is the dominance of the discourse that ‘hovers over virtually every field of modern working life’ (Shore and Wright 2000:59) it becomes very difficult to pose counter-arguments. The ubiquitous nature of the audit society means that, ultimately, individuals come to ‘conduct themselves in terms of the norms through which they are governed’ (Shore and Wright 2000:61). In short, it is easy to submit oneself to scrutiny and to comply with the demands of the audit technologies, but in so doing, individuals are unwittingly contributing to and reinforcing the very culture of audit. As Shore and Wright argue, over time this leads to a change in the identity of professionals who become ‘recast as a
depersonalised unit of economic resource whose productivity and performance must constantly be measured and enhanced’ (2000:62).

Power argues that universities have effectively had to reinvent and transform themselves into an auditable commodity. New tiers of management and quality assurance experts have emerged, their authority derived from control over audit processes and procedures. Significant too is this shift in power relationships where academics must submit themselves to scrutiny and become ‘objects of information’ (Shore and Wright 2000:59). Accordingly, audit heralds ‘a significant break with the principle of academic autonomy’ (Shore and Wright 2000:68) and clearly indicates a diminution of trust.

Checking only becomes necessary in situations of mistrust (Strathern 2000:4).

For many academics, according to Shore and Wright, the emergence of an audit culture has resulted in ‘increased pressure to conform, reduced autonomy and responsibility without power’ (2000:70). Lecturers are now ‘required to devote their time to producing auditable records – time that would otherwise be spent on teaching and research’ (Shore and Wright 2000:72). The burden of complying with audit is considerable for academics who must devote significant time to preparing for inspection. Further, audit has led to a changed definition of what constitutes quality in HE teaching, for to be audited ‘the learning experience must now be quantified and standardised so that it can be measured’ (Shore and Wright 2000:73). As a consequence, good teaching is less to do with good teaching and inspiring students - qualities that do not easily lend themselves to audit - and is more about the extent to which a lecturer has provided course outlines, module handbooks, detailed reading lists, assessment criteria – which can.

Such changes are, then, highly significant. The audit culture that has emerged has generated a huge burden on academics, who must provide an increasingly bureaucratic paper trail in order that their work can be audited. Notions of professional autonomy are completely undermined and the lack of trust that is implicit in such an audit culture signals a significant shift in the relationship
between academics and the institutions that employ them. Further, as student numbers increase in an increasingly marketised sector academic workloads increase accordingly. As a consequence, lecturers are now teaching larger classes, with students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and with differing abilities, with the added pressure of league tables, national student satisfaction surveys and the constant calls from management to increase pass rates and award ‘good’ degrees. Such changes to the nature of academic work are, I argue, a function of the globalisation of HE explained in section 2.2.

There are two principal instruments of audit, administered by the funding councils, through which the government maintains control of the sector in the UK. They are the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which is responsible for ensuring that universities’ quality control procedures for teaching are effective and ‘fit for purpose’ and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) that periodically evaluates the research performance of university departments and allocates research funding accordingly.\(^3\) The QAA is a particularly influential body that requires universities to comply with a variety of stringent and bureaucratic systems which seek to measure the quality of the student learning experience and attempt to standardise curriculum design and teaching and assessment. Not only has this raised questions regarding the nature of a rather mechanistic approach, but it has also been suggested that the time spent by academic staff actually administering the systems detracts from the quality of the very thing they seek to measure (Milliken and Colohan 2004). The RAE has also become very significant and it is suggested that ‘it has come to dominate research-oriented universities and, although its efficacy is widely contested, its impact is undoubted’ (Keenoy and Reed 2008:189).

The HE environment has then become highly regulated. Universities are now subject to a variety of audit processes and scrutiny by regulatory bodies, overseen by the funding councils, on behalf of the government. In the final part of this section I now turn to the marketisation of HE that seems to be an inevitable consequence of the neoliberal reform agenda. In response to the market demands

\(^3\) The most recent Research Assessment Exercise was completed in 2008 and is to be replaced by a new system, provisionally called the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
of the changing HE environment, universities have attempted to modernise themselves in an effort to appear more student-friendly, resulting in the creation of what some have called the ‘McUniversity’ (Parker and Jary 1995). Universities have also sought to broaden their range of commercial, income generating activities and to develop what has become known as the ‘third mission’ (Nedeva 2007), alongside the principal missions of teaching and research. This process of modernisation does, then, raise many questions that I explore in this thesis, concerning the purpose of a university and what it means to be an academic within.

**Marketisation of Universities**

As a result of the neoliberal response to the challenges of globalisation, universities in the UK find themselves operating in an increasingly complex environment and faced by significant pressures. For although they are independent institutions in a quasi-market system - where there is competition between the increased number of HE providers as well as new corporate universities entering the market (Webber 2000) - universities are still largely reliant on state-funding and are constrained by the requirements of the various controlling bodies. With the emergence of a system of mass HE provision and the government’s intention to increase participation in HE to 50% of under 30s by 2010 (DFES 2003) there are increasing pressures on staff workloads in HE. The ongoing strategy to reduce public expenditure by reducing the unit of resource (the amount of spending per student) and to allocate resources on a more competitive basis, has had the effect of intensifying and commodifying the work of academics (Callinicos 2009; Kline 2009).

The creation of market, or quasi-market conditions was always likely to result in the introduction of student fees (Boden and Nedeva 2010). Yet it is argued that with this development, knowledge has now come to resemble a commodity with a utility value in Marxian terms (Shumar 1997). Thus, education is transformed, as knowledge becomes a vital pre-condition to ensure a competitive edge in a society driven by the quest for increased profits. Traditional ideas of learning for learning’s sake are challenged as knowledge generation becomes driven by the
needs of the market, forcing universities ‘to see themselves as businesses providing a product to a market’ (Shumar 1997:24).

In the same way, the RAE has had the effect of driving academics towards ‘safe’ research projects that have an RAE value. Thus, the measure of a ‘good’ academic becomes measured by RAE performance (Harvie 2000). Hence, this commodification process sees the academic exchanging their work for RAE value and thus becoming alienated from it, as they are unable to satisfy their needs to pursue original knowledge (Harvie 2000).

In a sense, the organisation and control of the work of academics is now ‘conditioned, but not determined, by capitalist priorities and disciplines’ (Willmott 1995:1001). Students have begun to see themselves as consumers of educational services, where HE staff ‘are purveyors of commodities within a knowledge ‘supermarket’ (Winter 1995:134). Such notions were made explicit in the outgoing Labour government’s vision for the future of HE (BIS 2009), where a system of programme labelling is suggested to help inform students when making choices. This goes to the heart of the challenge for universities and their managers: there is no real alternative but to respond to market demands but, by doing so, they put in jeopardy the unique nature of a higher education institution. As a consequence, this could detract from the quality of their ‘knowledge product,’ due to academic workers becoming dissatisfied and alienated from their work.

It is suggested that the whole market approach challenges traditional notions of autonomy, academic freedom and collegiality - the very values upon which HE is built (Lynn-Meek 2000). Whilst there is a general acceptance of the long term economic benefits of having a well-educated workforce in a post-industrial society, there are serious debates over whether a market system, which effectively turns knowledge into a commodity, is an appropriate method of HE delivery (Lynn-Meek 2000). The introduction of student fees in England in 2006 was another step on the road to marketisation, and further creates the conditions for education to be perceived of as a commodity, and for students to see themselves as customers who must have greater choice, information and flexible study
options (Boden and Nedeva 2010; Middleton 2000). Marketisation then has led to a situation where universities are faced by increasingly difficult choices as they attempt to balance a variety of competing demands. Those who are responsible for managing universities in these complex times are likely to come under increasing scrutiny, from both academics and the wider public.

In this section I have explained how universities have been affected by globalisation and shown how the UK government’s response has had the effect of capturing individual institutions by a process of neoliberalisation. The ensuing modernisation agenda, underpinned by the technologies of NPM, not only raises many difficult questions throughout the public sector concerning the nature of public service, but in the HE sector such an agenda is creating significant pressures on individual academics.

According to the dominant neoliberal discourse, universities are now subject to a range of quality assurance and control mechanisms that require individual academics to conform to a range of bureaucratic demands. This pressure is compounded by a heightened degree of managerialism as university managers use HRM techniques in an effort to gain greater control over individual academic workers and the work that they do. Marketisation intensifies workload pressures due to growing student numbers from increasingly diverse backgrounds, coupled with a rise in bureaucratic quality assurance systems. Thus, traditional views of what it means to be an academic and, indeed the very purpose of a university under conditions of modernisation are now being questioned. In the final section of this chapter, I now turn to the effects of all of this on the individual academic worker.

### 2.4 Globalisation and the Academic Worker

In a review of the ways in which globalisation has affected the academic profession in Australia, Marginson concludes that it ‘finds itself increasingly embattled, its conditions of work eroding, its status questioned, its norms and
customary practices in doubt’ (Marginson 2000:32). Given that the Australian neoliberal HE reforms pre-date those in the UK by some ten years, Marginson’s analysis can be taken as something of a cautionary tale and the following conclusion offers a powerful critique of the risks associated with a neoliberal modernisation programme.

If we continue to subsume the academic functions of the university into its corporate identity, building institutions for the sake of the institutions themselves, and losing sight of the fact that it is in teaching, research and scholarship that universities make their distinctive social contributions, we will impoverish the university as an institution and pave the way for the shift of its academic functions into a generic corporate environment. This might be good for business, but it would not be very good for education. (Marginson 2000:34)

In this final section of the chapter, and with Marginson’s words in mind, I turn to a consideration of the ways in which academic workers are being affected in the context of globalisation, and the suggestion that a neoliberal modernisation agenda is leading to a de-professionalisation of academic work.

**Proletarianisation of the Academic Worker?**

The types of organisational change associated with a neoliberal modernisation agenda, discussed in 2.3, have, then, significantly altered the nature of academic work. In this section I briefly consider the notion that changes to the way that universities are managed in the UK, under conditions of globalisation, have led to a re-conceptualisation of academic work. Such material provides the necessary context for my subsequent discussion of the ways in which universities are currently being managed.

It has been argued for some time now that a proletarianisation of academic labour has been taking place (see for example Farnham 1999; Miller 1995; Willmott 1995; Winter 1995). According to Halsey, the massification of HE has led to a de-skilling of academic work and a reduction in the ‘prestige, salaries, autonomy,
and resources’ of academics (Halsey 1992). Deem, Hillyard and Reed (2007)
discuss the ‘new managerialism’ that pervades the HE sector. Such a system of
management in universities, they argue, has created conditions of ‘over-managed
institutionalised mistrust’ (2007:190), that is hardly conducive to creating an
environment within which academics’ creative energies are channelled into their
teaching and research activities.

Clearly such changes have had a long gestation. Wilson (1991) in an early
analysis of the situation drew on the work of Braverman (1974) and identified a
number of trends in HE typical of proletarianised work

..less trust and discretion, a growing division of labour; stronger
hierarchies of management control; greater conflict; growing routinisation;
bureaucratisation; worse conditions and facilities; above all a steep decline

It is perhaps the issue of control that is the most significant feature when assessing
the nature of academic work. The traditional view was that academics effectively
‘control themselves’, similar to Friedman’s notion of ‘responsible autonomy’
(Wilson 1991:253). Yet the increasing focus on HRM and a generally more
assertive style of management is challenging this autonomy as HE managers seek
to gain greater control over academic labour, and may lead to an increase in
tension and a rise in conflict. Wilson (1991) stops short of arguing that there has
been a wholesale deskilling of academic work in Braverman’s terms, but argues
that there is evidence of degradation ‘in the objective sense that conditions of
employment, broadly conceived, have dramatically worsened’ (1991:258). For
Wilson, the changes are threatening the traditional notion of universities as
independent communities of scholars pursuing knowledge for its own sake.

Others have also argued that there is evidence of some degree of deskilling and
degradation through loss of status and commodification (Nedeva and Boden 2006;
Shumar 1997; Miller 1995). Whilst academics may not have completely lost
control of the organisation of their work, Miller suggests that autonomy is
increasingly becoming constrained by a growing amount of bureaucracy and performance monitoring. He suggests that a kind of bargained autonomy exists ‘whereby degrees of at least apparent control are retained by the individual on the implicit understanding that the targets of increased student numbers, more articles or more form filling are met’ (1995:54). The key point here is that academics may be seen to be losing ideological control of their work under the pressures of marketisation and massification of HE.

In tandem with this diminution in the degree of autonomy enjoyed by academics there has also been an apparent reduction in levels of job security. Market pressures have led to a situation where the managers of universities seek ways to cut costs. In this respect we have seen an increasing tendency to utilise staff on casual or non-permanent contracts, leading to the model of a ‘flexi-university’ (Farnham 1999:28). Such arrangements can certainly allow institutions to reduce their staffing overheads considerably, but the consequence for staff is a reduction in the status of the profession that leads to ‘plausible accusations of casualisation’ (Fulton 1996:1). Significantly for university managers, it provides greater freedom over decision making as, arguably, they seek to dilute the power of trade unions in an attempt to minimise the likelihood of being constrained by individual or collective resistance.

Clearly, then, this all represents a significant degree of change to the conditions under which academics carry out their work. So much so that it would, perhaps, be surprising if there were not an element of resistance to change, which can be defined as

An inability or an unwillingness to discuss or to accept changes that are perceived to be damaging or threatening to the individual (Buchanan and Huczynski 2004:617).

This deliberately straightforward definition serves to illustrate what is actually a very complex psychological response that can be expressed in a variety of ways. Resistance may be an individual act of mischief to challenge the dominant order (Watson 2002) by developing ‘coping strategies that lie outside the formal
influence of management’ (Noon and Blyton 2002:236). Such strategies could include anything from minor acts of sabotage, pilfering, or simply failing to comply with instructions. Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington identified more complex forms of resistance in their study of a motor-manufacturing plant (2001). Here it was found that workers resisted the introduction of certain change initiatives by dissembling cooperation. Resistance was grounded in perceived threats to workers’ self-identity and ‘was not animated primarily by anxieties about job security’ (Ezzamel et al 2001:1074).

In the context of Marxist labour process theory ‘the conditions for resistance are always present and tend to develop further over time’ (Thompson and McHugh 2002:116). As such, resistance may be seen as a rational response by workers to a perceived threat to their working conditions and to combat alienation. In this form, resistance will tend to be collectively organised, involving trade unions, using appropriate processes and procedures, or by taking industrial action (Salamon 2000:11).

In a recent study of Australian academics’ resistance to managerialism (discussed below), Anderson notes the likelihood of their opposition since they are

Trained in analytical thinking and inured to critique, academics are unlikely to passively accept changes they regard as detrimental…They identify – often passionately – with the tasks and goals that comprise the academic endeavour, and are therefore likely to resist erosion of valued aspects of their work (2008:252).

In this study academics employed a range of everyday strategies of resistance, such as avoidance, refusal or qualified compliance, but, perhaps more significantly, by employing intelligent argument to challenge the dominance of managerialism. For Anderson then, academics’ resistance to managerialism is not only to be expected given the strength of academic cultures, but is also ‘a force with which university management must reckon’ (Anderson 2008:267).
Despite the ameliorating effects of such resistance to change in the academy, the concerns that underpin the proletarianisation debate, discussed in this section, remain. Such concerns clearly conflict with the legitimising discourse of neoliberalism, explained in 2.2, where such criticisms are rejected and characterised as being outmoded and ignoring the realities of the modern, globalised HE sector. This discourse, the strength of which should not be underestimated, presents university reform in virtuous, social justice terms, arguing that change has led to the creation of a more entrepreneurial and customer focussed sector, to the ultimate benefit of students and the wider society, as a better-educated and more knowledgeable workforce generates greater economic wealth-creation. For academics working in such an environment, the rewards should be clear.

But these developments have created an increasingly individualised employment relationship of growing complexity and diversity. It is, I contend, the relentless process of individualisation that is central to the debate and which raises serious questions over the traditional collegiate approach to managing universities. As the pressures on individual workloads, productivity and accountability rise, then the relationship between institutions and the academic profession becomes increasingly contentious and problematic (Farnham 1999). It seems there is a growing separation in HE between those who execute the work and the reality that important decisions are made further away from the work in elite policy-making units (Smyth 1995) as universities become increasingly management oriented. Accordingly this raises questions concerning the ways in which the academic employment relationship is managed, and is the issue to which I now turn.

**Managing Universities**

Traditionally, those responsible for running universities

…were regarded as academic leaders rather than as managers and chief executives…universities were perceived as communities of scholars researching and teaching together in collegial ways. (Deem 1998:47).
It seems that traditional approach has now been reversed, as university leaders are taking a far more corporate and, indeed, hierarchical approach. The management strategies adopted by universities are beginning to follow an increasingly managerialist tendency, as managers seek to impose new control mechanisms on the work of academics, directing them towards corporate goals. In this section I consider the gradual shift from collegiality to managerialism.

Deem (1998) showed how a hybridised form of ‘new managerialism’ has emerged in UK universities that differs from other parts of the public sector, and includes the management of individual performance and target setting. It is interesting to note the similarity of experiences in both pre and post 1992 universities. Although sectoral differences in working conditions apparently persist, the system that has developed following the 1992 FHE Act ‘has created and reinforced pressures for convergence which arguably bear considerably more strongly on individual academic staff than they do on their institutions’ (Fulton 2001:2).

Deem’s (1998) study concludes that traditional notions of the role of the academic are clearly under threat. Individual autonomy, an underpinning value cherished by most academics, is increasingly being curtailed as managers seek to monitor individual performance in order to facilitate budget allocation more effectively.

The key components of this hybridised form of managerialism in HE have been usefully summarised by Reed as;

The assertion of managerial prerogative as a necessary precondition for the introduction of market/private sector discipline as a universal solution to all problems

The direct regulation of professional practice through the design and implementation of various control mechanisms geared to the effective auditing and monitoring of professional work

The redefinition of higher education as a commodity providing service in which educational needs and priorities are reduced to codifiable and measurable performance outcomes and indicators
The re-engineering of the occupational and disciplinary cultures on which higher education has traditionally been founded to ensure that they will release the innate creative and innovative capacities of staff from the stultifying influence of bureaucracy (2001:1).

With the increasing emphasis on the need to quantify performance, for instance in the form of university league tables (section 2.3), it is perhaps unsurprising that HE management has turned to HRM and attempted to implement individual performance management systems. In an Australian study into the introduction of Performance Indicators (PIs) into HE, Taylor (2001) concluded that academics’ dissatisfaction with the system centred around the perceived inability of quantitative measures to capture the many and varied dimensions of academic work, the apparent subordination of teaching to research and a limited involvement of academics in the development of PIs. As Taylor suggests

…if PIs are to trigger an improvement in the performance of academics, they should in the first place be developed and refined in consultation with them (2001:380).

There is perhaps nothing inherently wrong with the idea of performance management - if the motivation is to actually improve performance. The problem seems to be that in many organisations it would appear that ‘people performance is vitiated by the obsession with control and therefore is liable to undermine, rather than contribute to, performance’ (Hendry et al 2000). Reed has argued that under conditions of modernity there is an ideologically motivated suspicion of the professional power exercised by knowledge workers which has led to the development of ‘organisational control and surveillance systems in which mobility, transparency and predictability are the dominant motifs’ (1996:586).

There has been an increasing focus on the individual and greater use of more individualistic management strategies, especially the use of performance appraisal and, to some extent, performance related pay (PRP). The 1992 FHE Act made
explicit reference to some form of appraisal or staff development and that has gradually been implemented in many universities. In terms of PRP, Shelley (1999) discovered something of a pre and post 1992 institutional divide, with 65% of pre 1992 universities operating some form of PRP system where an element of academic staff payment was based on performance. In contrast only 33% of post 1992 universities had such systems and interviews with personnel directors detected significant opposition to such schemes.

One of the problems that I explore in this thesis, is the rather ‘homogeneous approach’ (Simmons 2001) of HRM taken by universities’ management. The inadequacy of a ‘one size fits all’ approach has recently been demonstrated in a study of Dutch academics, which showed the need to vary the HR strategy according to the context – in this instance, different faculties (Smeenk, Eisinga, Teelken and Dooreward 2006). It is difficult to explain the continued attempts to implement such a homogenous, managerialist and individualistic regime as HRM in a sector that is traditionally characterised by collegiality, cooperation and collectivism. It is even more difficult to understand given the apparent lack of definitive evidence that HRM actually works (see section 2.2). Nevertheless, HRM apparently continues to be the favoured approach for managing academics, although the manner in which it is implemented appears variable. Warner and Crossthwaite (1992) and Mackay (1995) found evidence of an increasing awareness of the significance of HR issues in the UK, albeit to a greater degree in the new universities. But Jackson (2001) argues that the whole process is characterised by lack of planning and a rather *ad hoc* approach to HR issues.

So although it would appear that the importance of good people management has been generally accepted in universities, there is little evidence of a well-managed, strategic approach to HR. As I explained in chapter 1 and section 2.2 above, HRM requires integration of corporate and HR strategies. This can be achieved through the involvement of HR managers in strategic planning. Jackson’s findings, above, show that not only are many personnel directors being recruited directly from the private sector, but significantly, there is little evidence of them being involved in strategic planning. However, there is evidence of a significant devolution of responsibility for HR functions to line managers in areas such as
discipline, grievance, health and safety, staff development, appraisal and reward. Few, if any, had received appropriate training.

Guest and Clinton (2007) raised similar concerns over the commitment of line managers to the values of their university’s HR strategy. This is particularly significant as effective HRM depends upon committed and able line managers to implement HR policies and, on the basis of this evidence, it seems that in universities those people are still not being adequately prepared for the demands of the role. Unsurprisingly, and in common with many other studies of HRM and performance, Guest and Clinton found no association between HRM and university performance, which they attribute to ‘the relatively undeveloped state of HRM in most universities’ (2007:23).

It seems ironic that in parts of the private sector there is a recognition that the key to motivating and retaining knowledge workers is to flatten hierarchies and thus provide greater freedom to plan and work independently (Horwitz, Chan and Quazi 2003). Yet the in the HE sector quite the opposite appears to be happening, as the government continues to operate a tight regulatory regime across the whole sector and universities continue to expand management hierarchies and persist with an apparently flawed approach to HRM. It has been suggested that until now academics in the pre 92 sector ‘have fairly effectively defended the academic terrain…’ (Dent and Barry 2004:12) but we may now be witnessing a new order of things (Waring 2009:268). For it is suggested that increasing reliance on managerial solutions now brings into question the very nature of academic identities and what it means to be an academic, and could have a significant long term human cost (Berg; Barry and Chandler 2004:174). Academics find their claims to professionalism challenged as ‘government controls now extend right into areas once assumed to fall well within the domain of professional judgement and decision-making’ (Laffin 1998:223). Universities, and the academics within, retain an element of autonomy but ‘the desire of government to micro-manage institutions and their work seems to have increased and trust decreased’ (Deem et al 2007:49).
In this chapter I have explained how the higher education landscape has been significantly altered in the context of wider global pressures. In response to the challenges of globalisation governments worldwide have embarked on a process of modernisation, informed and driven by neoliberalism. Universities became enfolded into the neoliberal discourse as governments recognised the significant contribution they could make to national economies due to their role as knowledge producers. Consequently, universities became subject to a wide array of controlling audit mechanisms externally whilst, internally, a growing managerialism and the use of HRM has created an increasingly controlling and directive environment. Accordingly, academic work has undergone a process of individualisation which challenges traditional collegiate values and raises questions concerning the nature of the academy and what it means to be an academic.

In the next chapter I explain how this process of individualisation has been progressed through government policy, which has followed a distinct trajectory over the last twenty years ‘to change the relationship between higher education and the state’ (Henkel 1998:171).
Chapter 3
Managerialisation, Individualisation and Control

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2 I explained how the global landscape of HE has changed dramatically in the last three decades, leading to the emergence of a broad global discourse concerning the nature and purpose of HE sectors around the world. The response of national governments has been largely informed and driven by the ideology of neoliberalism, leading to a process of change characterised by modernisation. A number of elements central to the process of modernisation of HE can be identified. These include the shift from an elite to a mass provision of HE, the adoption of market principles throughout the sector and a consequential individualisation of academic labour. Massification and marketisation have fundamentally altered the nature of HE, calling into question both the manner in which the sector is organised and operated and the role of the academic and, indeed the purpose of the university, under conditions of modernity and neoliberalism.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how UK HE became enfolded into that broad global discourse explained in chapter 2. I discuss the changes that have taken place in UK HE, demonstrating the extent to which government HE policy was informed and driven by neoliberal ideologies, manifested as a form of NPM. I show that there has been a clear and coherent development of UK government HE policy, following a distinct trajectory from the early 1960s to the present time, resulting in modernisation and individualisation of HE. A growing insistence on the strategic economic significance of HE has led governments to seek control of the sector. This has been pursued in two ways. First, the external architecture of the sector was reorganised by empowering the funding councils and associated regulatory bodies, to ensure that universities become more closely aligned with government agendas. Second, by ensuring that, internally, universities replaced
their relatively flat structures and collegial processes with more efficient, business-like hierarchical structures and managerial processes to ensure more ‘effective’ management of academic workers. Many longstanding academic values such as collegiality, academic freedom and identity, are all challenged in this new corporate environment.

This chapter is organised into the following sections. In section 3.2 I give a brief historical overview in order to establish the importance of the collegiate values that have emerged over time and which are challenged in the current neoliberal context. I show how notions of learning as a social good, collegiality and academic freedom are seen by many as core values and mark out the rather unique nature of academic work and identity (Clegg 2008; Tapper and Salter 2003; Halsey 1992). I complete the section by summarising the ways in which such notions are challenged by discourses of modernisation, in order to contextualise the following discussion.

In section 3.3 I offer a chronological account of the changes that have taken place in UK HE, beginning with the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) that led to the first major wave of expansion. Robbins marks the point from where it is possible to discern a clear policy trajectory and, as a consequence, set in motion the process of modernisation.

In section 3.4 I discuss the Thatcher years and provide an evaluation of the significance of the New Right discourse and the way this subsequently shaped government attitudes towards HE policy-making. This was a period of fundamental reform of the whole public sector. Control and reduction of public spending emerged as a central policy theme that impacted significantly on universities, altering the nature of the environment in which they operate. In this section I also discuss the highly influential Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985) and consider its impact on the internal management of universities.

In section 3.5 I consider the second wave of expansion that began following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, enabling a further development of the massification and marketisation of the sector. In this section I discuss three highly
influential reports, *Fender* (CVCP 1993), *Dearing* (NCIHE 1997) and *Bett* (IRHEPC 1999), to illustrate how managerialism emerged as an increasingly dominant discourse.

In section 3.6 I explore developments in the twenty-first century, including the 2003 *Future of Higher Education* white paper (DFES 2003), 2004 *Framework Agreement* (INCHES 2004) and introduce the 2001 *Rewarding and Developing Staff* (HEFCE 2001) initiative. This led to a major operationalisation of HRM in UK universities and a consequent individualisation of academic labour. As a consequence, there has been a change in the way that academics are required to carry out their work and a reduction in their autonomy.

Finally, in section 3.7, I reflect on and summarise the key issues arising from chapters 2 and 3 and explicate the three critical themes that have emerged and which form a framework for my subsequent analysis.

### 3.2 A Golden Age of Higher Education?

Oxford and Cambridge universities, established in 1214 and 1290 respectively, together with the other ancient universities (see appendix 1), developed the collegiate system as the hegemonic academic trope that remained in place until the advent of neoliberalism in HE. The so-called civic universities that were founded in the period between 1832-1909 (Farnham 1999) adopted similar collegiate principles and democratic processes to their predecessors. Based within the industrial areas of Britain, these universities were established to meet the socio-economic needs of the time and were meant to advance science and technology. They were supported largely by donations from wealthy businessmen. Advancement of learning was seen as an important duty and responsibility of the individual citizen (Boden and Nedeva 2010; Shattock 2002).

As I explained in section 2.3, although universities were funded by block grants administered by the UGC, there was an implicit assumption that governments should not exercise undue influence on universities’ affairs. This arrangement, it
was believed, would enable universities and the academics within to meet their socio-economic obligations and contribute to civic society more effectively (Nedeva 2007). Such operational autonomy was an important aspect of collegiality that is increasingly challenged by a neoliberal discourse of control, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The underlying principles, values and traditions that define the nature of academia have developed and taken hold over several centuries. The ‘purpose of the university’ was shaped in Europe in part by the thinking of Cardinal Newman and Von Humboldt (Deem et al 2007). Central to Newman’s beliefs was the role of universal knowledge, with the university cast as ‘an institution for communication and circulation of thought through the personal interaction students and tutors’ (Deem et al 2007:80). Whilst for Newman, the pastoral care of students was highly important, Von Humboldt was more concerned with the authority of the professor, derived from research (Deem et al 2007). Significantly, Fuller (2007) notes the ‘dynamic unity that Humboldt held to exist between education and research… [that are] …now seen as alternating phases of an endless cycle’ (2007:57).

Indeed, as universities developed in the UK in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the value of teaching informed by research was increasingly recognised (Tapper and Salter 2003). Tapper and Salter suggest that ‘for academics to be academics they had to be committed to expanding knowledge’ and that ‘the pursuit of knowledge was valued in its own right. Research was an end in itself, [that was] pursued for its intrinsic worth’ (2003:6). The collegiate system may not have been, and probably was not, ideal, with senior academics enjoying a somewhat elevated status in relation to their junior colleagues and a clear division existing between academics and administrators. Yet this was a highly significant period that led to the emergence of important principles concerning the nature of academic work, in particular, recognition of the primacy of academic knowledge. As a consequence, academics derived considerable authority and status in the university.
As chapter 2 demonstrated, this long established collegial tradition has been supplanted in the neoliberal era by a hierarchical and corporate trope, with managers rather than academics now dominant in decision-making. Under such conditions of ‘new managerialism’ (Deem 1998) a new group of manager-academics has also emerged, exercising power and dominance over non-management academics (Deem and Brehony 2005) and, thus, further eroding the authority and status of the latter. In the context of globalisation and discourses of modernisation such a change is presented as an entirely rational response. Farnham (1999) argues that the major changes can be summarised as ‘massification, marketization, modularity of courses and Halsey’s ‘Decline of the Donnish Dominion’ (1999:232). In short, massification has led to class sizes increasing dramatically and courses have been packaged into more marketable modules to satisfy the demands of the student as consumer. Consequently, in the present HE environment authority is no longer the sole preserve of those with academic expertise, but now extends to those non-academics with strategic decision-making responsibility, as universities have evolved into more managed environments.

Brown (2005) has argued that the government’s policies towards HE are now deeply flawed, as they continue to pursue a business model and impose quasi-market principles across the sector, challenging those core values. Henkel (1998) explains the distinctive nature of those collegiate values and which are challenged by managerialism.

The most powerful norms into which academics are socialised are not those of collective action but those of academic autonomy, self motivation within self regulating communities, and the need to establish a distinctive academic identity… (1998:165)

The extent to which academic identities (Clegg 2008; Berg et al 2004; Henkel 2000) are challenged by this managerial environment that has emerged is one of the central questions that I explore in this thesis. Consequently it is necessary to understand the rather complex nature of academic identity in order to facilitate such an analysis.
Identity is understood not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person’s project and their ways of being in those sites which are constituted as being part of the academic. In this sense the space itself is multiply constituted, since for any particular individual, the site of the academic may include relationships with other colleagues globally, be a particular fragment of a department, and may include a range of activities, some of which are experienced as being academic and others of which are not. (Clegg 2008:329)

According to this comprehensive explanation, academic identity is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that is clearly interrelated with collegiality. Attempts to evaluate the extent of the challenge posed by managerialism to universities and their academics must surely appreciate such complexity.

The purpose of this section was to show how traditions of collegiality and underpinning academic values have emerged over many years and formed into a coherent narrative, from which many academics derive their identity. Recent changes to HE potentially pose a fundamental challenge to that narrative. In the next section I consider how the process of change began. The wave of expansion of HE that began in the 1960s provided the necessary impetus towards an ongoing trajectory that ultimately led to the individualisation of HE.

3.3 The First Wave of Expansion: The 1960s

In the period following the Second World War just another six universities had been created in the UK by 1962 (Farnham 1999:210). Following the publication of the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963), a government commissioned review of HE, the sector began to grow considerably. The early 1960s heralded the start of a period of significant social and industrial change, summed up in Harold Wilson’s memorable ‘burning with the white heat of technology’ speech to the Scarborough Labour conference of 1963 (Goodman
There was a growing political consensus around the need to link scientific and technological advances to economic growth (Baber and Lindsay 2006). The Robbins Report recommended an expansion of universities and student numbers, stressing that this was necessary in order to help tackle Britain’s continuing relative economic decline (Seville and Tooley 1997).

Robbins identified four major purposes of HE, clearly reflecting the traditional values and purposes outlined above: instruction in skills; promotion of general powers of the mind; the advancement of learning and the transmission of a common culture (Mayhew, Deer and Dua 2004:68). Here then was a clear reassertion of the core academic values of HE, but also an indication of the explicit view in government that universities had a role to play in developing more practical skills and contributing to national economic performance. More important than this reassertion of the socio-civic duties of universities is the emergence of a more directive approach by government towards the affairs of the HE sector.

The number of universities in the UK increased from 33 in 1960-61 to 44 in 1970-71 (Mayhew et al 2004:66). These were new universities built on greenfield sites, the so-called plate-glass institutions, (appendix 1) and former colleges of advanced technology (Parker and Jary 1995). The age participation rate of students engaged in HE increased from around 5% in 1960-61 to 14% in 1972-73 (Mayhew et al 2004:66). By 1970 Miller (1995) reports that 443,000 students were enrolled on degree or equivalent courses ‘in universities, colleges or polytechnics within a binary system …of autonomous and public sector polytechnics and colleges.’ (1995:43).

Following Robbins, the HE system ‘underwent considerable expansion and growth in institutions and subject departments’ (Deem et al 2007). However, although a more planned approach to HE policy was emerging at this stage, according to Kogan ‘it did not suffer from the artificial elements of the managerialism which is now developing’ (1989:71). Similarly, Mayhew et al argue that ‘the relationship between government and HE in the early 1960s was one of high trust…[with] relatively few systematic checks on how universities
spent their money, and even fewer on how they conducted their internal affairs’ (2004:77). Robbins does, however, mark a key stage in the developing landscape of HE after which ‘a period of considerable change and reform began’ (Deem et al 2007:43) and is the point when the trajectory towards modernisation, and then individualisation, began. For the new universities that were established following Robbins were meant to symbolise a new direction, representing a shift away from the elitism, narrow academicism and conservatism of the old university system, to stake out intellectual territory closer to the needs of mass higher education in a rapidly changing, high-tech world (Perkin 1991:294).

It was, perhaps, not until the 1980s that the full implications of the process that Robbins set in train became clear, and is the subject to which I turn in the following section.

### 3.4 Thatcherism and Managerialism

The next stage of development effectively began with the election of a Conservative government in 1979. The subsequent neoliberalisation of the whole of the public sector characterised by NPM fundamentally altered the relationship between government and HE. A central tenet of the Thatcherite, or New Right, agenda was the perceived need to control public expenditure. For the HE sector this led to huge cuts in the allocation to the UGC and demands for efficiency savings (Tapper and Salter 2003; Parker and Jary 1995). The sector came under increasing financial pressure, with the government first making severe cuts in 1981 that averaged 17% and extended to 44% (Wright 2004:82). But there were other government imperatives. Universities were now encouraged to become more engaged with business and enterprise, to set targets to encourage certain disciplines over others, to recruit more fee-paying overseas students and to appoint business executives to governing bodies (Parker and Jary 1995).
Into this environment came the *Jarratt Report* (CVCP 1985) on efficiency in universities. Sir Alex Jarratt, a former civil servant turned industrialist, was Chancellor of Birmingham University (Deem 2004; Kogan 1989) and chaired the committee that produced the report. The report was highly influential, not only because it is so ‘explicit in its managerialism’ (Kogan 1989:75), but also for the fact that it laid the foundations for the model of the modern, managerial university (Scott 1995).

Jarratt argued that universities should resemble any other corporate enterprise, with subsidiary units and individual academics accountable to the corporation. The report claims that universities had been inefficient in planning and resource allocation in the past and that this was all to do with powerful academic units, inhabited by individual academics who saw their academic discipline as more important than the long-term well being of the university. Kogan’s riposte was that the well-being of an institution

is important only because it ensures the good work of the individuals who work in it. Any academic enterprise which does not have powerful academic departments and individual academics who cherish their academic discipline above all else, will be second rate or worse (1989:76).

Here then, is a clear sign of the polarised discourse beginning to emerge between those who may be termed the modernisers and the traditionalists.

Jarratt also argued the case for stronger leadership in universities. This has become hugely significant as the model advocated vice chancellors in the role of chief executive rather than leading academics (Deem *et al* 2007) and Heads of Department as middle managers. The role of individual teaching and research staff is less clearly defined, ‘except that they have got to be accountable and that they have got to fulfil the institution’s objectives’ (Kogan 1989:77). Such notions conflict considerably with the traditional academic values. As Dearlove explains;
good academics cannot be told what to do; they defy control; and the kind of creativity required cannot be commanded by an academic master… (1997:57).

It is this kind of autonomy, based in the collegial system, that academics have struggled to retain in the face of modernisation and which is challenged by the subsequent managerialisation of HE, first mooted by Jarratt.

Following Jarratt it is possible to detect changes both in the way that successive UK governments have sought to manage the HE sector and in their perceptions of the role of a university. The managerial model suggested by Jarratt has now become the template for the modern university, leading to a shift in the balance of power away from academics to university managers. Such a model is the product of the neoliberal discourse of modernisation explained in chapter 2. Thus, line managers are now required to be far more accountable for meeting targets and delivering on budgets, the consequence of which, is likely to be much closer monitoring and scrutiny of individual academics within departments. Yet, despite the increasing ubiquity of this approach, it is inherently problematic. For there remains a tension between on the one hand allowing academics the time, space and freedom to pursue the creative aspects of their work, whilst on the other, managing the university as a commercial corporation with all the trappings of budgets and individual performance criteria.

The Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997 were therefore hugely influential and challenged existing orthodoxies in terms of how the public sector, including HE, should be managed. The dominant New Right ideology that underpinned the Jarratt Report led to fundamental changes in the nature of HE and a growing managerialisation of the sector. Following a period of cuts to HE, the stage was now set for the next wave of expansion, to which I now turn.
3.5 The Second Wave of Expansion: The 1990s: Massification and Marketisation

The 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act* (FHE) ‘established a single framework for higher education with separate funding bodies for England, Scotland and Wales’ (Deem *et al.* 2007:45). It followed the *Education Reform Act* of 1988 (section 2.2) that abolished the UGC and significantly changed the ‘structure of the system of accountability and control of higher education’ (Arthur 1997:88). The 1992 Act was clearly informed by an increasingly dominant neoliberal discourse of modernisation, discussed above. It created a unitary system that removed the division between higher education institutions and effectively produced the ‘level playing field’ necessary to allow competition to take place between providers. There had been a growth in demand for university places from the early 1970s and according to Mayhew *et al.* (2004) one of the aims of the Act was to provide sufficient places to meet that demand. As a consequence, the conditions were created that enabled the massification and marketisation of the HE sector to further develop.

Following the 1992 Act polytechnics and colleges of higher education were transformed into higher education corporations (OPSI 2009), with 34 former polytechnics (appendix 1) becoming the first group of post 92 universities with the power to award their own degrees (Farnham 1999). Whilst incorporation meant that institutions were ostensibly independent, a board of governors, rather than the local authority oversaw their management. The Act made provisions for funding councils to monitor the quality of education provision, thus ensuring that the government was able to maintain an element of control over the sector. The new system that emerged has been likened to a managed market (Arthur 1997), with quasi-market conditions (Waring 2009:257). Here, the government maintains control of funding whilst institutions are required to ensure cost-effective, value for money resource allocation, subject to external audit and review. Here then is an example of the neoliberal discourse of control that I discussed in section 2.3, clearly influencing the UK government’s HE policy agenda.
Universities now sought to attract greater numbers of students. To make programmes more marketable to the student consumer they were re-packaged into shorter modules, delivered on a semesterised basis, allowing students greater ‘choice’ and flexibility. Under-recruiting programmes came under threat of closure. Academics came under closer scrutiny to ensure that programmes met centralised quality assurance criteria, dictated by the newly Higher Education Quality Council (Deem et al 2007). This was a highly significant development. Worthington and Hodgson (2005) explain how quality assurance in HE has been presented as entirely reasonable and difficult to contest, but can be better understood as a coercive form of power, control and surveillance. Accordingly, quality assurance systems have

…created a situation in which university teachers today are compelled to fashion their teaching in accordance with pre-given quantifiable teaching objectives and learning outcomes that correspond with managerial notions of ‘best practice’… (Worthington and Hodgson 2005:106)

The effect of the FHE Act was then, hugely significant. The market principles that were established fundamentally challenged traditional academic norms by firmly aligning the university with the government’s developing focus on the economic purposes of higher education, with traditional ideas of advancement of knowledge for its own sake becoming less important (Mayhew et al 2004). It also created a very complex system characterised by diversity between what became known as pre and post 92 universities. Although such diversity provides greater choice reflecting neoliberal agendas for UK HE, the system that has emerged was largely unplanned (Taylor 2003). So despite obvious institutional differences, universities are now forced to operate in an environment where all are judged by the same criteria, with some competing for funding in areas where they cannot realistically specialise, leading to a potential erosion of quality (Taylor 2003).

This legislation ushered in the next wave of HE expansion. The student age participation rate soared from around 17% in 1988-89 to 33% in 2000-01 (Mayhew et al 2004:66). Farnham (1999) states that the number of students in
higher education had increased from 321,00 in 1962/3 to 1.5 million in 1995/6 (1999:215). By 1997 there were 176 higher education institutions in the UK, including the constituent parts of the federal universities of London and Wales, of which 115 were titled universities (NCIHE 1997). The New Labour government, elected in 1997, ensured the continuation of this wave of expansion by calling for a participation in HE of 50% of 18 to 30 year olds by 2010 (Bryson 2004:39). By 2009 the age participation rate in England had reached 43 percent (DIUS 2009).

However, the post 1992 expansion, in comparison with that of the 1960s, was not well funded. In the period between 1980 and 2000 the index of public funding to HE fell in real terms from 100 to 52.5 and, as a consequence, the unit of resource (total public funding divided by the number of full-time equivalent students) fell year by year (Mayhew et al 2004:66). Such dramatic cuts clearly reflect neoliberal imperatives of cost reduction and efficiency maximisation.

Thus, HE underwent a process of marketisation and massification following the 1992 FHE Act. At the same time, an increasingly powerful associated managerial discourse was developing following the Jarratt Report. Three government commissioned reports in the 1990s - Fender, Dearing and Bett - expressed that increasingly managerial discourse. I consider each in turn.

**Promoting People: The Fender Report**

*The Fender Report*, produced by the university employers’ body the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) in 1993, was originally conceived as a discussion document for universities. Professor Brian Fender, the vice-chancellor of Keele, chaired the working group that included a mixture of academics, industrialists and a significant number of university personnel officers. The aim of their work was to provide a strategic framework for the development of staff in universities in an effort to maintain their enthusiasm and commitment in the context of global changes affecting people at work.

Like Jarratt previously, the report is heavily influenced by private sector management rhetoric with much reference to ‘modernisation’, ‘customer satisfaction’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘continuous improvement’. Little mention is made
of the traditional values of HE and a strongly managerialist tone is perceptible throughout. In the section of the report that deals with trade union relations and the recommendation for single-table pay bargaining, for example, the report states that

If the trade unions chose not to co-operate, the only practical way to achieve the objective would be to withdraw the existing recognition of all the trade unions and offer instead a new recognition agreement under which all the trade unions would be expected to sit round the same negotiating table… (CVCP 1993:3)

The report goes on in a similar vein before recommending that ‘the unions be invited to agree amongst themselves … and, if they cannot, the employers must decide’ (CVCP 1993:3). Such a tone is suggestive of the growing authority of an emerging managerial discourse in which notions of academia as described by Dearlove (1997) and Kogan (1989) are implicitly dismissed as belonging to the past.

Two further issues raised in Fender reinforce this point. The first is the suggestion that pay should be linked to performance of both individuals and teams and that reward strategies should ‘encourage and reward excellence and address under-performance’ (CVCP 1993:2). Second, the report recommends that universities move away from using personnel management and replace it with ‘the more wide-ranging human resource management with its emphasis on people as a resource not just a means’ (CVCP 1993:4). Given the discussion in chapter 2 of the rather contested nature of HRM, and the connotations of control associated with individual performance management, such recommendations are illuminating. Not only was the government arguing the case for a more business-like approach to managing HE, but now those actually responsible for running the universities were too.

The Fender report marks an increasingly powerful shift to a more managerialist approach which, alongside the massification and marketisation of the HE sector,
further legitimised the discourse of modernisation. It also marks the point where the notion that universities should adopt HRM was first mooted, a change that became explicit following the 2001 RDS initiative.

**The Dearing Report**

In 1997 The National Committee of Inquiry into HE, under the chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing, published its report ‘Higher Education in the Learning Society’ (NCIHE 1997). This was the most high profile report since Robbins and set out a broad vision for HE over the next twenty years. The Dearing report, commissioned by the Conservative government led by John Major, attempted to address the growing problem of funding an expanding higher education sector. It was a lengthy document of some 1700 pages with over 90 recommendations. Consequently, a detailed review is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a brief outline of some of its key points shows how Dearing was significant in maintaining the trajectory towards individualisation.

The Dearing committee, with representatives from education and business, sought the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including employers, employees and the main academic trade unions. Its proposed vision was certainly challenging, calling for a sector ‘to be world class both in learning at all levels and in a range of research of different kinds’ (NCIHE 1997:1)

Dearing proposed four main purposes of higher education.

1. To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment;

2. To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society;
3. To serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels;

4. To play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society.

(NCIHE 1997:4)

There is a clear emphasis on the economic role of HE, to the extent that even ‘increasing knowledge for its own sake’ is linked to benefiting the economy and society, perhaps reflecting a modernisation discourse. In common with the emerging globalisation discourse, the report goes on to argue that in order for the UK to remain competitive internationally, it must produce more graduates. Accordingly, Dearing concluded that it was appropriate and timely to resume the growth of the HE sector that had been curtailed by the Conservative’s public expenditure cuts of the 1980s.

Dearing acknowledged that growth could lead to a diminution in standards. To counter this possibility two related sets of proposals were advanced. First, a number of suggestions were made with the aim of standardising frameworks of qualifications and assessments. Second, Dearing proposed that the QAA be given an enhanced remit to include quality assurance and public information, standards verification, maintenance of the qualifications framework and the establishment of a code of practice for adoption by institutions, to ensure conformity (NCIHE 1997:10).

The report acknowledged that morale was low throughout the sector, but that staff had responded well to the demands of an expanding teaching load, more administration and constant pressure for research outcomes. Further, Dearing highlighted the significance of boosting the confidence of staff in order to achieve the vision for HE stating that what is required are ‘professional, committed members of staff who are appropriately trained, respected and rewarded’ (NCIHE 1997:6). To achieve this end a number of recommendations were put forward to ensure that academic staff are adequately equipped to undertake their changing roles in the context of the modernisation of HE.
Significantly, the report appeared to favour an enhanced role for HR professionals and recommended that all institutions should update their staff development policies to ensure they addressed the changing roles of staff (NCIHE 1997:13). It was this recommendation that led directly to the Rewarding and Developing Staff (HEFCE 2001) initiative and the subsequent adoption of the technologies of HRM across the HE sector, as called for in the Fender Report. In an apparent attempt to legitimate the status of academics as professionals, Dearing recommended that it should become a requirement for all new academic staff to become members of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT)⁴.

On the issues of pay, conditions of service and working practices, Dearing concluded that the ‘rather under-developed staffing policies of many institutions are barriers to effective practice’ (NCIHE 1997:41). However, it was felt that the whole issue of the employment framework was such a substantial area that a further independent review was recommended to investigate more fully. This review eventually resulted in the Bett Report (IRHEPC 1999) – see below. In terms of funding, Dearing makes plain that the state should remain the main provider. However, it was suggested that graduates, as the main beneficiaries of HE through improved employment prospects and pay should, in the future, make a greater contribution to the costs of HE. Although this recommendation was not taken up immediately, it eventually led to the introduction of student top-up fees in 2004; a necessary ingredient in creating a wholly marketised HE sector.

The Dearing Report received a mixed reception, not least because, as Shattock (1998) explains, vision is one thing but translating it into practical steps is another. In this respect, Shattock believes, there hangs over the report ‘an uncertainty about details, a fuzziness about structures’ (1998:36), which ultimately invite further debate rather than providing steps for action. Much of the criticism of Dearing concentrated on the report’s recommendations, which pay the price for attempting to achieve consensus, so it ‘displays an ambiguity on every key matter...’ (Robertson, 1998:8). It has also been suggested that the

⁴ The ILT was renamed the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2004 when it merged with Learning and Teaching Support Network and the National Coordination Team.
problem for Dearing was timing; when the inquiry began Britain already had a system of mass higher education. Consequently, Neave (1998) argued, the report came too late to effectively tackle any of the associated problems.

However, despite such criticisms, the Dearing report is significant. It marks a further stage in the trajectory towards modernisation of the sector and individualisation of the academic profession. A modernisation discourse clearly informs the suggestion that further marketisation and managerialisation of the sector was necessary to achieve economic competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. The recommendation that universities should incorporate HRM tools to ‘manage’ their academic staff more effectively is the product of a neoliberal discourse of individualisation. The notion that staff should be ‘required’ to join the ILT together with the proposed role for an enhanced QAA suggest an inherent belief that you can simply create new national bodies that purport to possess the secrets of teaching and learning and are prepared to judge the teaching performance of every university teacher in every kind of institution against criteria that the national bodies themselves define and embody (Trow 1998:109).

The immediate effect of Dearing was perhaps imperceptible. However it is the prescriptions for the future that are the key to assessing the effectiveness of the report. In addition to the recommendations for managing staff, Dearing also made recommendations for reforming the management and governance arrangements of HE institutions. Such arrangements, it argued, were characterised by diversity and a lack of clarity and as a consequence were not as effective as they might be. Although this was rather a thinly veiled criticism of the management of universities, significantly, the prescription for improvement is more and better management. Accordingly Robertson concluded that the committee members persuade themselves that they know best how a system of higher education should be run, either as a version of a large business corporation or as a major public bureaucracy (1998:19).
Such ‘academic corporatism’ (Tapper and Salter 1998:22) attracts much criticism, yet the Dearing Report demonstrates the growing strength of a managerial discourse and, as a consequence, marks an important stage in the trajectory towards modernisation and individualisation of the sector.

**The Bett Report**

Following the recommendation by the *Dearing Report* a committee, chaired by Sir Michael Bett, was established and produced a report into pay and conditions of academic staff (IRHEPC 1999). The Bett committee included representatives of HE employers, the main trade unions and independent members drawn from the public and private sectors. It took written and oral evidence from an extensive range of organisations and individuals, including staff working in higher education, higher education institutions and professional bodies associated with higher education. The employers’ body UCEA (University and Colleges Employers Association) and the main academic unions AUT (Association of University Teachers) and NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education) were consulted widely.

The stated objective of the committee was

> to identify, and point the way towards, pay arrangements and related employment practices which will underpin an effective world-class HE system and which will be appropriate for the first part of the twenty-first century, taking account of likely technological and other developments.

(IRHEPC 1999:55)

In setting out twelve challenges to meet that objective the report delivered some fairly stark criticisms of the system of management and the levels of pay and general working conditions existing in HE, which lagged well behind other sectors. The committee recognised the need to address the issue of people management, stating that ‘we are concerned about the low priority which seems to be given to people management issues in higher education’ (IRHEPC 1999:57).
The report acknowledged that jobs in higher education had become significantly more onerous (1999:30) and the ‘general perception among both academic and non-academic staff is that the manifest increase in their productivity over the last decade has gone wholly unrewarded.’ (1999:32). That all of this improvement had been achieved and with ‘no evidence that the quality of the sector’s output has declined…’ (1999:29) was generally taken as a resounding vote of confidence in academic staff. Despite this, the report placed a strong emphasis on the need to improve people management for all levels of staff, suggesting that funding councils might provide initiatives to help fund improvements. Management development specifically was singled out for attention.

We feel strongly that unless there are improvements in the way staff are led, managed and developed, the vision of sustaining an expanded and vibrant world-class HE system in this country will not be fulfilled.

(1999:311)

As Dearing before it, Bett also concluded that the key to improving the performance of the HE sector lay with management, who should be equipped with the skills to ‘manage’ academics more effectively.

On the issue of determining pay and conditions, the committee recognised that there was a significant difference of opinion between the employers, represented by UCEA, and the academic trade unions (AUT and NATFHE). The former were seeking to maintain substantial flexibility at the local level without the need to adhere to any national guidelines, whereas the trade unions were determined to preserve national collective pay bargaining. Bett’s conclusion was that a broad national framework should remain, providing sufficient freedom for individual institutions to vary the detail of their conditions to fit local circumstances. The preservation of national collective bargaining was set to become a major political struggle between employers and employees in HE.

One key to interpreting the significance of Bett is to focus on the differing tone of the submissions to the inquiry. With HE employers now operating as chief executives running their own corporations, as Jarratt proposed, they were reluctant
to agree to any changes that might dilute their ability to control the employment relationship locally. Consequently, some argue that Bett had little effect on the sector (Farnham 2001:42). Certainly the proposed increase of 20% in pay levels over the following three years (1999:185) was not implemented. However, the proposals for a broad national framework for determining pay and conditions are highly significant. This paved the way for a subsequent individualisation of the mechanism for determining academic pay, the implications of which, I address in this thesis.

Taken together, the effect of the *Fender, Dearing* and *Bett* reports was particularly influential. The high profile of Dearing and Bett in particular, opened up the debate concerning the role and purpose of the university under conditions of modernisation, to a much wider audience. The notion that universities should become more efficient and business-like was entirely consistent with popular discourses. As a consequence, many universities began to re-organise their management structures in ways that challenged the established collegiate processes that accorded with a more traditional academic narrative.

In parallel to these important changes within universities, the government’s neoliberal reforms were significantly affecting the nature of the HE sector. By empowering such agencies as the QAA and the various funding bodies the government was able to maintain a considerable degree of control over the sector. As a consequence, the second wave of expansion discussed in this section saw a significant change to UK HE, characterised by a growing massification, marketisation and managerialisation. In the following section I consider the associated individualisation of HE.

### 3.6 Twenty-First Century Individualisation

In this final section of the chapter I discuss three important developments that have helped to reinforce the marketisation of HE and led to a further individualisation of the academic employment relationship. First, the

The Future of Higher Education

In 2003 the government published a white paper that set out its latest vision for the future of HE (DFES 2003) and which paved the way for the 2004 Higher Education Act (OPSI 2009). It included the proposal to allow universities to charge fees of up to £3000 per year for courses, which was entirely consistent with a neoliberal discourse of individualisation, where some of the costs of HE are transferred from the state onto the shoulders of the individual. This, the government argued, would give institutions greater freedom to manage their own affairs and reduce reliance on state funding and offer greater choice to individual students consumers whilst, counter-intuitively, also making the system fairer.

Having a university education brings big benefits and while the government will continue to pay most of the cost involved in studying for a degree, it is also reasonable to ask students to contribute to this. But we need to make sure that no student is put off from going into higher education because they cannot afford the cost of studying while they are at university. And those who come from the poorest backgrounds should get extra support

(DFES 2003:2)

Critics argued that, in reality, student fees would lead to ‘the creation of a tiered system’ (Brown 2003:5), where students would have ‘no real equality of opportunity or institutions equal chances’ (NATFHE 2003:3). It was argued by some that the £3000 limit was only a starting point and that the cap would soon be lifted – Brown (2004) predicted somewhere between 2006 and 2010 – thus widening the gap between the top and bottom and creating greater social inequalities. The likely result, Brown (2004) argued, an increase in the number of mergers and collaborations as the poorer institutions seek to attract students and,
almost inevitably, there will be a reduction in the range and choice of provision overall.

This white paper provides a good example of the way in which the discourse of modernisation has totally transformed the nature of the debate around higher education. The proposals for reforming HE are based on market principles and are ‘informed very largely by economic and wealth-creation arguments’ (NATFHE 2003:3).

In a fast-changing and increasingly competitive world, the role of higher education in equipping the labour force with appropriate and relevant skills, in stimulating innovation and supporting productivity and in enriching the quality of life is central.

(DFES 2003:10)

In terms of management, the aim was to enable universities to take responsibility for their own strategic and financial future. Strong leadership and management, freed from excessive red tape, will help them not just respond to change, but to drive it.

(DFES 2003:76)

The white paper acknowledges the importance of recruiting, retaining and rewarding high calibre staff in HE and, also, the massive productivity gains delivered in recent years by existing staff. It also calls for the development of professional standards for teachers in higher education, to be expressed as new competences (DFES 2003). The expectation that all new staff should be required to obtain a new standardised teaching qualification was justified on the grounds of enhancing quality for the student.

In *The Future of Higher Education* the government presented its proposals for HE as the common-sense view which sees ‘failure to create a learning society as a threat to the future of the nation (Wright 2004:82). However, Wright suggests there is a more far-reaching agenda as we are now
witnessing a major transformation of the sector, a re-purposing of universities within modern Britain, changes in their governance and management, the ratcheting up of staff productivity and redirection of their work, and a new focus on the student as consumer (2004:72).

Such arguments certainly support a modernisation discourse and it is clear that the HE sector has undergone a considerable degree of change. Within a very short time following the 2004 Act student fees were introduced and at the time of writing in 2010, the first cohort of fee-paying, individualised, students has just graduated. At the same time there are calls for fees to rise to £5000 on the grounds that their introduction has not deterred poorer students from going to university (Guardian 2009). The effect of the 2004 Act was then, twofold. The introduction of student fees brought the notion of a free market for higher education a step closer, thus advancing the marketisation agenda. It also led to a strengthening of the modernisation discourse by ‘re-purposing’ the role of the modern university as a commercially oriented, ‘customer’ focussed institution.

**Modernisation of Pay Structures**

*The Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Pay Structures* (JNCHES 2004) was the result of joint negotiations between HE employers and the trade unions under the auspices of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES). Both the Dearing and Bett Reports had stated the need to develop a pay system that adequately and fairly rewarded academic staff in the context of changes to HE. The outcome was an agreement that led to a significant individualisation of the academic employment relationship.

The purpose of the *Framework Agreement* expressed by the joint committee that produced it, was to

modernise pay arrangements in the sector to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, to tackle problems of low pay, to recognise and reward the contribution which
individuals make, and to underpin opportunities for career and organisational development (JNCHES 2003:1).

A number of recommendations were suggested to achieve these aims. It was suggested that there should be a broad national pay framework for guidance, but with the flexibility for substantial local variation within individual institutions, much as Bett had recommended. A single pay spine was proposed to harmonise pay arrangements across the sector and that would be subject to joint annual review. Assimilation of academic staff across to grades on the spine would be based on the outcome of institution wide job evaluation/role analysis arrangements. A model pay structure was provided - called appendix C - which, it was stated, would ‘meet the needs of many HEIs’ [but allowing for institutions to] ‘negotiate variants of or alternatives to this…’ (JNCHES 2003:2). Also included was a much debated new system of contribution points which would be available as an additional incentive to staff at the top of their pay grades. A pay increase of 6.44% over two years was offered, falling short of the 20% increase suggested by Bett.

Implementation of the agreement was to be the subject of negotiation between individual HE institutions and their recognised trade unions. Institutions were called on to use their best endeavours to introduce these new pay arrangements from 1 August 2004 or as soon as practicable thereafter, and to complete implementation by 1 August 2006, subject to the funding arrangements in the devolved administrations (JNCHES 2003:5).

In a national ballot in 2004 academic staff voted to accept the Framework Agreement. Consequently, this led to a significant transformation of the existing system of national collective bargaining for determining pay across the HE sector.

On the face of it the Framework Agreement appeared to offer much of what the UCEA had been arguing for in its submission to the Bett Report. Although it retained some element of national guidance which ‘prevented a complete free-for-
all in local pay bargaining’ (Waring 2007:154), the power of local management within institutions increased substantially as a result of the Agreement. For the ability to vary implementation arrangements offered far greater local flexibility in pay negotiations. Consequently, the decentralisation of bargaining led to a ‘further degree of individualisation at the level of the institution’ (Waring 2007:154).

In the context of growing managerialism throughout the sector the localisation of pay negotiations contained within the Framework Agreement did, then, create the potential for conflict and contestation between management and trade unions. For example, progression within pay grades is a normal expectation for staff but now subject to ‘procedures for dealing with performance problems’ (JNCHES 2003:2). Also the notion of contribution points was seen by many as being one step away from performance related pay and inappropriate for academics, given its potentially divisive nature.

Ultimately, academic staff voted to accept the deal and in a rather ironic twist, had to consider balloting for industrial action due to the tardiness of so many universities in implementing the new system. The reasons why academic staff accepted such an individualistic pay deal given the long-standing support for national collective pay bargaining are complex and beyond the scope of this chapter. It was the view of the union negotiators that to reject the deal would lead to outright conflict and the need for a sustained period of industrial action if the minds of the employers were to be changed (NATFHE 2004). This point was clearly emphasised in the ballot, where the ballot papers indicated that a vote against the deal was essentially a vote in favour of strike action. Thus, the deal was accepted with a two-thirds majority reflecting, perhaps, not so much support for the deal, as an unwillingness to stage a sustained period of industrial action.

The primary effect of the Framework Agreement was to further individualise the employment relationship within universities by shifting the balance of power towards management through the localisation of implementation arrangements. It also illustrates the dominance of the modernisation discourse, and the difficulty of presenting a strong counter-argument, in the face of a sustained trajectory over the
last 40 years. For many staff and, in particular younger academics whose only experience is of the modernised HE sector, it is possible that such a pay settlement was seen as the best that could be achieved in the context of a powerful, neoliberal policy narrative.

I turn now to discuss the government initiative that led to a major operationalisation of HRM in the UK HE sector and, as such, cemented the effects of the individualistic trajectory that have been explained throughout this chapter.

**Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education**

In 2001 the *Rewarding and Developing Staff in Higher Education* (RDS) (HEFCE 2001) programme was launched. Both the Dearing and Bett reports had previously highlighted the need for more effective leadership and a better standard of people management in universities. Bett actually suggested that funding councils might consider the possibility of linking an element of funding to some sort of HR initiatives, to include management development (IRHEPC 1999:89).

Prior to this, the Fender report had explicitly called for a shift from a traditional personnel management approach to the more strategic technology of HRM (CVCP 1993:4). Hence, RDS was the inevitable outcome of a sustained discourse within the wider context of modernisation, stressing that academics should be managed more effectively in order that they may achieve their objectives more efficiently.

The central idea of RDS was that a percentage of universities’ funding would be contingent upon the production of a detailed HR strategy that identified specific and costed HR objectives. It was for institutions themselves to determine priorities, but HEFCE identified six key areas which had to be covered in the strategy.

1. Recruitment and retention
2. Staff development and training – including management development
3. Equal opportunities – including equal pay
4. Review of staffing needs
5. Annual performance reviews – includes individual rewards

(HEFCE 2001:1/16)

There were two stages to RDS: the first from 2001 to 2004 and the second from 2005 to 2006. The funding from HEFCE for the first period amounted to some £330 million, around 4.95% of the total funding for universities in England alone. In the second period a further £167 million was allocated to RDS. Additional sums were also made available. For example, in order to stimulate academic staff recruitment there was a further £20 million to fund a Golden Hello scheme (2004/03:62). Another £10 million was made available to fund a Promising Researcher Fellowship Scheme (2004/03:63).

It was always HEFCE’s intention that RDS would have a finite timescale and from 2006 all funding would be returned to the core (HEFCE 2001). It was envisaged that by then the HR values promoted by the initiative would be sufficiently embedded in the strategy of HEIs and would ultimately become self-supporting, probably through the use of a self-assessment tool and by reference to standardised HR benchmarks.

The effect of RDS on universities and their employees is one of the central questions that I address in this thesis, but it did lead to a number of generic changes across the HE sector. For example, it has now become the norm for universities to produce comprehensive HR strategies, often published on their websites as an inducement to prospective employees, and a string of associated HR policies. Former personnel departments have in the main renamed themselves HR departments. Many perceive that there has been an associated increase in the number of HR personnel (see chapter 5). Also, the strategic significance of HR departments has been enhanced, as HR directors have assumed an increasingly senior status within university hierarchies.

HEFCE itself commissioned two independent evaluations (Deloitte and Touche 2002; Office for Public Management 2002), as well as carrying out several of their own internal audits to assess the effectiveness of RDS. The overall findings
suggested that there had been a significant strengthening of the HR function and that, generally, universities were taking a far more professional approach to HR management. Some of the major benefits included a greater transparency over the allocation of funds to specific measures via the implementation of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Reliable, Timely) objectives and that, as a result, there was an increasing confidence in the mechanics of the process. Decision-making generally was enhanced, it was claimed, through the generation of appropriate data, often in the form of annual HR reports for the consumption of management and governors.

RDS was perceived by HEFCE to have focused the minds and ultimately raised the profile of HR strategy and management throughout the sector (HEFCE 2003/33:13). The Deloitte and Touche report noted the far greater incidence of HR directors’ involvement in strategic planning, which had been one of the more general criticisms of university management in previous years. In consideration of future methods of allocation of funds this report suggested a system of earned autonomy where funding is automatically allocated to a HEI once it has demonstrated an ability to achieve measurable HR targets (Deloitte and Touche 2002).

It is worth noting, however, that these were very early reports into the effectiveness of RDS, which based their analysis on a review of relevant HR policies and a survey of HR directors. Consequently, they were not able to present any degree of detailed qualitative analysis. In a more recent study Guest and Clinton (2007) suggest there has been some general ‘improvement’ in HRM in universities, but agree that more needs to be done. The authors also acknowledge the need for a more detailed study than this survey of HR directors provides. The aim of my thesis is to provide that level of detail and qualitative analysis.

In the context of the policy trajectory for UK HE the introduction of RDS was a significant development that has much in common with the managerialist discourse that emerged following the Jarratt Report (sections 3.4; 3.5). For although the notion that ‘better management of people’ should be a specific policy
objective has much to commend it, the nature of the proposed HRM approach to achieve that aim is, potentially, problematic. In chapter 2 I explained the contested nature of HRM as an approach to managing people, including evidence that there is little to support claims that HRM leads to any improvement in organisational or individual performance (Keenoy 2007) and that HRM is actually a tool of management control (Hendry et al 2000). Chapter 2 also highlighted the inadequacy of such homogeneous ‘one-size fits all’ approaches (Smeenk et al 2006).

Hence, the adoption of such a strategy is consistent with neoliberalism and NPM, where HRM is more to do with increasing control over the management of workers than actually enhancing their development. Indeed, universities were required to produce their HR strategies, conforming to very specific criteria, if they were to receive any funding. This indicates a specific neoliberal policy objective, designed to enable government to maintain a degree of control over funding, in line with the Framework Agreement (2004) and the Higher Education Act (2004) discussed above.

The effective implementation of RDS required universities to undertake a process of internal reorganisation in order that line managers could practise HRM and performance management. For the effective operation of a performance management system is contingent upon a particular type of management structure to facilitate that. Usually this means small business operating units, or cost-centres, headed by budget-holding line-managers, organised in a traditional hierarchical manner. In such a structure, relatively short spans of control enable line managers to effectively monitor their staff by allowing them sufficient time to carry out appraisals. According to HRM theories (Storey 1992; Beer et al 1984) one of the key tasks of line managers is to undertake staff appraisals and manage the performance of their staff, with the ultimate goal of improving organisational performance. Yet the relatively flat system of departments common to many universities, that were a product of the more collegial approach, did not lend themselves to HRM, run as they were on democratic principles by elected heads with wide spans of control.
Many universities have undertaken such an exercise to the extent that their structures now resemble those of any other commercial corporation. Those types of structures, based on a hierarchical system of authority, are intended to deliver conformity and standardisation, and to maximise output, following a Taylorist organisational design. It has been argued that such a managerial model ‘borrowed from industrial and commercial organisations and imposed on universities is not appropriate to the nature of work in higher education’ (Coffield and Williamson 1997:21). The very nature of academic work is non-routine and not easily reduced to standardised performance criteria. This creates a fundamental dilemma, with academics seeking to preserve their autonomy which they regard as vital and thus making them ‘as hard to herd as cats’ (Dearlove 2002:268) and management apparently committed to implementing a form of performance management in line with a managerial discourse.

The extent to which HRM has affected the way that academics are managed is explored in detail in this thesis. Such an inherently individualistic approach appears to run counter to the collegiate nature of HE. Yet the government’s belief that the key to improving the performance of universities is to raise the quality of management across the sector is a recurring theme throughout this chapter. As a consequence, academics, who used to enjoy high degrees of autonomy and the ability to effectively manage themselves, now find that freedom significantly curtailed by a process of individualisation. Through the use of individual performance management and a complex network of bureaucratic control mechanisms, dictated by HR strategies, a gradual process of subjectification is taking place - ‘the delicate construction of a complex and hybrid assemblage…’(Rose 1999:271) - which offers a more tightly constrained freedom that seeks to impose certain patterns of behaviour and modes of action upon the work of academics. Whether or not this may be characterised as a transformation of the academic employment relationship and a reconstitution of the role of an academic is a critical element in my analysis.

Through its promotion of HRM by RDS the government has arguably changed the conditions under which academics perform their work. The role of management in shaping and monitoring the work of academics has been strengthened and the
status of HR as a key strategic function has been given greater legitimacy. Together with the 2004 *Higher Education Act* and the 2003 *Framework Agreement*, the effect of these twenty-first century reforms has been to transform the HE sector. Thus, the process of individualisation that began 40 years ago with the publication of the Robbins Report and gained momentum throughout the 1980s, is now clearly and explicitly influencing the government’s HE policy agenda.

### 3.7 Three Analytical Themes

In chapters 2 and 3 I have demonstrated how the landscape of HE has changed dramatically, both globally and in the UK. Chapter 2 explained how the neoliberal response of national governments around the world to the challenges of globalisation led to a process of change characterised by modernisation and, ultimately, individualisation. In this chapter I showed how UK HE became enfolded into that broad global discourse leading to a development of government policy that followed a distinct trajectory, leading to significant changes to the sector. As a consequence of such modernisation and individualisation, which challenges longstanding academic values such as collegiality, academic freedom and identity, questions are now raised concerning the purpose of the modern university and the role of academics.

Throughout these chapters it has become clear that there are three recurring and inter-related themes around which debate takes place: first, modernisation of the HE sector in response to global pressures and its associated impact, second, government and management attempts to gain control of academic labour through a process of internal and external reforms, in the context of modernisation and, third, the associated challenges to academic labour as a result of modernisation and the possible tensions and conflicts which arise, challenging traditional notions of collegiality. Accordingly, in this section I consider these three analytical
themes in turn and show how they form a framework for my analysis of the fieldwork data in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

**Discourses of Modernisation**

The first theme that I explore in effect provides the contextual underpinning for all of the subsequent analysis. Chapter 2 showed that the responses of national governments to competitive pressures under conditions of globalisation have increasingly been informed by a neoliberal discourse. Globalisation has affected a variety of sectors heterogeneously. As a result, the experience of work for many has been radically altered. The HE sector is one particular area of work that has been affected as governments have recognised the significance of universities as strategic sites of knowledge production (Boden and Epstein 2006) and set in train a process of modernisation designed to make universities compete in the global knowledge marketplace. Reform has been presented as the most rational response to the changing environment and, according to neoliberal ideology, there is no alternative but to modernise if universities are to survive and contribute to national economic competitiveness.

As the trajectory towards modernisation gathered momentum such arguments became increasingly dominant. As demonstrated in this chapter, the transformation of the HE sector in the UK has led to the emergence of a completely new role and purpose of the university, including the academics within. The government routinely presents a sustaining narrative, referring to universities in terms of their ability to contribute strategically to national economic growth, to the ultimate benefit of the wider society. The most recent articulation of which was presented in *Higher Ambitions* (sections 1.1; 3.1), where the government set out its latest vision for the future development of HE in a modern world. Yet, as this chapter has shown, from the Robbins Report in 1963 to the present day, there has been an increasingly powerful discourse stressing the economic significance of universities to the national economy and the associated imperative to improve management systems, both internally and externally.

Reform of universities into more business-like institutions, run by commercially aware managers in a market-led sector, is entirely consistent with this
modernisation discourse. So dominant is the discourse that it becomes difficult to articulate alternative views. Any attempt to do so is likely to be marginalized as being outmoded and not engaging with the realities of the modern world. For reform has been informed and driven by the logic of NPM which has been introduced throughout the public sector and is now presented by its proponents as an inevitable and irresistible response to the changing business environment (Diefenbach 2009).

The concept of modernisation was explained in section 2.2, where I also discussed the associated individualisation and suggestions that this has led to a risk society, characterised by social inequalities (Shaoul 2008; Levidow 2002), where only the fittest survive (Sennett 1998). As a consequence of such counter modernisation discourses a rather polarised debate has developed between the modernisers and the traditionalists. Clearly societies develop and change over time, but the nature of the response to change, particularly with regard to business organisations, is open to question (Grey 2009). As organisations have developed over time there have been many evolutions in management techniques and the manner of work organisation, driven by the need to remain competitive in the face of global change. For some ‘change management’ has now attained ‘fetish’ status with an unquestioning adherence to the notion that all change must be good. As Grey explains:

Change is like a totem before which we must prostrate ourselves and in the face of which we are powerless (2009:93)

According to this analysis, then, it is not so much that modern times do not require organisations to change, but that not all organisational change programmes are entirely necessary. Put simply, the rationale of ‘change for changes sake’ is unlikely to be sufficient justification to do so.

Clearly HE in the UK has undergone a period of significant change in the context of globalisation. As this chapter demonstrates, there has been a clear development of policy that is underpinned by a discourse of modernisation. Yet this new discourse of modernisation, and the narratives which sustain it, conflicts
significantly with the traditional discourse of the role and purpose of HE. This traditional view has at its heart well-established notions of collegiality characterised by a narrative based around the primacy of academic research and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, from which academics derive a degree of authority and status. Although opinions may differ over the extent to which collegiality pervaded the whole of the UK HE system, the key point is that this was a generally accepted and largely unifying discourse. For academics then, the new discourse of modernisation potentially leads to confusion and dissonance.

Discourses of modernisation have been hugely influential and informed the manner in which HE has changed and developed in recent years. Many questions are raised and, accordingly, this is a major theme around which I structure my analysis. In chapter 5 I consider the changes that took place at the case study universities and discuss the extent to which prevailing modernisation discourses had influenced management plans and strategies.

**Operationalisation and Control**

The second theme problematises the nature of control, including issues relating to the manner in which universities have responded to imperatives to change and modernise. In particular, it is about the implementation of HR strategies as required by RDS. Chapter 2 demonstrated how globalisation impacted on universities at the local level and had, effectively, created a global marketplace for HE. Neoliberal governments, increasingly cognisant of the strategic economic significance of universities, sought to gain control of their operation through changing the external architecture of HE sectors. In the UK, such changes were informed by the logic of NPM that enabled the government to achieve ‘control at a distance’ through reform of funding mechanisms (section 2.3) and the development of regulation and audit technologies, such as the QAA.

In this chapter I explained how such macro level reforms were reinforced at the micro level as universities adopted increasingly corporate structures in an attempt to become more ‘business-like’ in their affairs. Following the *Jarratt Report*, a growing managerialism and the use of HRM driven by the RDS initiative has, arguably, changed the conditions under which academics perform their work.
Accordingly, academics are now subject to much closer scrutiny of their work and are required to comply with bureaucratic audit and regulatory procedures. The result, according to some, is deskilling and a degradation of academic work through loss of status, plus a commodification of academic labour (Shumar 1997; Miller 1995).

Section 2.4 considered the notion that there has been a proletarianisation of academic labour (Wilson 1991) as a result of the changes that have taken place to HE. Such debates have taken place over many years now and in parallel to the ongoing trajectory of change discussed in this chapter. I explained in chapter one that current concerns relate to growing levels of stress associated with an intensification academic work and increases in bullying (Callinicos 2009; Kline 2009). The nature of management and organisational control has been much debated and clearly a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for purposes of clarity, the debate can be characterised as taking place around two contrasting positions. The first suggests that management control is an essential management task designed to coordinate the activities of business organisations.

Any complex division of labour requires mechanisms to set goals, allocate responsibilities and evaluate the effectiveness of performance (Thompson and McHugh 2002:101)

Such control is thus presented as an entirely necessary and rather benign process of coordination. Yet the alternative view is rooted in a Marxist analysis of the capitalist labour process. Here management is presented as an activity that is designed to control and monitor workers in order to extract maximum surplus value and ensure profit maximisation for the organisation (Thompson and McHugh 2002; Watson 1993). In this sense, management control is viewed as an exploitative activity that results in workers feeling resentment, isolation and, ultimately, alienation (Hyman 1987).

Section 2.2 considered the notion that HRM is a technology of management designed to increase control over workers. For example, Townley (2002) has
employed a Foucauldian analysis to argue that through the use of individualistic performance management and appraisal techniques the ‘panoptic gaze’ of HRM turns workers into ‘objects of knowledge’ to be controlled and manipulated accordingly (Townley 2002).

The extent to which RDS was underpinned by a controlling discourse, seeking to reconstitute academic workers is, then, an important issue that I address in this thesis. In chapter 6 I consider the manner in which the case study universities implemented their HR strategies and discuss what effects they have had.

Collegiality and Resistance
The third theme that emerges concerns the ways in which academics have been affected by changes to HE and, in particular, by HR strategies. In this chapter I explained how traditions of collegiality and underpinning academic values have developed over many years and formed into a coherent narrative, from which many academics derive their identity. Recent changes to HE, brought about by discourses of modernisation, including the use of the individualistic and controlling technology of HRM, potentially pose a fundamental challenge to that narrative. This theme is about the ways academics have responded and to what extent they have attempted to resist the changes.

Although the discourses of modernisation and the narratives that have emerged about the role and purpose of the university are all presented as entirely reasonable and consistent with global demands, the challenge to traditional collegiate values is significant. Notions of academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake conferred significant authority and status on academics that is challenged by a more directive, neoliberal approach. Accordingly, managers have far greater influence in the modern managerial university. Further, the increasing ability of government to influence teaching and research agendas through instruments such as the QAA and RAE, emphasises the extent to which there has been a move away from the Haldane principle. Proposals in Higher Ambitions serve to illustrate the growing willingness of government to attempt to shape and influence the strategic direction of universities. Significantly, where universities once operated according to
democratic principles there are now strict management hierarchies and more formalised processes, challenging the former collegiate ethos and more informal practices that used to exist.

The degree of change experienced by academics working in the UK HE sector is considerable, as chapters 2 and 3 have clearly demonstrated. Section 2.4 explained the complex nature of individual responses to change and the circumstances under which it could take place. Particularly significant was the work of Ezzamel et al (2001) that found workers’ resistance to be motivated by a desire to preserve their self-identity. Similar conditions are present in HE where a growing level of managerialism has led to a shift in the balance of power away from academics to line managers, calling into question existing power relations.

Townley (2002) argued from a Foucauldian perspective that through the use of HRM techniques and performance management in particular, line managers are legitimised to exercise greater power over subordinate workers. Failure to comply may result in sanctions, in effect a disciplinary power. Also significant here is Lukes’ (2005) concept of the hidden structures of power. Those who express discourses of modernisation advocated by government are usually those at the senior level of institutions, in this case, universities. By virtue of their position, reinforced by the marketisation of HE, they are able to set the agenda and promote such discourses as the taken for granted logic. To resist may not be futile, but it becomes very difficult to effectively articulate an alternative message from a, perceived, less powerful position.

Changes to HE, underpinned by modernisation certainly have the potential to challenge existing norms and traditions of collegiality. In chapter 7 I explore this and consider the ways in which academics responded to the implementation of HR strategies and associated changing dynamics of power and, if there was any resistance, what form it took.

In this chapter I have explained how the trajectory towards individualisation began following the publication of the Robbins Report in 1963. The subsequent expansion and modernisation of the HE sector gathered momentum over time, as
did the discourse that supported the changes. As the sector grew and became more market led the government sought to maintain a tight control through a process of managerialisation. Accordingly the whole structure of HE was transformed, as was the internal operation of universities. The emergence of HRM in universities led to an individualisation of academic work and the final element in the modernisation of HE was complete. In the following chapter I turn to the research design that enabled me to explore such issues. I explain and justify the methods used before providing profiles of the case study institutions where the fieldwork was carried out.
Chapter 4
Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain and justify the nature of the research design and the methods I used to answer the research questions identified in chapter 1. I outline the process of designing the research, the issues and problems that arose and how these were overcome. My research is based on a study of three cases. I explain how the cases were selected, how respondents were identified and discuss issues of validity and reliability. The results of the data analysis that I present in the following three chapters are the outcome of a process of narrativisation and I also discuss this method of data analysis. I complete the chapter with a detailed account of the cases, which effectively sets the scene for the subsequent analysis, starting in chapter 5.

Accordingly this chapter is structured as follows. In section 4.2 I explain how and why I chose the case method of research as the most appropriate means of addressing the research questions. The nature of my research questions was such that I needed to speak directly to academics about their experiences of RDS. Accordingly, I adopted a research design informed by ethnographic approaches that allowed me to speak to key actors from across the case universities and to gather sufficiently rich data to inform my analysis.

Section 4.3 explains how I selected the case institutions. The main consideration here was to ensure that the universities chosen were sufficiently representative of a large and diverse sector. In this section I also explain one of the major problems that arose and how I dealt with it. This concerns the ultimate decision to focus on three universities, rather than the four originally identified. Although this issue proved to be something of a diversion, in the context of this thesis, it does provide some further insights that I address.
Section 4.4 returns to matters of process and explains the process by which I identified research respondents. Here I show how I was able to contact sufficient numbers of respondents from across each university to ensure that I conveyed an accurate picture. I explain how I first categorised university staff into three broad groups and then identified key actors within those groups, before contacting potential respondents through a mix of purposive and opportunistic (Denscombe 2004) approaches.

Section 4.5 discusses my choice of research methods. Semi-structured interviews were the main method used and I consider the benefits and appropriateness of such an approach for this thesis. I explain how this qualitative approach allowed me to generate a rich set of data concerning peoples’ lived experience of RDS at their respective universities. A further benefit was the ability to spend time in the individual research settings and to carry out some observation.

In section 4.6 I explain and justify my approach to data analysis, by means of narrativisation. In this section I also discuss matters of data analysis, explaining how I recorded and organised the interviews and how the data was coded and categorised.

Section 4.7 addresses the ethical issues that arise when conducting research. I explain the ethical principles that informed my approach and discuss the ways in which I preserved interviewees’ anonymity and made arrangements to deal with matters of confidentiality.

Finally, in section 4.8, I complete the chapter with biographies of the three case institutions. Such material provides the necessary background to contextualise the subsequent data analysis chapters. I also include details of the fourth institution discussed in section 4.3.
4.2 How To Answer the Research Questions?

On reflection, my choice of research design turned out to be one of the more straightforward decisions that I had to make during the course of working on this thesis. Given the nature of my research topic, the research strategy I adopted was clearly the most appropriate. However, I needed to undertake a systematic review of the available options in order to ensure that my intuition was well founded and, that my approach generated suitably robust results and reliable answers to the research questions.

An early decision of mine was to reject a quantitative approach in favour of qualitative methods. I did consider designing a questionnaire, or set of questionnaires, to send to a large sample of UK universities in order to gather statistical data on such things as the perceptions of the effectiveness of HR strategies and policies. Such an approach could have been targeted at HR directors, line managers and academic staff and may well have generated significant quantities of data. However, I felt that whilst this would give me an idea of what was going on inside universities, it would not tell me anything about why, which is what I was more interested to find out. Thus, a qualitative approach would enable me to gain a far deeper understanding of ‘the motivations, thinking and ideas that generate the patterned mosaic of social life’ (O’Reilly 2009:16) inside UK universities.

In order to generate sufficient richness of data, to make an informed assessment of the impact of the changes to HE, I really needed to speak to the people inside universities who were experiencing those changes. An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to delve far more deeply into the routines, processes and social relationships ‘in the hope of identifying a framework that might be relevant to understanding similar settings or which, in some cases, may be broadly generalisable’ (O’Reilly 2009:17). I should stress that I make no claims to presenting my results as an ethnographic study but rather one that has been informed by the qualitative methods that are central to ethnographic approaches.
Clearly ethnography plays an important part in the field of anthropology where the aim is to understand

the social world of people being studied through immersion in their community to produce detailed description of people, their culture and beliefs (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:12).

So ethnography, according to Van Maanen goes beyond the type of fieldwork that is common to much sociological research where fieldwork is no more than a method of gathering data.

‘In anthropology, ethnography is the field, its central rationale for being’ (1988:22).

Van Maanen explains the variety of different styles of ethnographic expression that all have in common the ultimate goal of

‘understanding the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written about group (1988:13).

It is perhaps the notion of total immersion in the research setting that sets ethnography apart from other qualitative methods and the time that must be devoted to it, usually a year as minimum (Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Van Maanen 1988). Such a daunting scale of research inquiry has led Alvesson and Deetz (2000) to propose a ‘partial ethnography’ which may be used to consider a particular event, or phenomenon in a given situation. For these authors the chosen research method is no more than a framework for engaging with empirical material

Less significant than the particular techniques or procedures are the ways in which the researcher approaches the subject matter, the questions asked and the answers sought, the lines of interpretation followed and the kind of descriptions and insights produced (2000:4)
Accordingly in this thesis I have attempted to present a detailed and accurate representation of the case study universities by adopting a quasi-ethnographic approach. I may have been unable to immerse myself in the field completely, but I did spend a significant period of time at each university over an eighteen month period, using observation and semi-structured interviews. Such an approach enabled me to generate detailed material that would help me to understand how the people I was researching understood their world (Delamont 2002) and made sense of the changes that have taken place in HE.

To answer the research questions effectively I have taken a phenomenological, rather than a positivistic stance, which

…accepts multiple realities. People act on their individual perceptions, and those actions have real consequences – thus the objective reality each individual sees is no less real than an objectively defined and measured reality (Fetterman 1998:5).

My concern is with trying to understand how things are experienced first-hand by those involved and exploring how those people ‘interpret events and, literally, make sense of their personal experiences’ (Denscombe 2004:99). Clearly, for the purposes of my research, this requires the capture of sufficient data to explain how the phenomenon of HRM affected people. Individual accounts will naturally be highly personal and subjective, but that

subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person’s reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience (Patton 2002:106).

It is the different ways in which people experienced HRM, and how they interpreted and made sense of that experience, that I was interested to discover and which this approach enables.

Such a stance requires an in-depth and detailed enquiry in order to ‘unravel the complexities of a given situation’ (Denscombe 2004:31). Case studies are an
ideal means of providing such a comprehensive investigation into complex social phenomena and which ‘retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events…’ (Yin 2003:2). The case study approach allowed me to explore not only the specific issue of RDS, but also the many processes associated with it that were manifested as an ongoing programme of change, that I characterise as a modernisation discourse. A further benefit of such an approach concerns transferability (Gill and Johnson 1997). For RDS and other changes to HE were common throughout the sector. So it is possible to assume that the impact of those changes at least, was similar and transferable to other settings.

A case study approach also meant that I could use a variety of data-collection methods, discussed in section 4.5 below, to strengthen the validity of my analysis through a process of triangulation. Such methods strengthen validity by testing one source of information against another to strip away alternative explanations…to understand more completely the part an actor plays in the social drama, and ultimately to put the whole situation into perspective’ (Fetterman 1998:93).

A multiple case design only serves to strengthen that validity further and provides better analytic benefits, by expanding the external generalisability of the findings compared to a single case (Yin 2003).

Having decided on the case approach as the one that would generate the most reliable and valid results, the next stage was to choose which universities to contact. I turn to this issue below.

**4.3 Choosing the Case Institutions**

My choice of universities had to take account of three key constraints. The first of these was how best to represent the diverse nature of the UK HE sector, currently comprising some 166 universities (UUK 2009). In recent years universities have
sought to align themselves into particular strategic groupings that reflect the similarity of their particular missions. These include the Russell Group of elite research intensive universities; the 1994 group of research led universities; Million + which represents new post 92 universities and the University Alliance of pre and post 92 universities (UUK 2009).

However, this particular stratification of the sector is less important than the key distinction that, I believe, still remains and continues to divide the sector. This is the binary divide between pre and post 92 universities, which the 1992 FHE Act technically abolished, but that in reality still exists. Given the significance of that divide, my choice of universities needed to reflect this and so, at a minimum, I felt that I needed one pre and one post 92 university amongst my fieldwork sites.

The next constraint was more straightforward and related to the RDS initiative itself, which only affected English institutions. Universities in Wales, where I live and work, were eliminated accordingly. Whilst it is the case that Welsh institutions are also developing HR strategies and that their impact is very likely to be similar to that in England, there is one significant difference: the element of funding that was tied to RDS in England to encourage universities to implement their HR strategies. One of the central aims of this research is to consider the degree to which universities are being subjected to a neoliberal policy discourse as the government seeks to gain greater control over the direction of UK HE. As such it was essential to choose universities where I could explore the nature and impact of the financial stimulus behind RDS.

This constraint clearly impacted on the third, which was to do with issues of accessibility and practicality. The pressures that arise from balancing a part-time research degree with the demands of a full-time career will inevitably impact on the research design for anyone in that position. My own situation was further complicated, since when I started in early 2002 I had two children under the age of four. I am pleased to report that, at the time of writing, they do not claim to have been adversely affected by my occasional absences – both physical and mental.
Given such constraints I needed to choose universities that were easily accessible within a day in order to minimise the number of nights spent away from home. To begin, I identified a rough geographical arc around Wales that spanned the south-west of England, went east, but stopping short of London and then on up to the Midlands, ending roughly in line with North Wales. Within this arc I concentrated on university towns and cities where, in most cases, there was both a pre and post 92 university. Beyond that the criteria were fairly broad, as the main issue I was concerned to explore was the HR strategy that all the universities had to possess. In all cases I confirmed the existence of an HR strategy by searching on the university websites. As a result of this process I identified an initial pool of eighteen universities to contact with an expectation of gaining consent from a third of that number, giving me a sample of three pre and three post 92 universities.

I began contacting each of these universities in June and July of 2005. In the first instance I got in touch with the HR directors after making initial contact with their personal assistant (PA) via telephone and email. Following their advice, I followed this up with either a formal letter, or a direct phone call to each HR director to explain the nature of my interest in their university. In some cases further follow-up letters or emails were required, but ultimately I made contact with each of the original pool of eighteen. Whilst everyone that I spoke to was genuinely helpful and supportive, a common issue emerged that was given as a reason for not being able to take part in my research. At that time, all English universities were just twelve months away from having to meet the government deadline for implementing the National Framework Agreement that I discussed in chapter 3. So even at this early stage of my fieldwork here was an important finding that appeared to corroborate my argument in chapter 3 where I showed that the localisation of pay negotiations inherent in the Framework Agreement was having an individualising effect. This early evidence indicated that such individualisation of pay bargaining required a huge investment of time at the local level.

At the end of this first stage of the process, by September 2005, I had agreement from four universities that were willing to take part in my research. I had the
necessary split of two from each of the pre and post 92 sectors, with each university being of a sufficient size as to be representative of their sector. I provide details of each university in section 4.8, but for purposes of clarity I give their pseudonyms here. The pre 92 universities are called Casterbridge and Budmouth, the post 92s are Shaston and Weatherbury. The first round of interviews with the four HR directors took place between September 2005 and January 2006. However, at this stage I encountered my first significant problem and I turn to a consideration of this below.

I interviewed the Weatherbury HR director, Judy, in January 2006, having already held similar interviews at the other three universities. The interview process, including the initial arrangements, was no different here to the others, but what followed, certainly was. At the end of each of the interviews with the HR directors I spent a little time discussing with them how best to proceed with the subsequent stages of my fieldwork. At Weatherbury it was agreed that it would be better to leave the next round of interviews until May, as the remainder of the spring term was likely to be very busy as the university attempted to meet the deadline for implementation of the Framework Agreement. Such an arrangement suited my needs and that flexibility allowed me to concentrate on interviews at the other universities.

As arranged with Judy, I contacted her PA in May 2006 via email and after getting no initial reply, followed up by telephone shortly after. I spoke with the PA who agreed to contact Judy and get back to me to discuss making arrangements for the next round of interviews. It was from then on that problems began to arise, for that return call never came. I sent a number of follow-up emails, which also went unanswered. By this stage the summer holiday period had begun, so I did not pursue any further throughout late July and August. As a researcher I was also conscious that persistent calling can be irritating, so it was necessary to avoid potentially alienating research participants. I sent further emails after the holiday period in September, but still received no reply. I did finally make contact with someone in the HR department at this stage who informed me that the PA had now left, but that she would pass on my message to Judy and ask her to contact me. Still, she did not. By this stage I had reached the
point where I needed to make a judgement about whether or not to include Weatherbury as a case institution.

By drawing on my union contacts I eventually got in touch with the branch chair, Jeremy, at Weatherbury. This was useful and enabled me to carry out a rather opportunistic telephone interview, which he agreed to. Jeremy also agreed to speak with Judy and let me know the outcome. In a rather curious echo of my dealings with Judy, the same thing happened and I did not hear again from Jeremy. I followed up again with emails to which I received no reply and left messages on Jeremy’s voicemail, but he never replied. By this stage at the end of October, over a year since Weatherbury had agreed to take part in my research, I made the decision not to proceed further. Consequently, the data that I gathered in the course of the two interviews with Judy the HR director and Jeremy the UCU chair is not used in my thesis.

Clearly, when engaged in this type of research such unexpected events are always likely to happen and as a researcher one has to take the most appropriate course of action. Consequently, I decided that there was little point in spending even more time pursuing Weatherbury further. I also felt it inappropriate at that point to attempt to contact another post 1992 university to make up my sample of two universities from each side of the sector. Further, by this point I had made significant progress at the other three universities, who were being extremely cooperative and where interesting data was already beginning to emerge.

Although four universities would have been better than three, I feel that the quality of the data generated and the robustness of the design of my research, does still allow me to effectively address the research questions and draw some broadly generaliseable conclusions. It is also important to note here that I do work in a post 1992 university. Although this is not included in my formal presentation of data and analysis, it does serve to further enhance my broader observation of the changing nature of HE and to corroborate some of the trends that emerged elsewhere in the fieldwork.
Overall, the whole episode is reflexively interesting in itself. It raises questions as to what exactly caused Weatherbury to withdraw from participation in such an abrupt manner. It could be that it was such a busy time for them that I was simply not a priority. However, I am surprised at the way in which I was effectively ignored, especially following the initial willingness to participate and support my research. Accordingly, I would have expected, at the very least, some kind of reply to my many emails, if only to say that the university could no longer participate. I can only speculate on their reasons. I suggest, however, that the nature of my research topic is a potentially more sensitive matter than I originally suspected, investigating as I do, the manner in which large sums of government money are being spent by universities. It could be that Weatherbury did not wish to discuss such matters after all.

In the following section I explain the process by which I identified suitable respondents within the three universities to take part in my research and briefly discuss issues of sampling.

4.4 Identification of Respondents

My overall purpose here was to generate sufficient data from all levels of the university hierarchy to enable me to present a reasonably accurate portrayal of the situation at each of the universities. In this sense I drew on my own knowledge and experience of university hierarchies to generate a sample, effectively following a purposive approach (Denscombe 2004: 15). The sample available to me was drawn from each university’s internal structure. I characterise this as broadly conforming to three levels of senior management, middle management and academic staff. In appendix 2 I provide a diagram to illustrate how the various different roles in each university conform to this generic structure. I began in all cases by identifying three key actors - the HR Director, a member of the strategic management team and a union negotiator – who were interviewed.

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5 It should be noted that ‘middle manager’ is used in this context as a descriptive category and that, usually, people in this position were also academics. Deem (2004) has used the term ‘manager-academic’ to describe this group that has emerged under conditions of new managerialism.
first in order to establish important contextual information. This was followed by two further stages of interviews, beginning with the middle managers and followed by the academic staff. I explain below how these people were identified.

Following the initial round of interviews, the HR directors were extremely helpful in assisting me to identify potential respondents from the tier of middle management for the next stage of the fieldwork. At both Casterbridge and Budmouth each HR directors’ PA was assigned to assist me by contacting managers and organising the interviews. The arrangements were more informal at Shaston, where I was provided with a list of names to contact myself. At Weatherbury, this stage in the arrangements was not reached for the reasons explained in section 4.3. This phase of the research was largely completed between January and July of 2006. There was, however, an inevitable need for flexibility in arrangements and there was therefore a degree of overlap between the three broad stages of the fieldwork at each university. Nevertheless, the pattern was common to each university where each of the three tiers of the hierarchy was interviewed, starting with the senior management, followed by middle managers and then academic staff.

I did learn one valuable practical lesson relating to the need to take a flexible approach, which I recount as a cautionary tale for fellow early career researchers. Due to the problems of attempting to coordinate my diary with those of others, it transpired that four people, with whom I had been trying to make arrangements with for some time, all happened to be free on one particular day. Ignoring the advice of my supervisor, I decided that the need to carry out these interviews outweighed the folly of attempting to conduct four in-depth, face-to-face interviews in one day.

That day, on which I left home at 8.00 am, returning 14 hours later at 10.00 pm, turned out to be one of the hottest of the 2006 summer, reaching around 34 degrees centigrade. Ultimately, I completed my interviews with four key actors, which generated some very useful data. But the physical and mental strain that I placed on myself that day was really quite severe. As a one-off exercise, arising out of necessity, I can justify my actions. My supervisor was, however, quite
correct that you should not attempt to carry out any more than two such interviews in one day.

Following interviews with middle managers I asked them to suggest possible candidates in their departments who would be willing to take part in the next stage of interviews. By asking for a list of people from which I could make my own choices, I minimised the risk of being given a ‘hand-picked’ list. This rather opportunistic, or snowball approach (Denscombe 2004:16), enabled me to generate a potential pool of respondents that included a broad mix of some newer and some more experienced staff. I contacted these people individually and made the arrangements accordingly. By the end of the process I had a sample of approximately twenty respondents from each university. The final interviews were completed by May 2007.

4.5 Research Methods

The main methods of data-collection that I used were one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. The majority of these were face-to-face, supplemented by a small number of telephone interviews. The interviews usually lasted from one and a half to two hours, although the telephone interviews were much shorter, usually lasting around 45 minutes. The interviews were all recorded and later transcribed verbatim by me.

Given the nature of my study I believe that an in-depth, semi-structured interview was by far the most effective method of investigating the RDS phenomenon. Such an approach offers a reasonably relaxed and informal setting that allows interviewees the time to ‘focus on intimate details, to remember historical events, and to discuss things that would not be discussed in normal circumstances’ (O’Reilly 2009:125). I had a number of key points and issues to pursue in each interview, but allowed the interviewees sufficient time and space to develop their own narratives and expand on issues by the use of open questioning. The interview schedules are included in appendix 3. Consequently, when the process of data-collection was complete, I had a set of narratives to interrogate and
analyse, which would ultimately provide a detailed story of how RDS had impacted on people’s lives in their respective universities. As I explain in section 4.6 below, this method of narrative analysis can ‘offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings’ (Patton 2002:116).

New themes and issues emerged as the fieldwork progressed, upon which I reflected and then integrated into subsequent interviews. Such an approach is similar to grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998), where data analysis and collection go hand in hand. It is entirely appropriate in this kind of research and does, I argue, further strengthen the validity of my later analysis. It also helped, I believe, to be able to talk to other academics at an immediate level of understanding, by virtue of our shared role and experience. Hence, the majority of interviews very quickly progressed to quite an intimate level of discussion by virtue of that shared contextual understanding.

A further benefit of my approach was to allow me to spend some time in the research setting and get a feel for the atmosphere of the place. When travelling to the most distant institutions I tried to arrange a number of interviews over the course of two days, allowing for an overnight stay. As suggested above, it is quite common in universities for lecturers from other institutions to be around. As a consequence I was able to spend time in libraries, cafeterias and various other social spaces, chatting to people about their university. This form of observation provided further important insights into the nature of the research setting, without my presence particularly disturbing that setting.

I spent time in each university library carrying out some documentary analysis. These libraries provided a rich source of information, including minutes of key academic committees. Consequently I was able to review minutes of the University Senate and Council and Board of Governors and gain further insights into the context of some of the issues arising from the interviews. Universities also provide a vast amount of web-based material, including HR strategies and their associated policies. So this was an important aspect to my research that provided the triangulation to further strengthen its validity by allowing me to
compare information sources to test the quality of information (and the person sharing it), to understand more completely the part an actor plays in a social drama, and ultimately to put the whole situation into perspective (Fetterman 1998:93).

Consequently, the data analysis is justified on the grounds of ecological validity (Gill and Johnson 1997), based as it is, on rich data drawn from the natural setting.

As I explained in section 4.3, it was important to be able to take a reflexive approach to developments at my own institution. Due to the multi-stranded nature of my role that I outlined in chapter 1, I was engaged in dealing with many of the issues that were emerging in my fieldwork. There was a clear value to this in terms of further strengthening the validity of my own findings. However, on a personal note, it did at times lead to a rather strange sensation, where the lines between the reality of my own situation and the alternative realities of those I was reflecting upon in my research, became rather blurred.

In the following section I turn to a consideration of my approach to data analysis.

**4.6 Narrativisation**

I explained above that the use of semi-structured interviews as the main form of data collection would generate a set of narratives, each telling a story of how people responded to RDS and other associated issues. However, I needed to find a way of interpreting and analysing those stories meaningfully, in order to provide some answers to the original research questions. An increasingly common approach that has emerged in recent years in social science research and in the study of organisations in particular, is narrative analysis (Reissman 2008; Patton 2002).
The narratives of research subjects offer what Patton (2002) above, calls ‘translucent windows’ through which it is possible to gain an authentic view of how they see their world. Interpretation of narratives that goes ‘beyond the surface of a text…’ (Reissman 2009:13) can provide an important insight into social processes and the complexities and dynamics of a given situation. In such analysis the details of each story are important – ‘how and why a particular event is storied, perhaps, or what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story that way…’ (Reissman 2009:13). Clearly, it is essential to remember that narratives will present a very subjective, and rather partial view, and this must be kept in mind when analysing what was said. Yet it is this very subjectivity that conveys the essence of a situation from a variety of different perspectives.

In the context of this study then, it provides a set of stories from different levels of the university hierarchy, which convey the various perceptions of individuals concerning the nature of RDS and the impact it has had. Through the careful recording of what was said, reinforced by the observation and documentary analysis, the validity of such an approach is further strengthened (Reissman 2008). Accordingly, in transcribing the interviews I also included references to respondents’ laughter, or when they paused, for example, in an effort to convey a clearer sense of their tone and manner when recounting a particular episode. I kept hand written notes and after each interview, as soon as I was able to, wrote a summary of my immediate response and reflections on what I had just heard. These fieldwork notes proved to be a further rich source of information that was incorporated into my analysis.

Each interview transcript was coded in a two-stage process that began by categorising the data through a process of descriptive, or open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The purpose of this first stage was to provide a coherent framework and to organise the data into themes and establish broad patterns. That enabled me to interrogate the data at a much deeper level of analysis and actually ‘go beyond the data’ (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:30). My focus here was on interpreting the meanings attached to each narrative in the context of my broader research questions and themes that emerged from the literature. In appendix 4 I
have provided a sample of a transcript from an interview with an HR Director to illustrate the process of coding and initial analysis.

The two-stage process I describe above of first, categorisation, followed by a deeper level of analysis, is characterised as an inductive approach, which allows the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be (Patton 2002:56).

Although it was not a purely grounded theory (Strauss and Corby 1998) approach – my personal experiences meant that I did not go into the field with an entirely open mind – it did ensure that my analysis was grounded in the data. Such a constant comparative approach ensures that the analysis can never move too far away from what is happening on the ground. It ensures that any theory developed by the research remains closely in touch with its origins in the data – that it remains grounded in empirical reality’ (Denscombe 2004:120).

The research design explained in this chapter further enhances the validity of my analysis, in which I have adopted a hybrid approach. Narrative analysis usually tends to focus on the whole story that a person tells, rather than fragmenting it into categories, and possibly then losing the sequential and structural features of the original narrative (Reissman 2008). However, my approach was to explore the effects of RDS through an analysis of the stories told by people at different levels of the three universities. Such a method is a useful way of analysing differing experiences as respondents will often remember and order their careers or memories as a series of narrative chronicles, that is, as series of stories marked by key happenings (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:56).
Analysis of these stories and narratives, situated as they are ‘within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural and institutional discourses…’ (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:62) helps to build a picture of the attitudes to and effects of RDS at different levels of the university. By employing such a reflexive approach, I draw upon the stories that people had to tell about their experiences of the changes taking place at each institution and consider their significance in the context of the research questions. The opportunities for triangulation that the overall design of my study offers further strengthen its validity. As a consequence, the data that I generated are sufficiently robust to enable a meaningful analysis from which valid conclusions may be drawn.

The process I have explained in this section was carried out in what may be called the traditional fashion, that is, by working from hard copies of transcripts and using a variety of coloured pens, highlighters, pencils and erasers. However, it was my original intention to use one of the many computer-aided data-analysis software packages. There are significant benefits to be gained from the use of such packages, in terms of enhanced ability to store, code and retrieve data (Denscombe 2004:275). Accordingly, I attended a workshop organised by the CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) project, based at the University of Surrey and had the software loaded on my PC. After initial attempts to analyse the data in this way I ultimately rejected this method as inappropriate for my own needs.

There are concerns that through the use of such packages there is a tendency for researchers to become distanced from their data (Denscombe 2004) and there is a danger that data may be fed through the computer as if that is a substitute for intellectual analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Whilst it is not within the scope of this chapter to pursue the debate any further, it is worth reflecting on my own experience. For my problem was at a more prosaic level. That is, an inability to engage my creative and analytical thought processes at an appropriate level when working with the data on a screen, inside the shell of a software package, in the same way that I can when working with text on paper. This may well be to do with my age and not something that faces a younger generation of researchers, more accustomed to living a large part of their lives through interaction with some
form of electronic device. For me, the traditional approach remains the most effective.

4.7 Ethical Issues

When undertaking this type of quasi-ethnographic research, as with any other, it is important to consider ethical issues as

Research of any kind takes place within a social context. This means that it must take account of the moral and legal climate of the time and the boundaries this places on the topic of investigation...Social researchers have no status or privilege that puts them above the moral and legal codes that operate for the rest of the society. (Denscombe 2002:177)

The adoption of a number of basic principles (Ritchie and Lewis 2003; Denscombe 2002) is usually sufficient to ensure that the researcher does not stray beyond such moral boundaries. First, informed consent which means providing respondents with adequate information concerning the purpose of the study, how the data will be used and what will be expected of them. It should also be made clear that participation in the study is voluntary. Second, anonymity and confidentiality, meaning that the identity of respondents should be concealed and that any comments should not be attributable to particular individuals. Thirdly, it is essential to take steps to ensure that respondents do not come to any harm. This is of particular importance for those conducting anthropological research who become immersed in their research setting and consequently

are exhorted not to pursue a particular piece of research if they cannot do so without damaging those they would study (Sieber 1992:23).

In my study such concerns were addressed with each university’s HR director when discussing their participation and subsequent consent to take part. I explained this process in section 4.3 and in appendix 5 is a copy of the letter sent
to each institution outlining my requirements for the research study. Each university was satisfied with my proposed arrangements for maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality and access was granted accordingly. All individuals that I interviewed were informed before the interviews that they would be guaranteed anonymity. Each interview was preceded by a brief informal conversation explaining the nature of my research to give each respondent the opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns they might have had. A summary of the points covered in these conversations is provided in appendix 6. In all cases the interviewees were satisfied with my proposals and unsurprisingly, given the research setting, were quite familiar with the requirements of the research process.

Although the area I am researching is relatively uncontentious (the situation at Weatherbury notwithstanding) and does not involve sensitive personal issues, it is important when conducting social research to respect the rights and dignity of those taking part (Denscombe 2004). According to Ritchie and Lewis

> Interviews can have a certain seductive quality: participants may appear comfortable and may disclose information apparently willingly during an interview, but may later regret having been so open (2003:68).

Accordingly, the use of pseudonyms is the usual method of concealing identities in research employing ethnographic methods and ensures that the researcher brings ‘no harm to people or the community under study’ (Fetterman 1998:129) and is the method I have adopted. Consequently, respondents are more confidently able to provide honest answers to questions without fear of reprisal. It was also understood that the transcript of each interview would be made available to those who wished to see it – an opportunity that was not taken up by any in this study.
4.8 Case studies

In this final section I provide details of the cases used in this research. As I explained in the previous section each institution has been anonymised and given a pseudonym and I have done the same thing for all the individuals referred to in the analysis.

Shaston
Shaston is located on the outskirts of a county town in the English midlands and was established shortly after the second world-war. It became a college of higher education in the 1970s, awarding CNAA validated degrees, and was granted full university status comparatively recently. Shaston has always enjoyed a reputation for being a small, friendly, student-focussed teaching institution with particular strengths in vocational subjects. It has established links with a number of local schools, colleges and employers and is involved in a number of jointly delivered programmes in the local area.

The attainment of university status was the culmination of a long-term strategy that has seen significant growth and acceleration in the pace of change at Shaston, since 2000. There has been a concerted effort, expressed in its strategic plan, to develop Shaston as a modern university. The aim is to build on its traditional strengths, whilst further developing its portfolio of activities to include more research and consultancy work and postgraduate provision. The majority of Shaston’s funding comes from HEFCE, with additional support for its teaching and nursing programmes from the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and the NHS. However, it is recognised that this will be insufficient to finance its ambitious expansion plans. Accordingly, Shaston has set itself quite demanding targets to develop additional funding streams from fee-paying students, both locally and internationally, as well as significantly increasing its ability to attract funding for research and consultancy work, and further exploiting its links with local and regional employers.
Shaston is located on a pleasant, leafy campus a few miles out of the city-centre and has a rather eclectic mixture of buildings. Some of these are rather utilitarian, dating back to its original post-war establishment. Other, more modern buildings, include purpose built student residences and a sports-hall surrounded by floodlit, all-weather sports pitches. Shaston is currently involved in a major capital project to develop a second campus that is expected to offer further income-generating potential.

Shaston is organised into 6 academic departments with a student population of around 8000. The majority of these are taking undergraduate programmes in vocational subjects, with growing cohorts on business, sports and social sciences. Around 20% of its students are following taught postgraduate programmes, with a small cohort of research students. Shaston has relatively small staff numbers of between 600 and 700. A directorate, chaired by its vice-chancellor and chief executive, who is in turn, accountable to a board of governors, manages the university. The current vice-chancellor was appointed quite recently, following the retirement of his former, long-standing, predecessor. Each department is run by a head, supported by a small management team. Such teams usually include a business support manager and a number of principal lecturers (known as management PLs) who manage sub-sections of each department. The Shaston HR department, headed by its director, who also sits on the university directorate, is small compared to many other similar size universities, comprising fewer than ten members of staff.

Casterbridge
Casterbridge is situated in a large city in the south of England. It was originally established as a university college in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, supported by local wealthy philanthropists, it received Royal Assent and became a full university. Casterbridge now enjoys an international research reputation and is a prominent member of the Russell Group of universities. The university is renowned for the quality of its teaching and research and achieves consistently high ratings in the RAE exercises in several of its departments. Casterbridge receives a significant degree of its teaching and
research funding from HEFCE (including QR money)\textsuperscript{6} as well as from the NHS for its medical faculty. It generates significant additional funding streams from its many international fee-paying students, major research grants and other commercial activities.

From 2000, Casterbridge has pursued an ambitious strategy of capital investment to upgrade its buildings to provide higher quality facilities for teaching, research and accommodation. Around this time a new vice-chancellor was appointed with a specific remit to modernise what was perceived to be a rather traditional and outdated institution that was significantly under-performing. Following a period of financial difficulty throughout the 1980s and 90s, the Casterbridge Council embarked on a long-term strategy to develop the university mission and secure its position financially. Accordingly, the university’s strategy is to become increasingly international in focus and to strengthen its reputation as a global institution. It is involved in a number of collaborations with other universities, colleges and local employers and other regional agencies. Casterbridge recognises that it plays a large part in the life of the city and aims to make a contribution economically as well as socially and culturally. Casterbridge is a university with a multi-million pound turnover, generating substantial annual surpluses.

In common with many other city centre civic universities, Casterbridge has a number of large and small Georgian buildings, which form part of the architectural heritage of the city itself. As a consequence, its ambitious development plans present some quite difficult logistical and, thus, costly challenges, as well as requiring the support of city planning officials. A number of departments are housed in converted Georgian houses where the teaching and staff accommodation, whilst quite intrinsically appealing, are clearly inadequate for the needs of modern students. The main administrative and management building is a rather unappealing concrete tower block, that was also due to be refurbished at the time of this research study.

\textsuperscript{6} Quality Related is the term used to describe the research funds that are allocated to universities based on performance in the periodic Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) that is due to be replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
Casterbridge is organised around its 6 faculties covering the full range of traditional university academic disciplines, including a medical faculty. It has around 30 departments and a number of internationally recognised research centres. There are around 13000 students currently studying at Casterbridge, including 5000 postgraduates. Total staff numbers are close to 6000, of which 2000 are academics. The university is formally managed by a strategic committee of senior managers and deans, chaired by the vice-chancellor, on behalf of its Senate and Council. Faculties, managed by deans and supported by a small management team, are the main business units of the university. Accordingly, budgets are devolved to Deans who enjoy significant levels of autonomy in the running of their faculties. Operationally, programmes are managed by departments, which also have a small management team to support their head. At the time of this study there was an organisational restructuring exercise to amalgamate some of the smaller departments into larger operating units. The Casterbridge HR director sits on the strategic management committee and heads a department of around 50 staff.

Budmouth
Budmouth is situated on a large greenfield campus site just outside a large city in central England. A prominent member of the Russell group established in the early 1960s, Budmouth is one of the plate-glass institutions opened in that period. Accordingly, the university excels in science and technology and has established an international reputation for innovation in research over the last 40 years. Budmouth is funded for its teaching and research by HEFCE (including QR money) and the NHS, but has always aimed to work closely with local and regional industries and generates a significant proportion of income from its many entrepreneurial collaborations and commercial activities. Indeed, Budmouth has long sought to minimise reliance on government funding and is able to generate substantial income from its many fee-paying overseas students and other research grants and consultancy fees.

Since its foundation, Budmouth has followed an ongoing programme of building and development on its campus. At the time of this study, plans were being
submitted to expand the campus even further. Budmouth’s medical faculty has grown substantially in recent years, establishing an international reputation for excellence. In recent years Budmouth has sought to develop international operations and strengthen its reputation as a global university. Budmouth also aims to widen access to higher education and seeks to attract students from non-traditional backgrounds to its programmes. The university is proud of its many achievements in its brief history and it has rapidly become an international institution with a multi-million pound turnover, and its business plan has led to several of its commercial ventures generating substantial profits.

Budmouth’s large campus has a lively, vibrant feel to it with modern, purpose built accommodation in what is, effectively, a self-contained student village. As a consequence, Budmouth has been able to develop a very successful commercial operation as a conference venue. Despite the continual expansion programme the campus still retains some areas of open space and parklands. The university’s management and administration function is housed in a very impressive, state of the art building, which has commanding views over the campus and surrounding countryside.

Budmouth has 4 faculties in which there are around 30 departments and some 50 research centres. It has in excess of 16000 students, of which almost a half, are postgraduates. 20% of Budmouth’s students are from overseas. It has around 5000 staff, including around 2000 academics. At Budmouth, departments are the main operational and business units to which budgets are devolved. Accordingly, heads of department have significant responsibility and report directly to the deputy vice-chancellor. Faculties do not have budgets but they each have a chair who sits on the university’s steering committee. This is the senior management team that effectively runs the university and is chaired by either the vice-chancellor or the deputy vice-chancellor. A recent reorganisation was undertaken with the intention of further streamlining the management structure, and to relieve some of the pressure on heads of department. Accordingly, a number of departments were merged to create larger operating units to be run by a small management team. The HR director works closely with the deputy vice-chancellor and runs a large department of almost 100 staff.
**Weatherbury**

Weatherbury is situated in the heart of a large city in central England. Its historical roots can be traced back to the nineteenth century through a number of former colleges and training institutions that combined to create today’s university. Weatherbury became one of the first polytechnics to be established in the early 1970s and continued to grow, until it was granted university status following the 1992 FHE Act. Weatherbury continues to offer a variety of vocational programmes and attracts students from a variety of different backgrounds due to its ongoing commitment to widen access to higher education. In recent years it has sought to expand its portfolio further and to develop a number of research centres.

Weatherbury has always sought to pursue a strategy that stays close to its original vocational mission. It works closely with local and regional businesses, many of which are new information-technology based ventures that are replacing the traditional industries with which the area is closely associated. However, in common with other post 92 universities, Weatherbury has also sought to expand its research and consultancy base in an effort to increase its potential to raise additional sources of income to supplement its main source of income from HEFCE, the TTA and NHS. Weatherbury has a number of sites located throughout the city and in recent years has embarked on a major capital investment plan to upgrade its existing buildings and to build new ones. These facilities are all designed with additional income generation potential in mind.

Weatherbury’s main campus is situated a few miles out of the city centre and is easily accessible by bus or train. It is situated in a very busy urban environment, surrounded by shopping centres, with the large concrete buildings presenting a rather unattractive façade. However, in recent years the city itself has undergone a major regeneration programme and some of Weatherbury’s new buildings have been built in conjunction with that development.

Weatherbury has 7 faculties offering a range of vocational programmes including business, humanities, art and design, education and healthwork. The majority of
students are following undergraduate programmes, with a small but growing number of taught postgraduates. Weatherbury has a very large student population of around 23000, with almost half of those mature, part-time students. The university is managed by a directorate, chaired by the vice-chancellor and chief executive, who also sits on the board of governors, which has overall responsibility for running the university.

In this chapter I have addressed issues of research design and sought to justify my approach to this study. As I explained in section 1.3 I was originally inspired to do this research as a result of my own experiences of the changing nature of higher education. Accordingly I have undertaken a quasi-ethnographic study incorporating the case method of research and a qualitative approach. The data that I generated from this approach were subjected to a process of narrative analysis, where I interrogated the stories of the respondents at each level of the case universities. In the final section of this chapter I provided a biography of the three universities and the fourth university, discussed in section 4.3, that I was unable to include in the study.

In the following three chapters I present the results of the data analysis. Each chapter, 5, 6 and 7, is structured according to the analytical themes that I discussed at the end of chapter 3.
Chapter 5
Discourses of Modernisation

5.1 Introduction

In the following three chapters I discuss and analyse my fieldwork data, structured around the three critical themes set out at the end of chapter 3. In this chapter I consider issues relating to the construction of modernisation discourses and how the conditions were created to enable modernisation to take place. In chapter 6 I discuss the ways in which the discourse was enacted in practical terms, by considering matters of implementation, operationalisation and control. In chapter 7 I turn to the potential challenge that such discourses present to existing orthodoxies and collegiate traditions and consider the response of academic staff to the change process, including any evidence of resistance.

Discourses of modernisation and their sustaining narratives were explored in detail in chapters 2 and 3. This chapter considers the extent to which such discourses were influencing management plans and strategies at the case study institutions. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, there has been a development of government HE policy, following a distinct trajectory informed by neoliberal ideologies, that I characterised as a process of modernisation. According to the dominant discourse that has emerged, universities, to survive in the modern global era, must change and become more ‘business-like’ institutions, run by commercially aware managers operating in a sector organised according to market principles. This new discourse of modernisation presents a significant challenge to traditional notions concerning the role and purpose of HE and, potentially, leads to conflict and confusion for academics.

I explore the effects of modernisation through an analysis of the stories told by people at different levels of the three universities. Such a method of narrativisation was discussed chapter 4, where I explained how the differing
accounts of respondents’ lived experiences of change can be used to build up a picture of important events and key happenings, including opinions and attitudes to such developments, at each university. These stories and narratives provide a rich source of data concerning respondents’ experiences of the changes. In this chapter I discuss those change stories and consider the impact of discourses of modernisation.

Such discourses did figure prominently in my interviews with management at each university. In the fieldwork it soon became clear that an underlying belief in the virtue of modernisation was driving the universities’ policy-making agenda at the senior level. Senior managers were unanimous in their belief that their respective universities had to adapt and restructure to become more able to respond to the changing, globalised HE environment. There was a clear perception that restructuring would not only enhance systems for managing academic staff, but also lead to more effective delivery of agendas in teaching and learning and research.

It was particularly striking that, in all three universities, a number of very similar developments had taken place over the last five years, the consequences of which were manifested in a variety of different ways in a kind of ripple effect throughout each institution. The impact was heterogeneous and was impacting on people at all levels of the hierarchy. There was a clear underlying current of change that was creating an element of instability and uncertainty. The two key developments, which in some ways can be seen as a catalyst for much of the subsequent change, were the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor at Shaston and Casterbridge and an organisational restructuring exercise at all three. During the fieldwork at Budmouth a new Vice-Chancellor (VC) was appointed following the retirement of the incumbent. So here the situation was slightly different in that the early interviews revealed an element of anticipation as to the likely nature of the new VC, whilst the later respondents had yet to make a judgement on the new VC.

Accordingly, this chapter is organised as follows. Section 5.2 considers the role of the VC and the significance of the power that is vested in that position. The
Jarratt Report (chapter 3) proposed a corporate model for universities, with Vice-Chancellors providing strong leadership in a chief executive role. It follows that further modernisation would be highly dependent upon the VC and, consequently, I explore the different opinions that emerged in people’s stories concerning their respective VCs.

Section 5.3 explains the nature of the restructuring at each university and evaluates the responses of staff and the effects on their patterns of work. Organisational restructuring is a further necessary element in terms of creating the conditions necessary for modernisation to take place. In Chapter 3 I discussed the notion that the successful implementation of RDS (section 3.6) is contingent upon a particular type of hierarchical structure, where departments operate as business units run by line managers. Accordingly, I explore the nature of the restructuring at each university in turn.

Following this I concentrate on three related areas, each of which each had an important effect in sustaining the overall discourse of modernisation. These developments had the potential to challenge the established orthodoxy and taken for granted assumptions concerning relations of power. Section 5.4 explores the modernisation of the administrative function. This was deemed essential in order that the universities could operate in a more ‘business-like’ fashion. A more professional approach to administrative work is consistent with managerial discourses and I consider the impact of any such changes, including any shifts in power relationships.

Section 5.5 explores the attempted professionalisation of the HR function in order to create a more strategic approach to people management. In chapter 6 I consider the ways in which the management of people changed as a consequence, but in this section I focus on the manner in which HR was modernised at each university in response to the RDS initiative. Again, this was an important element in constructing the discourse of modernisation.

In section 5.6 I discuss the modernisation and potential individualisation of employee relations that was a function of the new approach to pay bargaining.
following the implementation of the Framework Agreement. I explained in section 3.6 that this agreement led to a localisation of pay negotiations between management and unions. Consequently, I consider the effect of this at each university in the context of modernisation discourses.

In section 5.7 I provide a brief summary of the main points to arise from this chapter.

5.2 Vice-Chancellor as Chief Executive?

At Casterbridge the retirement of a long-standing VC in 2001 set in train a substantial period of change. Minutes of the Senate meeting of October 1999 show the clear intention to seek and appoint someone with a particular remit to modernise what was perceived to be an under-performing institution. Following a rather lacklustre period in the 1970s and 80s it was felt that the university was trading on its past academic reputation and had failed to acknowledge the realities of the changing nature of the HE sector.

It was pushing almost all of its money straight into academic endeavour, which is great in one sense…but whereas other institutions were saying ‘but hang on, the world’s changing and actually we need far more robust central systems that facilitate how we want to work, but they need to be really good, effective modern… etcetera’ …but they… just carried on the same…

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

In the late 1980s the institution had run into serious financial difficulties, which caused its Council to tighten up financial management dramatically. This experience is clearly still in the background as an ever-present reminder of the dangers of taking anything for granted in a rapidly evolving HE sector.
… the year of the near meltdown…er, that year’s kind of burned on the brains of councillors, and only recently have they begun to feel that they can let go of the reins again and are comfortable with the idea of devolving responsibility, and have approved a very ambitious financial plan for the coming year…

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

The role of VC was always a high profile one, but the notion of the VC as chief executive, advocated by the Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985), does appear to have become a reality at each of the three case institutions. The apparent need for someone with particular leadership and management skills had been recognised at Casterbridge, thus stimulating the search for an appropriately experienced individual to take the university forward.

I think in a sense, it wasn’t […] coming in and saying there’s a problem here, so much as it was Council recognising there’s a problem and then getting a vice-chancellor that was appropriate to manage that, and they went for someone who was, you know, probably as different as they could get away with.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

I asked senior managers at all three universities about their views of the significance of the VC role in their institution. The interview extracts below each indicate a strong support for the notion of ‘strong leadership’ in universities that is in line not only with the prescriptions of Jarratt, but also the Fender (CVCP 193), Dearing (NCIHE 1997) and Bett (IRHEPC 1999) reports.

… what […] has done very effectively is to present his vision, both before and after he was appointed. He has been very effective and not particularly confrontational, and got the institution to take that vision and drive it down into clear strategies and those strategies are being implemented.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge
Any head would tell you that things have improved enormously over about the past eighteen months. And this is largely due to the appointment of the new vice-chancellor, [...]. I think before [...] came we had an executive that existed in splendid isolation really…. The previous regime, whilst I have a lot of time, a lot of respect for the old principal, er, decisions were made at the top, occasionally things filtered down…there’s been enormous change. Previous to that we had no input at all…the group of heads used to get together and effectively we had clandestine meetings behind closed doors, just really to try to find out what and earth was going on in the place.

Edmond: Senior Manager, Shaston

The life of the university is dependent significantly on the vice chancellor…and you do need that person with a different approach to make sure you are not on a straight and narrow track, that you develop a broad spectrum of activities.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

Clearly, the VC had been extremely important in helping each of the universities to embark on a programme of modernisation and change. In a sense, the appointment of a new VC signalled a change of culture at the top of each institution that symbolically marked the start of a new era in their respective histories. These extracts indicate that, at the top of the institutions at least, there was broad agreement that not only was change necessary, but in order to drive that change forward there was a need for strong leadership.

Despite the apparent significance of these strong leaders, VCs need the cooperation of a supportive management team. Jarratt had made this point in arguing that universities should operate like any other corporate enterprise. It did appear at all three universities that the senior level was starting to operate as a management executive in a strategic role. At Casterbridge there was a fortnightly
formal strategic committee including the senior managers, deans, divisional heads, bursar, finance director and HR director.

[…] is involved in everything and either makes decisions or recommendations, and when a recommendation comes from […] it’s got a powerful push. […] really is the kind of executive committee, the management.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Despite the fact that this committee was the formally recognised senior management executive of the university, a much smaller VCs advisory group had evolved that met informally every week. It included the VC, the Pro Vice Chancellors (PVCs), the registrar and deputy registrar and was clearly a very powerful and influential ‘inner cabinet’.

…there’s a smaller group, the vice chancellor’s advisory group … who meet on a Monday morning and there are all kinds of things they have their finger on the pulse of, and need to make management decisions on the spot…

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This is highly significant and lends support to the notion that there has been transference of decision-making power away from academics to a smaller group of senior managers. This was justified on the grounds that the formally constituted bodies were too large and cumbersome. A smaller executive group could act more strategically and be responsive to change in a dynamic environment. Such views, expressed by the senior managers, are clearly consistent with the broader discourse of modernisation and are indicative of a subtle shift in power relations, challenging the traditional collegiate approach to decision making. This centralisation of power at the top of the management hierarchies was an important stage that enabled the necessary conditions to be created for the subsequent implementation of the modernisation agenda.
Shaston had a similar structure where the formally constituted extended executive group met on a fortnightly basis, but there was also a smaller Management Directorate. It included the VC, two PVCs and Registrar who met more frequently to discuss strategic issues and who effectively ran the university on a daily basis. At Budmouth there was a Steering Committee, which was the formal body that met weekly, and a smaller Executive planning group including the VC, Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC), Finance director, Registrar, and the university secretary, that was the key operating group.

Senior managers in all three universities stressed that these committees – both the formal and the smaller informal senior management groups - were mandated to act on behalf of the Senate at Casterbridge and Budmouth and Board of Governors at Shaston, and that these were the ultimate decision-making bodies. However, the power vested in the VCs, supported by their advisory groups, was significant and further emphasises the importance of the VC in the context of modernisation. Although the universities retained their respective over-arching governing bodies, it seems that the VCs held the real decision-making power.

Interviews with staff lower down the hierarchy certainly showed they felt that this was the case. Their stories convey a clear belief that these small management executives, and the VC in particular, were incredibly powerful and effectively running the university. The following extract is representative of many similar stories in each of the institutions:

…clearly the […] structure is the formal powerful group, Senate…Council has become pretty much a rubber stamping operation, senate’s pretty much the same. I mean I’ve not been to Senate but clearly there’s all sorts of…they are treated with great respect, but their role is pretty marginal to real decision-making.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

For Charles, in common with many other academics I talked to, there was a sense of inevitability that this kind of change should take place. That a senior union
official should express such a view is perhaps illustrative of the dominance of the modernisation discourse. It seems that, in many ways, this was becoming the taken for granted view concerning the manner in which modern universities are managed.

In this section I have argued that there has been a significant transfer of power within each of the case institutions that is entirely consistent with the discourse of modernisation. Vice-Chancellors were acting like CEOs of a commercial corporation, supported by small teams of senior managers acting in an executive capacity. Increasingly, it seemed, strategic decisions were being made by these small groups, rather than through the formal democratic and collegiate structures. In the broader context of an increasingly competitive, global HE market this was presented as an entirely rational development. A strong supporting narrative stressing the benefits of an effective, centrally managed university for staff and, in particular, students, appeared to negate any significant dissent from the discourse.

In the following section I consider the nature and implications of the consequential restructuring exercise carried out in all three universities. The effect of the respective exercises was to reinforce the transfer of power from academics to a small managerial elite.

5.3 Organisational Restructuring

Just as these new and evidently influential VCs were taking over at Shaston and Casterbridge, all three universities were also embarking on an organisational restructuring exercise. In this section for reasons of clarity, I concentrate on each university individually, by first explaining the changes that took place and then considering the response from staff. Having provided this rich description I conclude the section with an evaluation of the respective restructuring exercises.
Casterbridge

In 2000 the Casterbridge university Council commissioned a report to review the management structure of the university, shortly ahead of the appointment of the new VC in 2001. Senior managers perceived a need to change, to modernise, and the aim was to make the operation of the university more efficient and to professionalise the administrative work by handing it over to the appropriate support staff. Consequently, the focus was shifted from departments to faculties because the previous system, based around approximately 40 departments, was seen as too diverse and therefore inefficient. Faculties became the main business units, with devolved budgets and managed by executive Deans. The change was legitimised in terms of economic efficiency and rationality.

A member of the committee that wrote the original report explained the rationale for restructuring to me.

Well, there were many issues that came together at the same time as I recall. There was a general feeling that the structures which we had, were no longer fit for purpose in the modern economy. They were insufficiently streamlined, cumbersome, er, difficult to understand, difficult to navigate your way through them, overly bureaucratic, er, and crucially, decisions were not being made at the right level. We were also very unhappy with the old model for distributing resources and accounting for income and expenditure, […] and it was just a monster with many tentacles and so it was convenient to do that as well, in the context of the same exercise.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This extract from Henry illustrates a narrative that is constructed around the need for a business-like approach and is expressed in management, rather than academic terminology. This is entirely consistent with the modernisation discourse, but says little, if anything, about the core academic and educational purpose of the university. The story is based on a strong assumption that there had to be change and modernisation, yet no evidence is provided to demonstrate perceived failings of the former system.
The decision to make faculties, rather than departments, the key unit has significantly strengthened the role of the new executive Dean. One senior manager, clearly a strong advocate of the modernisation agenda, explained how he operated at the senior level of the university and saw himself as the interface between senior management and faculty staff. Josh described himself as a corporate player and accepts that he is now perceived of as a manager, slightly removed from the other academics.

I became dean just over a year ago at a time when the role of deans was changing within the university. So I was lucky, I was coming into what was effectively a new job anyway. Although I was very close to everybody in the department, they saw me in a different light almost overnight, as dean.

Josh: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Josh had almost complete autonomy to organise and operate his faculty as he felt appropriate, as long as it was within the budget - the main criteria for which he was accountable to the university council.

I think we do things quite differently to what other faculties do. We sort of think outside the box a lot and think, okay, maybe it’s been done that way in the past, but we want to do it this way…I think deans actually, having a sort of mini-university of their own and managing it that way, I think is the right thing to do.

Josh: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

The Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985) had called for Deans to assume more of a management than an academic role. The extracts above show how at Casterbridge faculties had become akin to business units, with Deans accountable for meeting targets agreed by the management executive, within a budget constraint. Accordingly, an entirely new discourse about what it means to be a Dean has emerged, that is largely accepted and reinforced by the Casterbridge
Deans themselves. Henry, a Dean, acknowledged that the language senior managers employed had become unashamedly business-like.

I mean that’s clearly been the trend and er, the sort of language that I’ve just used in the last five minutes…language that might not have come naturally to deans ten years ago. In the old days they were more avuncular [laughs], keeping up spirits and doing the ceremonials and chairing the faculty committees, that sort of thing…but not people who were told, ‘look you have a budget, you have a mission, we want you to make your faculty the best in the world, get on with it.’ [pause] We all take much more training now than we use to and er, worry about employment legislation, financial reporting…personnel, you know, leading people. The word leadership is one that was not very much used I think, at least in my experience in academia, fifteen, twenty years ago [pause] and there were people being embarrassed by the word and nowadays, it’s absolutely acceptable.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

The stories of these executive Deans illustrate the significant degree of authority and responsibility that they held. It seems clear that they saw themselves as operating in a management, rather than an academic capacity. Their primary emphasis appeared to be on ‘managing’ and ‘delivering within budget,’ which came before academic or educational considerations. The new structures are justified by business efficiency arguments, indicative of a growing managerialism. Overall, the effect of the restructuring seems to reinforce the notion that there has been a transference of decision-making power to the upper levels of the management hierarchy.

The most explicit example of a managerial discourse that I encountered came from Thomas, a senior manager.

As a university I think we are exceptionally well placed to meet whatever is thrown at us. Primarily because in the last twelve years we have
completely evolved our management processes to ensure that we are a business. We are driven to make a surplus, not because we have shareholders but because that’s the only way to be financially sound. If you’ve got a surplus that means you’ve got a cash surplus to invest in new buildings, in new developments. It means you’ve got the cash reserves so that if you get a hit on reward you can cope with it. We are not running deficits we are, er, we’ve got one of the highest financial ratings…we are a lean, mean organisation financially.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

The dominance of the above discourse did not go entirely unchallenged and not all Deans felt the same way about their more powerful corporate role. Concerns that the core academic purpose should not become subordinate to economic efficiency arguments were apparent. Evidence of this came from an interview with a Dean who expressed some concerns about an increasing level of managerialism in the university.

When I took on the deanship I made it quite clear that this is a fixed term position as dean. I still see myself as an academic, working for a period of time in academic management if you like, I don’t like that expression, but that is what it is best described as. I don’t think it is in my interest, I don’t think it is in the university’s interest for me, or other people in my position, to become completely divorced from their subject discipline and broader academic life and engagement.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Donald felt that the whole modernisation of structures had created a top-heavy bureaucracy, engendering a number of problems. He argued that the structure did not facilitate proper debate involving the appropriate people. In fact, for Donald, himself part of the senior management of the university, the whole strategy had been counter-productive.

You either ought to simply abolish the faculties and deans and have strong pro vice-chancellors working directly with schools. Or you ought to
abolish pro vice-chancellors and simply have much more authoritative deans. But there is a dysfunction in my view, and [pause] if I were to look at our management structures and say is there one thing that really is…you know, practically inhibits, I would say it’s that, we have one layer of management too many.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This is significant and highlights the fact that for some, an element of collegiality remains that is not entirely in accord with new and competing discourses concerning the modern university. In the extract above, a senior manager, himself empowered by the modernisation discourse, is uneasy with the changes that have taken place. Thus, there is a dissonance for him where his understanding of what it means to be an academic Dean conflicts with developing discourses of modernisation.

Such concerns were also expressed at other levels of the university. There were suggestions of a growing distance between the senior management level and the rest of the university and a lack of awareness by the former, of the pressures and difficulties faced on the ground, by the latter.

Certainly the senior management, and I’m not very comfortable with this, the pvcs believe their role is to strategise rather than operationalise, they think it is up to deans to operationalise at faculty level, but I mean deans are very experienced people. If you separate leadership and management from operationalising in your mind, it seems to me that you might not have thought through the logistics of the operation.

Judith: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Judith’s concern here then, is that the approach to management being advanced by the university is in accordance with a rational, industrial model that is at odds with the democratic structures that used to exist. She believed that a mechanistic structure may be inflexible and could lead to a lack of inclusivity, thus undermining its effectiveness.
Judith had recently applied, unsuccessfully, for promotion to become a Dean and the experience had suggested to her that senior managers had very little awareness of the significance of the Head of Department role, or what that role actually entailed.

The university is still built around its departments, they are so important, never mind the new faculty structure… and it was clear to me that senior management just do not appreciate how they really are like the engine of the university, you know without them nothing works…

Judith: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

This point came up in several interviews with other Heads of Department and academic staff and is highly significant. For it appears that despite undergoing a major restructuring exercise, effectively the university continues to operate according to the old structures and processes. Accordingly, this illustrates a significant divergence between the stories of the senior managers above and the experience of staff at the operational level.

The main concern for the academic staff related to the nature and purpose of the management reorganisations. It was suggested by some that the changes were being driven by a small group of senior managers, who were more concerned with economic efficiency and rationality, than the core academic purpose of the university. Consequently, staff felt that the opportunity for all academic staff to be involved in decision-making was in danger of being lost. The old democratic processes were seen by senior management as no longer ‘fit for purpose,’ yet such a view contrasts sharply with the stories of collegiality expressed by many of the academic staff, as illustrated here by Lidia.

For all the talk about a commitment to consultation there has clearly been an erosion of the traditional collective decision-making processes. The old departmental meeting structure ensured a democratic approach, and that has now largely gone in practice, which is really not a good thing.

Lidia: Academic, Casterbridge
The key concern then, for academics, was that the essential collegiate characteristic of the university, as explained in chapter 2, is in danger of becoming subordinate to an increasingly managerialist approach. Through an examination of the stories concerning organisational restructuring I identified a clear dissonance in the paradigms of the different groups.

For the senior managers, modernisation was explained and justified by managerial and business efficiency reasons. It was presented as entirely rational and consistent with the modern era. Further, modernisation and change, it was argued, was essential in order that the university could function more effectively, guaranteeing a better quality of service for its end-users – the students. Yet the academics, whilst understanding the efficiency arguments, believed that the changes were at the expense of collegiality, which was presented as the defining element of a university. Such changes not only challenged the established discourse from which many academics derived their academic identity, but also threatened to alter the whole ethos of an academic institution. Consequently, academics felt that the student experience would be diminished, rather than enhanced, by the modernisation process.

At the time of the fieldwork a further reorganisation was taking place at Casterbridge. The aim was to amalgamate a number of smaller departments into schools, managed by a single Head, with a management team, including a business manager. This episode was particularly significant and further illustrated the divergence of views concerning modernisation. Henry, a senior manager, explained the rationale for the changes thus:

My hope is that with three large schools and three heads of school, who will receive much better support and training than, er, current heads of department received…those heads of school will be much better equipped to implement policies of all kinds, not just HR.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge
Opinion amongst staff in the faculty was fairly mixed, with most respondents recognising why the university wanted to carry out this latest reorganisation. However, Edward’s story further illustrates how collegiality is challenged by such modernisation.

What may happen is that you get an inner core of academics/managers within the faculty, and there is a feeling amongst many faculty members which I share, that you are getting a quasi managerial business ethos, and this is taking concrete shape in terms of a small group of individuals who effectively will be the executive body. There is a feeling that the influence we traditionally had, you know, choosing head of department… we used to vote for the dean… there is a feeling that these opportunities to make our feelings felt directly have disappeared. So you get an inner core – some people refer to them rather disparagingly as an apparatchik - steering everything.

Edward: Academic, Casterbridge

Edward’s concerns were characteristic of many of the academics I spoke to, as illustrated by Lidia, Judith and Donald above. Given the period of time that I spent at Casterbridge I was able to revisit one of the restructured departments and ask people about the changes that had taken place. James, an academic, was clearly dissatisfied with the manner in which the exercise had been carried out.

For me there has been a lack of communication and as for the way it was done, it has been poor, to be honest. [Restructuring] was going on at the same time as refitting the building and other things, so it was all done in a terrible rush, which has had consequences for teaching – we are still not ready. Staff morale has probably dropped because of the [restructuring] and I don’t think it has been handled very well. I still don’t see the point, like many of my colleagues. We felt more comfortable and more efficient in the old language department, I just don’t see the point and I can’t help feeling we were better before.

James: Academic, Casterbridge
James went on to explain how under the former departmental structure he had been able to see the Head of Department informally on a regular basis and could discuss any issues. Now he would hesitate to go and see the Head of School who is apparently very busy all the time.

Thus, the unforeseen implication of this modernisation and professionalisation of the operating processes and procedures, appears to be an erosion of the informal channels of communication, which are important in so many ways and especially in terms of maintaining the collegiate ethos of the university.

**Budmouth**

Budmouth had always aimed to keep its structure as flat as possible and operated on the structure that Casterbridge moved away from, where departments were the main business units and faculties had a rather amorphous role with very little power. However, in 2006 the university undertook a reorganisation to merge a number of smaller related departments into one large operating unit with an overarching management team that included a dedicated business support manager, in the manner of Casterbridge. Senior managers once again justified this as a rational exercise that would result in a greater degree of business efficiency and more effective delivery of their agendas for teaching and research.

… the other tranche [of the restructuring] was to look at departments and the role of chairs of departments and to see how we could organise those roles to make them more efficient and more effective.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

It was also suggested that further restructuring along those lines might follow.

I think that the next step if we were to continue this road, and continue to grow, is that we would say to the three language departments is that it’s about time you became a school of modern languages with only one person reporting to the centre, rather than three of you. So I think we might collect those together, we might collect the physical sciences together, so physics and chemistry don’t report separately. We might do
some restructuring around History and History of Art, Classics, perhaps bring them together…

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

The type of language used by Richard here is highly significant. For not only is he rehearsing the arguments in favour of better organisation and efficiency, in his narrative he talks explicitly about people ‘reporting’ to the centre. The use of such terminology and the portrayal of an efficient hierarchical business structure is characteristic of a strongly managerialist discourse. Reorganisation into a business-like structure is presented as entirely rational and, indeed, essential in the modern era, as he went on to say.

But, particularly as student fees come on board, as students become ever more demanding…you get more and more, the need to professionally manage the student expectation, the student experience, the funds of research expectations and research activities. It’s a big business and you can’t do it in a cavalier fashion, can you?

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

Yet for academic staff at Budmouth, in common with those at Casterbridge, such notions conflicted with their discourses of collegiality. Academics conveyed concerns about the restructuring which, they felt, risked compromising the essential identity of academic departments.

Merging departments and installing management teams with dedicated administrative support had been justified on the basis that academics are not trained managers and therefore needed support. But for the academics interviewed immediately after the reorganisation there was an element of anxiety and uncertainty as to how it would work out. Clearly, such emotions are common in any organisational change process and, as I explained in section 2.4, in such circumstances a degree of resistance is to be expected. But many staff were still unclear as to how the new departments would operate and where certain responsibilities lay, for example in terms of staff appraisals. Accordingly, in the
following extract Ella, an academic herself, explains why the degree of unease amongst academics goes beyond that expected level of resistance to change.

Actually, I think this latest reorganisation could prove to be something of a watershed for [Budmouth]. There are definitely signs of an increasingly managerialist culture developing, and that’s quite new.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth

Many academics expressed similar concerns over the uncertainty and instability that arises from working under conditions of constant change, as George explains.

There are far too many strategies rolling out simultaneously – that inevitably leads to overload.

George: Middle Manager, Budmouth

This divergence in the narratives of senior managers and other academic staff at Budmouth, illustrates a similar dissonance to that which existed at Casterbridge. It seemed that staff were not actually opposed to restructuring per se, but it was more to do with the manner in which the changes had taken place, which appeared to be informed by a growing managerialism and an insufficient level of consultation. As the university pursued its aims to operate more efficiently, the consequence was the development of a hierarchical structure that had more in common with an industrial, business model. The result of which, for the academic staff, was to further erode the democratic and collegiate traditions of the university, causing further dissonance and confusion.

The situation in one particular faculty served to further illustrate that dissonance and to emphasise the increasingly managerial agenda at the top of the university hierarchy. The faculty in question had expanded rapidly and simply outgrown its old management structure. The academic staff that I interviewed all recognised that such growth required some element of reorganisation, but were clearly unhappy with the new structure that had been created by senior management as a
response. It was seen as confusing and not particularly transparent. Indeed, it was difficult for me to get a clear picture of the new structure from anyone, including the chair of faculty and three Heads of Departments within the faculty. Each of these departments had their own management teams, internal structures and devolved budgets. One of these heads of a department of around 150 staff, Anna, explained how she had a management team including her own deputy, three heads of research groups and their deputies and an administrative manager. These were all supported by a variety of administrative staff spread across the groups.

It’s just the sheer scale of it and inevitably it does seem rather complex and hierarchical. I do understand why academics are suspicious of hierarchy, but you just have to do some of that stuff. It operates in a sort of matrix fashion, which is more appropriate, I think.

Anna: Senior Manager, Budmouth

The following passage from an interview with Janet, an academic, encapsulates the feelings of many academic staff that were interviewed in this faculty. Despite the recognition that the rapid growth of the faculty necessitated some kind of change, there do seem to be some misgivings over the manner in which the change was handled.

Well, it has caused widespread confusion and resentment, really. People have been unsettled by the change. Granted, there were meetings about the restructuring but it didn’t feel like genuine consultation, you know…it was more like being told what was going to happen. A number of people have left and there is a lingering sort of resentment amongst colleagues. I think morale has definitely suffered because people simply don’t know where they now belong or who is in charge…and that’s unsettling. There was a clear sense of identity in the previous structure, but that’s gone and ironically it feels like they are trying to manufacture an identity - like we used to have - but it doesn’t work like that…the institute is too big. It does
seem that management efficiency is the main objective of the whole exercise, rather than any academic justification.

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

The final sentence from Janet effectively summed up the feeling of many who expressed concerns over the rather business-like culture that was emerging. Liz, Budmouth’s union representative, also discussed the suggestion of a growing distance between management and academic staff.

I think our vc has an idea that [Budmouth]...I think he under-estimates the ethical stance of people within the university – he thinks we’re all happy with being [Budmouth] plc and moving towards a [Budmouth] brand, and that just isn’t the thing that we’re getting from our members.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

So, in common with Casterbridge, academics at Budmouth found their notions of collegiality challenged by a strongly managerialist discourse that portrayed change as both an inevitable consequence of the changing HE environment and a necessary response to ensure an effective delivery of its academic agendas. The problem likely to face senior managers is that the dissonance experienced by academics could ultimately undermine the attempt to create more effective systems of delivery. The attempts to manufacture an identity that Janet talks about are unlikely to replicate the atmosphere that previously existed, for that aspect of collegiality comes from a feeling of shared experience and common academic interests and develops over time. Arising from that is a feeling of loyalty and a willingness to work for the good of a department. Placing people in managerially designed, rational organisational groupings is unlikely to lead to the development of such feelings.

**Shaston**

Shaston has possibly undergone the most significant change of all three universities, due to it only recently attaining university status. Shaston’s gradual move to becoming a university was made possible by the 1992 FHE Act (Chapter 3) since when it has gone from being an institute of higher education, to a
university college, before becoming a university in its own right. Achieving university status had been a long-term strategic goal at Shaston which, according to this senior manager, now presents many new challenges and has required a fundamental review of its strategy.

I think it was incredibly influential, in a number of ways really. I mean…I think it changes the way both in which client organisations that you formerly worked with … client organisations that potentially you may work with … view what the institution is about, er it raises the stakes. But it also raises expectations. We are still the same department and the same institution we were three months ago, but suddenly the community, the business community, potential students see you in a different way.

Edmond: Senior Manager, Shaston

The view expressed here and by other senior managers was that as a university, Shaston now has to operate in new areas, for example, by becoming more research-focused, developing more post-graduate programmes and attracting more international students. It has created added pressure at all levels and inevitably raises many questions as to their readiness to compete in this new and more competitive arena. Senior managers were clearly pushing to move forward quickly, but there was some evidence that this was causing concern amongst academic and some middle managers, where there was a perception that the university was trying to change too fast and before all the building blocks were properly in place.

I’ve got a slight concern that we are actually as an institution going from one that was quite conservative to one that is taking more risks, which is fine that’s what institutions do need to do, but the new campus is a big risk. It means we’ve got to keep on growing, we’ve got to take on quite a lot of debt, er if recruitment does not materialise then this institution will be in grave difficulties, so that’s a gamble that I think was probably
necessary to take er, so far so good…I think it could happen, but I’m slightly nervous about it.

Robin: Middle Manager, Shaston

You know, as I say, sometimes I think if only the pace of change was slightly slower and we had slightly more breathing space to address one thing and make sure that’s up and running before we turn our attention to something else. The danger is that at the moment we are trying to fight on too many fronts.

Jacob: Middle Manager, Shaston

The university needs to be careful not to try to impose things too quickly in an unplanned way…things like this portfolio review…I mean there are concerns that they are pushing too fast just to get the validations through in time.

Frank: Middle Manager, Shaston

These three middle managers illustrate the underlying sense of concern over the degree of change facing the university. They provide a number of examples of the kind of changes taking place, including the building of a new campus and its associated financial risks and the rush to get new programmes validated. A particular concern amongst many academic staff was that the change in status could start to impinge upon what had always been seen as Shaston’s key strength as a student-friendly institution.

For a student who may feel lacking in confidence to go to a bigger institution, where they may get lost, they’d come to [Shaston] because they know they’d be cared for, and I think that’s something which I think we still preserve, and I think we’ve got to preserve, because as soon as we lose that…if we have a USP at all it’s down to the way that we care for our
students …but lose those values and we really do need to look at what we’re about.

Clark: Academic, Shaston

At [Shaston] there has been the idea that, you know, there has been this relatively small, cohesive, tight-knit community, where people have generally been supportive of one another, working across departments is seen as a benefit, where in other institutions you could cut the atmosphere with a knife, you know. This is a much more pleasant environment and people haven’t gone down that individualistic, sort of route. I think people are positive about the change, positive about the developments taking place…but in the background there is always that worry that something will be lost down the way as we grow and expand, you know, the price might be that that kind of atmosphere…

Jane: Union Representative, Shaston

The sense of cohesiveness that Jane talks about was alluded to in a number of my interviews and it was clear that this was an important aspect of the collegial spirit for many. But in common with Casterbridge and Budmouth, senior managers expressed the view that change was not only inevitable but, in the case of Shaston, imperative, given its attainment of university status. Gabriel, a senior manager was clearly very positive about the future.

Yes, well obviously, a huge amount of pride amongst staff and especially students. An awful lot of civic pride, you know great celebration, that means that for business, and all sorts of organisations out there, the profile and the perceived importance of us, has raised because we are a university. So I think it was a question for some, you know is this the pinnacle of achievement and we’ve arrived, and therefore nothing else, or is this significant and the start of another phase? Well, the other phase has clearly won and we really have to embrace it and move forward.

Gabriel: Senior Manager, Shaston
Another senior manager, Barbara, explained how she believed that in order for the university to be successful in the future, it had to change and manage its resources more effectively.

We have to be more business-like. We’re not a business as such – but we are. We just have to think in that way about managing finance, managing staff … it really is essential. And what’s more, I do believe that if it’s done well it can actually enhance the provision of the academic work and not necessarily impinge on it.

Barbara: Senior Manager, Shaston

It is interesting that in her story, Barbara talks about ‘managing staff’ in the same way as managing any other resource, such as finance. There are clear parallels with Richard, the senior manager at Budmouth, whose discourse was flavoured with similar business terminology about reporting lines in the structure. Here, then is further evidence of senior managers employing a strongly managerialist discourse that clearly informs their approach to the modernisation agenda.

The structure at Shaston, as in many post 92 institutions, was based around schools. In 2004 a restructuring exercise led to the creation of a new tier of line-management to head up new sections within the schools. These posts were offered as promotion opportunities at principal lecturer (PL) level. These individuals then became part of the management teams supporting the Head of School. The team also included a dedicated business support manager. As with the other Casterbridge and Budmouth the reorganisation was seen as essential to cope with the demands of the modern environment, especially given the impending new university status.

Robin, one of the newly created management PLs himself, explains his understanding of the rationale for the restructuring and also points to some of the concerns he has over the nature of the changes.

It’s always been managed to an extent quite conservatively, in terms of budget…er, there was no pressure to publish er, there was not a lot of
pressure to do things, you know, other than to make sure you did your teaching, or recruiting students…and when the new senior management came in they actually realised there were a number of things we had to do, some new things, as well as building on what we did well. There were some things we did well, but in terms of research activity, in terms of consultancy…there was a realisation that in order to grow, in order to justify a second campus and all the rest of it we’d have to raise the game. And the introduction of the new structures with these new heads of subjects was primarily intended to free up heads of department to do more sort of strategic thinking. The extent to which that’s been successful is another matter all together in my opinion, partly because it’s a recent initiative and it will take a while to settle down…people like me still trying to work out the right way to work and all the rest of it, but bear in mind in the most part we are talking about people who were in the institution before, and where they were appointed on the basis of their administrative attributes…they are now being expected to different things and become a little bit more strategic…er, some of them have risen to the challenge better than others, I guess, but it is asking quite a lot, so I’m not sure how successful it’s been just yet.

Robin: Middle Manager, Shaston

In this story Robin conveys a sense of the sheer scale of the challenge facing Shaston and, indeed, the associated risks. Senior managers were united in their belief that modernisation was an entirely rational and necessary development that would, ultimately, benefit the whole university. But the process of creating the necessary conditions to enact the changes was having a discernible effect at various different levels of the university, resulting in a degree of concern and some confusion.

At Shaston the nature of the management reorganisation provides a clear demonstration of the management’s intentions to become more business-like in the operation of the university. The creation of a new tier of line management in charge of clearly defined business units was designed specifically to increase effectiveness, accountability and to provide a focus for performance management.
Although staff could see the benefits in some respects, there was a general wariness and a belief that the university was becoming an increasingly more managed environment. In particular, it was the new line-management role that caused the greatest degree of unrest and was not fully accepted by all academic staff as explained by Faith, a senior lecturer.

There is also a lot of ill-feeling about this new line-manager role and most people think this really a layer of management too far. There is no need for this extra tier of management and mostly people tend to ignore them anyway, so what is the point? However, it is clear that there is plenty of management activity going on throughout the university.

Faith: Academic, Shaston

In the same vein, concerns were expressed over the new direction and especially the tone of the university’s new strategy document, which is seen as inappropriate in style, but symptomatic of the changing culture.

…it is sad that the university feels it has to resort to that kind of marketing spin.

Clark: Academic, Shaston

Shaston was, then, faced by particular problems. Although responding to the same global challenges as Casterbridge and Budmouth, the pressures of massification and marketisation affected the institution in a different way. Not only did it need to change its whole status and become a university, but it also had to deal with the implications of that changed status almost immediately before the changes had fully bedded in. Such are the pressures of operating in a market environment. My analysis of the stories of the academic staff demonstrates a similar concern over the increasing managerialism, characterised most explicitly by the creation of a new tier of line management. Most significant at Shaston, was the marked divergence in the views of senior managers and academic staff. Clearly there had been a well-developed sense of collegiate identity that, it was believed, was threatened by the changes. For senior managers, the most important
thing was to focus on the broader strategic imperative to meet their ambitions to become a successful university.

**Organisational Restructuring: an evaluation**

Shaston was obviously faced by particular pressures due to its changed status, but there was a clear view articulated by senior managers in each of the universities that like it or not, the nature of the HE environment has fundamentally altered under the pressures of globalisation. As I have shown, the impact on institutions is variable, but the imperative for change is constant. Consequently, in the stories of the senior managers a recurring theme is the notion that universities have to respond to change and begin to operate as commercially aware, corporate institutions.

All of the senior managers that I interviewed argued that organisational restructuring was an essential part of constructing the conditions that would enable their universities to become more business-like. An appropriate structure would facilitate greater accountability and budgetary control, better management control at all levels of the hierarchy and a more effective delivery of corporate plans, to the obvious benefit of the student. Such a strongly managerial discourse clearly challenged the traditional collegiate and democratic structures of the university. For academic staff, the result was concern over an increasingly managerial focus and uncertainty from the atmosphere of almost constant change.

Although many staff did appear to agree that some kind of reorganisation might be needed it was unclear whether this was a genuine belief, or rather the product of a sustained discourse of modernisation leading to an element of confusion that challenged their existing beliefs.

The arguments put forward by the senior managers at each of the universities appeared to support the legitimising discourse of neoliberalism (section 2.2). As a consequence, change is presented as entirely necessary and incontestable, where ‘dissent from the discourse is difficult to articulate’ (Clarke and Newman 1997:54) and to disagree risks being sidelined as anti-progressive. Yet, for academics, it was not so much that they were opposed to change, it was more to
do with the manner in which it was managed, which was characterised by managerialism and a lack of consultation.

In the following section I explain how reforming the administrative function was a further element in creating the conditions necessary to enable the enactment of the modernisation discourse.

5.4 Modernising the Administration Function

A further aspect of the modernisation process involved the professionalisation of the administrative work of the university by placing far greater emphasis on the support staff. According to NPM discourses, not only are more effective systems required, but the administration of those systems are better organised by appropriately qualified personnel. Under conditions of governmentality (section 2.2), where universities are subject to even greater external audit, performance indicators, regulation and control, then the case for a professional administrative function is strongly justified by a discourse of rationality.

Senior managers at each university all made such a case in arguing for a more professional approach to administration.

What I’ve been saying from the start is, look, we want to get the administrative monkey off the academics back, and just leave the decks clear for them to do their teaching and their research. And have er, input at the right places…where traditional academic expertise and advice is required, otherwise, hand it over to the professional administrators, that’s what they’re there for and that’s what they want to do.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

And administration and so on is something that you have to do to the minimum, to allow everything else to foster. But it is clear that administration is taking up more and more of our academics time, and one
way that we are addressing that is investing in administrators in more and more of our departments… there are a range of activities that are better done by professional administrators.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

A belief in the inherent logic of such a position is clearly apparent in the extracts from these senior managers. It is the same managerialist discourse that is used to justify the organisational restructuring, that there is no alternative in a marketised HE sector but to become more business-like and professional. There was some recognition of the academics’ position and here Henry, a senior manager, acknowledges the tension between managerialism and collegiality.

Well that involves academics letting go, and regarding support staff as true colleagues, and saying, yes they are the professionals in this, let them get on with it. And that’s a tough thing to do in the old collegial way of doing things, people who were raised in that atmosphere sometimes have difficulty doing that, I think. But that’s the price you pay under the old collegial system with academics involved in all of these administrative structures, and that means sitting on dozens of committees and spending all kinds of time er, doing things, learning about finance and so on, when really an administrator can do it. So the more we do that obviously we move to a more managerial culture, and some colleagues are worried about that. They fear that they will lose all of the advantages of the old collegial system, that they will no longer feel that they are at the heart of the thing that they belong to any more, just they’re the workies.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Here, Henry does appear to recognise some of the criticisms of modernisation. However, it is notable that when he talks about collegiality he prefixes it with the word ‘old’, suggesting that for him, it is something that clearly belongs to the past. Such a discourse is consistent with the modernisation agenda, characterised by a narrative contrasting the modern, efficient present system with the outdated, inefficient old one.
With regard to modernisation of administration, academic staff found themselves in a rather paradoxical situation. They did seem to believe that there could be some benefits in terms of freeing up time from administrative work. But in their stories there was an apparent level of concern that they risked losing an element of control of their work by handing responsibility over to the administrators, as alluded to by Henry above. Although the administrative aspect of an academic’s role is perhaps the least satisfying and something they would prefer not to have to do, the problem for academics appeared to be where to draw the line between work that required an academic input and that which could be done by support staff. They tended to argue that the balance was not right, implying there had been a lack of consultation. There was a strong belief that the professionalisation of administration had led to the emergence of a very bureaucratic culture and that administrators were now exercising increasing influence over the work of academics, as expressed by Liz and reinforced by Frank, below.

I mean, we are get things through all the time, for example on the […] which I teach on, we get letters through saying this is the latest study we’ve done on the […] programme and these are the changes that area required…er, when did you consult with the people who are teaching? There is no consultation, it’s led by this kind of administrative function.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

…it’s almost as if these people are carving out a niche for themselves and it’s in their interests to perpetuate it.

Frank: Middle Manager, Shaston

According to many of the more long-standing academics that I interviewed there had been an increase in paperwork, largely driven by the need to comply with external quality assurance requirements.

there are forms for everything now and its becoming almost a tick box mentality, just so it all looks good for the QAA…

Robin: Middle Manager, Shaston
Over the years I’ve seen a huge increase in bureaucracy and a definite erosion of the time available for teaching and interacting with the students. The QAA and RAE in particular have really increased pressures on academic staff.

Robert: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

I mean, QA systems are all very worthwhile in theory, but just so hugely time consuming…just to prove that you are doing what you are actually doing anyway!

Peggy: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

An element of dissatisfaction about increasing bureaucracy is perhaps to be expected in any organisation. However, analysis of the various stories suggests something rather more problematic, which is more to do with an element of control passing to those who administer the systems. In Liz’s story above, she is clearly concerned that decisions are being made about a programme based on information generated by administrators. So the consequence of moving towards a more systems based approach is that it provides the illusion of certainty and objectivity and thus, potentially replaces academic judgement. Samuel, a senior manager, acknowledges the potential for this below.

QA for instance, is something that has to be done clearly, and for very good reasons, but by its very nature it becomes a very bureaucratic, controlling mechanism. Systems and processes inevitably develop and there is a danger that you lose sight of the original purpose and the whole thing takes on a kind of life of its own.

Samuel: Senior Manager, Budmouth

That concern was heightened rather by a belief that the bureaucratic systems that had emerged were questionable in terms of their effectiveness.
This was always sold as having the benefits of freeing up staff and more time etcetera etcetera. I think it’s fair to say that the experience of most academics is that is does not appear to have had a major impact on their overall administrative workload.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This, perhaps, was the ultimate irony for academics. For not only did they feel that a degree of power had been surrendered to administrators, there was also a belief that modernisation had actually increased their administrative burden – the ‘administrative monkey’ that Henry talked about was still very much in evidence. Such change had all happened in parallel with the restructuring that had created a more hierarchical structure. Faculties and departments were now run by management teams, often with a dedicated business support manager to assist heads of department in running their sections and handling budgets.

Consequently, there was an obvious frustration amongst academic staff at what they perceived as a growing level of bureaucracy and the clear emergence of what Wright (2004) has called an audit culture. Significantly for academics, the effect of these changes was a perceived diminution of their control over academic work and an increase in their administrative workload.

5.5 Modernisation of HR

A further aspect of the modernisation discourse concerns the professionalisation of the HR function and the attempt to implement a more strategic approach to HRM, prompted by the government’s RDS initiative. I explained in section 3.6 the neoliberal ideology that underpinned RDS, including the justification for having a performance-led approach to managing academic staff. Notwithstanding the empirically supported doubts concerning the efficacy of HRM itself (section 2.2), RDS argued strongly for such an approach.

This notion that ‘better management of people’ will inevitably result in improved organisational performance is central to discourses of modernisation and is one of
the main issues that this thesis investigates. Consequently, the different aspects of
the issue are examined throughout this and the following two chapters. In this
section I begin by considering how each university attempted to modernise its HR
function and create the conditions to implement an HR strategy. In chapter 6 I
critically assess the impact of RDS on individual academic staff and consider the
manner in which RDS was implemented.

Shaston was unique in having a relatively small HR department but, quite
significantly, this was compensated by the fact that the HR director sat on the
senior management executive, thus guaranteeing a high profile for HR issues.
This was a legacy of the previous VC’s regime who had been particularly
supportive of HR. According to Tess, the HR Director, Shaston has traditionally
been pretty well organised in terms of personnel management, so the RDS
initiative did not so much herald a major change as help to support some pre-
planned staff development activities and to continue their strategy to devolve
greater HR responsibility to line managers.

So I think it gave us that opportunity to do more, so the idea that yes, I
think the phrase that came through in RDS one – additionality, what have
you done extra that you wouldn’t have done if you hadn’t had the money?
And we were able to show that we could appoint people, to do particular
things, to give other people more time to do things.

Tess: HR Director, Shaston

At Budmouth and Casterbridge there was a similar view of the benefits of RDS as
explained by two senior managers.

Oh it’s certainly been helpful - it’s been helpful in two ways. It’s been
helpful in seeding discussion and giving an opportunity to discuss HR
issues and innovations and HR changes, and of course its provided a bit of
funding too, to help us make it happen. So yes, it’s been very beneficial,
but of course it’s raised expectations in what might be reasonable in terms of the staff and trade unions, but nevertheless, it’s triggered discussion.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

…and the feedback to HEFCE has been quite consistent, most institutions have directly benefited in having that money recompensed and focused onto this agenda. You just have to see the growth in personnel departments and HR departments. There is a view, and certainly the AUT take a view that all the money that should have gone into pay has been siphoned off into boosting HR departments but, you know, I have to add in again since I’ve come here that what my predecessor had before the Hefce initiative, you couldn’t, you know it wasn’t a personnel department, not in any real sense, there just weren’t enough people in it. I won’t say they weren’t doing good stuff but they were completely hamstrung by the resources they had.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

In the above extract Michael does acknowledge the criticisms concerning the expansion of HR departments, but then goes on to make a strong case to argue why that expansion was necessary. In fact, management and union views were pretty much polarised as to the validity of RDS as suggested by Liz and Charles below.

What has happened to that money? I mean I’m not entirely sure I know, but I certainly know the personnel department has expanded in [Budmouth] quite considerably…

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

I mean, the people strategy, it felt like something they had to do for HEFCE wasn’t it?

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge
It was striking that, beyond senior management and union officers, there was very little awareness of RDS or the universities’ respective HR strategies. The four responses below are typical of many stories, including one from a senior Head of Department.

I know nothing at all about an HR strategy. If we do have one it has no impact on me.

Faith: Academic, Shaston

I’m not even sure of what I’m supposed to be aware of.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth

I’m not really aware of any HR strategy as such. I have seen some leaflets and emails but nothing that has been formally communicated to me.

Bob: Academic, Budmouth

I don’t even know what it looks like – what’s it supposed to be about?

Mark: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Given the high profile of the initiative this lack of awareness was surprising and something I discussed with the HR directors. Although they recognised there was a lack of awareness of the strategy itself, they were not particularly surprised or concerned. More important for them was whether or not the strategy was making a difference on the ground. This is perfectly in line with HRM theory, where responsibility for HRM is devolved to line managers. Yet the stories above imply something rather different was happening in practice. What is significant is the manner in which the sustaining discourse of modernisation is employed to justify the growing presence of HR departments.

Despite all the policies and procedures that the respective HR departments were producing, the impression I gained from the academic staff was that they felt HR
was a rather remote department that apparently made little difference to their working lives, as this experienced academic explains.

HR is seen as a rather distant department I think, simply rolling out strategies, but there is no sense of a genuinely integrated approach to HR. [The HR director] just doesn’t talk to anyone and makes no apparent effort to meet academic staff.

Lidia: Academic, Casterbridge

The implication of this suggestion is that university HR departments are better explained as a product of the modernisation discourse, rather than a necessary development to enhance the working conditions of academics. Many of the academics I spoke to felt that the HR department had no discernible impact on their daily working lives and Clark, below, sums up the feelings of many.

They are very much there to reinforce management strategies…I wouldn’t go to them if I had a problem, I’d go to my line manager.

Clark: Academic, Shaston

It is interesting that Clark draws a distinction between the role of the HR department and that of his line manager. For one of the key roles of a line manager, following RDS, is to enact the policies of the HR strategy that are formulated by the HR department. This was certainly an emerging issue in each of the universities and one that I explore in greater detail in chapter 6. As a consequence of the restructuring exercises (section 5.3) there was an increasing expectation that line managers should take a more strategic approach that was starting to challenge existing norms and collegial relations. Hence, the kind of academic relationship that Clark alludes to, above, becomes further enfolded into the broader modernisation discourse.

It was clear that the HR departments at each university had implemented several new initiatives. At Casterbridge and Budmouth, for example, an element of the management reorganisation had involved getting HR officers to spend some of their time working in departments to assist line managers. It was hoped that
academics would recognise that HR specialists can support the academic work that is being done in the department as Alec explains.

So the aim, and I wouldn’t say it’s anything like perfect, is to try and break down some of those barriers and I would like as an ultimate, so that at least my personnel advisors are invited to a kind of annual strategy meeting in each department, so that we know what are the aims and aspirations of our departments.

Alec:  HR Director, Budmouth

What is particularly interesting in this story is the characterisation of a barrier between academic and administrative staff. This was clearly a cause for concern and the implication from Alec’s story is that such an issue resulted from the attitudes of academics. Their unwillingness to accept change and continued efforts to maintain collegiate traditions and processes is characterised as holding up the progress of the apparently inevitable modernisation agenda.

The following two extracts, from a senior manager and an experienced academic serve to illustrate how many of the academics I interviewed described the role of HR. Such attitudes appear to confirm Alec’s perception of a barrier, above.

…there is a generally held perception that personnel are concerned with high falutin…issues of particular significance to HR officers, and not enough to doing the basic nitty-gritty jobs of recruitment.

William:  Senior Manager, Shaston

…it’s all about HR departments having to justify their existence by producing all these policies and procedures, but in the final analysis it has no effect on how I do my job.

Matthew:  Academic, Casterbridge

Academic staff were largely dismissive of the work of HR as suggested by Liz below.
I’m not sure how useful people find them in reality, I’m not sure how clued up they are as a lot of things have to go back to the centre anyway, to get proper answers about things.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

The following extract from Warren, a middle manager, helps to explain why it is that HR appeared to come in for so much criticism

In fact I would say that the HR policies are probably the most managerialist in the whole of the university. They operate systems – they have to, to be legally compliant and accountable, and so most of the day-to-day element of HR work is incredibly bureaucratic, which is a huge source of frustration.

Warren: Middle Manager, Budmouth

Here then, the work of HR is clearly associated with the kind of managerialism that was the source of so much frustration to many of the academics I interviewed. In arguing that they operate systems, Warren is suggesting that HR is just one more element in the battery of control mechanisms that apparently characterise the modern HE sector. This is rather different from the kind of dynamic, entrepreneurial management celebrated in modernisation discourses.

RDS had clearly had some impact in all three universities, not least because there was no choice but to submit an HR strategy to HEFCE in order to secure funding. Each university had an existing strategy but it seems that RDS did lead to a reassessment of their approach to managing people. There is no doubt that the HR departments at both Budmouth and Casterbridge had grown significantly. This was presented as entirely necessary if HR was to function effectively, given its enhanced status. The lack of awareness of HR strategies amongst line managers was the most striking issue, given that these were the people who were directly responsible for implementing the associated policies. Academics appeared to be largely unaffected by the developments following RDS yet, in
chapter 6, I show how the conditions that had been created were in fact starting to have a tangible effect on the ways in which they were expected to carry out their work.

5.6 Modernising Employee Relations

A further aspect of the modernisation process was the attempted individualisation of employee relations. At the time of the fieldwork all three universities were heavily involved in negotiations concerning implementation of the *National Framework Agreement*, explained in section 3.6, in time for the August 2006 deadline. For HR and unions alike there was clearly a huge amount of time being devoted to the exercise. It was apparent that this national policy initiative was having a significant effect at the local level, as the universities effectively had no alternative but to work closely with the unions in order to achieve a modernisation of pay and reward systems. So this national collective agreement was having a local impact and was leading to an individualisation of employee relations at the institutional level.

For Budmouth the whole exercise heralded something quite new. Previously, there had been no formal trade union facilities and time off agreement, as confirmed by Liz.

> It’s interesting isn’t it? [laughing] I mean we’ve had to fight for it and when I talked to one of my predecessors who did it some time ago and he said that he tried and tried to get a facilities agreement and just couldn’t get one.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

It seems that this localisation of negotiations was something of an unexpected, and perhaps not entirely welcome development for the senior managers at Budmouth and Casterbridge. Certainly the achievement of a trade union facilities agreement was a key development at Budmouth, as they had never had one.
before. Yet, in the stories of these two senior managers it is clear that they have some concerns over the increased involvement of the unions that the Framework Agreement required.

…we’re not seeking to share management of the university with the trade unions by going down a partnership route. There is a distinction between managing and consulting. We might at some point consult widely with staff about strategy in the wider sense, and that is an interesting thing to do, but I don’t think that I would, personally raise trade unionists onto a pedestal and say I would exclude everybody else and sit and talk to trade unionists about strategy.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

I personally think it’s absolutely essential, to involve your staff in every process of change. Whether or not doing so through the recognised trade unions is always the best way, we will have to wait and see. The difficulty I think is, we have some excellent trade union members who work enormously hard, but you’re heavily dependent on one or two people, and you’re never quite sure whether they’re speaking for their constituency.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

In both these extracts it is interesting that these senior managers distinguish between consulting with staff and with trade unions, implying that the latter do not necessarily represent the majority staff view. Whether or not Thomas felt the same test of representativeness should apply to senior management was not clear. However, despite this apparent tension, management and unions at Budmouth and Casterbridge were clearly working closely together. The following two quotes suggests that the unions were under no illusions as to the reasons for this more cooperative approach.

Now I don’t know if it’s a function of er, perhaps a more cooperative, supportive personnel department, or it’s because they have no choice, because the framework negotiations require such a lot of local negotiation,
that they don’t really have much choice in the matter. If they want to do something in partnership as the framework suggests then they have to give trade union reps facilities time in order to do that properly.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

This reward project has been quite seminal I think in the extent to which they’ve er, tried to involve the unions and keep them involved. I mean whether it’s a model for further developments or whether they are just…think that could so badly wrong they want to share the blame, you know.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

The situation was slightly different at Shaston, where there had traditionally been a closer relationship between the unions and management, which is characteristic of the post 92 universities. Yet, in contrast to the other two institutions where there was a developing relationship, there was a suggestion that the relationship was beginning to deteriorate at Shaston. Here, Jane explains how she believed things were changing and her concerns that she perceived a slightly more directive approach by senior management.

You know, the whole promotion structure which we hadn’t had here, you know we hadn’t had any means of going from senior lecturer to principle lecturer, or gaining extra points at the top of the scale, that came in and we were negotiating on that as part of the framework agreement and that suddenly got parachuted in through academic board, which was outside of what we were negotiating and so we were a bit miffed by that. You know, we’d spent a lot of time, again without extra facilities to do it, and then suddenly they circumvented the whole system and pushed something through academic board. We couldn’t really say anything against it, because we could hardly say to our members, you know, don’t go for promotion, don’t get extra money, you know [laughs]. It was the same when they implemented the single pay spine, again we felt they had done that too soon without working through all the rest of the stuff, but we can’t
say to our members, you know, don’t take the extra money…so they kind of forced our hand there. Just a few things that have happened over the last twelve months which show a little bit of a shift in the working relationship, more management and us rather than that collective feel we had a few years ago.

Jane: Union Representative, Shaston

This episode is indicative of the heterogeneous impact at the local level of changes to the sector at the national level. The effect of implementing the Framework Agreement at Budmouth and Casterbridge was a closer working relationship between management and unions, albeit with a degree of tension still present. Yet at Shaston the existing relationship came under some pressure from a growing managerialism. The management apparently saw the agreement as an opportunity to modernise their pay systems without recourse to the existing negotiating machinery. Such managerial tactics clearly created difficulties for the union, as explained by Jane above, and provides further evidence of the challenge to existing norms and traditions posed by discourses of modernisation. This development also seems to support some of the concerns over partnership working that I discussed in chapter 2. Here it was suggested that such an approach falls well short of traditional collective bargaining and is more of a managerially driven strategy where trade unions have significantly reduced influence, especially over pay (Oxenbridge et al 2003).

5.7 Summary

In this chapter I have shown how a discourse of modernisation was constructed at each of the three universities as they responded to the variable impact of global pressures. This was illustrated by a number of related developments that changed the nature and conditions under which academics performed their work.

First the recognition of the need to appoint a new Vice-Chancellor, as a symbolic figure to symbolise the start of a programme of reform, became the catalyst for a
number of significant changes. Amongst these was an apparent centralisation of power at the top of management hierarchies, where small groups of senior managers formed a powerful ‘inner cabinet’ that was the key strategic decision-making body.

Second an organisational restructuring was carried out in order to facilitate a more business-like approach to managing the university’s resources, both financial and human. The result, according to academic staff, was the emergence of a far more managed environment. As a consequence, there were concerns amongst academic staff that management discourses of business and operational efficiency were assuming greater importance and beginning to challenge traditional collegiate ideals.

Third, to support and reinforce the restructuring, the system of administrative support was reorganised, leading to an enhanced role for support staff. Academic staff felt that not only did this signal transference of some of their power and responsibility to administrators, but, ironically, their own administrative burden had increased as a result.

Fourth an HR strategy was introduced to provide a more coherent and performance-led approach to managing academics, according to the values of HRM. Yet most academic staff, including some of the middle managers responsible for actually implementing the HR strategy, remained unaware of its existence.

Finally the nature and conditions of management/union relations were changed, in accordance with the requirements of the Framework Agreement. A form of partnership working developed at Budmouth and Casterbridge that had not existed before, but at Shaston there was a deterioration in what had originally been a good joint working relationship. Shaston’s union representative believed that the university’s management had seen the Framework Agreement as an opportunity to increase its control over negotiations.
In the following chapter I turn to a consideration of the ways in which management implemented their policies, arising from the modernisation agenda. As such, I discuss the manner in which policies were operationalised using new technologies of control. Such technologies challenged academics’ discourses of collegiality, causing a degree of tension and conflict.
Chapter 6
Operationalisation and Control

6.1 Introduction

In chapter 5 I discussed the changes that had taken place at each university where, in accordance with notions of modernisation, there was a perceived need to take a more ‘business-like’ approach to managing their operations. Such changes were a necessary part of creating the conditions that, it was envisaged, would subsequently become embedded and thus had the effect of sustaining the discourse of modernisation. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the discourse was enacted in practical terms by considering the implementation and operationalisation of HR strategies at each university, including performance management and appraisal systems. The development of an HR strategy was a major aspect of the modernisation process at each university and had been a key objective for their respective HR directors following RDS.

As chapter 5 showed, there was very little awareness of RDS amongst the majority of academics, even extending to the very people that were supposed to be responsible for implementing the policies that underpinned each university’s HR strategy. This suggests a clear divide between the discourses of senior management, discussed in section 5.5, who all argued that RDS had been beneficial in raising the profile of HR and leading to an enhanced degree of people management, and those of the academic staff, who remained unconvinced and sceptical about the perceived benefits.

In this chapter I show how, despite the general lack of awareness of the HR strategy, it was beginning to impact on the way that academic staff experienced their work. It was possible to discern an increasingly tangible presence of HR activity. This was most apparent in terms of the Framework Negotiations, discussed in section 5.6, but also in terms of the heightened presence of HR
officers who were taking a more active role in departmental affairs. Academic staff also talked about the constant rolling out of new HR policies that did not appear to be having any actual effect, but did provide a constant reminder of an increasingly prominent HR department.

Those in line management roles were clearly assuming greater responsibility in terms of reviewing and monitoring the work of academics. This was creating extra pressure on the people fulfilling those roles as well as leading to perceptions amongst academics of an increasingly managerial approach. Significantly, this provides evidence that HRM was indeed being operationalised and the locus of control shifting away from academics. This caused further dissonance and conflict for the academics that I interviewed.

As I discussed in chapter 2, such developments have led to concerns amongst academics of an increasing managerialism that threatens to undermine their professionalism and autonomy (Deem et al. 2007; Farnham 1999; Miller 1995; Wilson 1991). According to a discourse of modernisation, the operationalisation of RDS at the case study universities reflected a necessary process of change in order to meet the challenges of globalisation. Yet the counter discourse characterises RDS as the product of a managerial agenda seeking to gain greater control over the work of academics by turning them into ‘objects of knowledge’ through the ‘panoptic gaze’ of HRM (Townley 2002). This chapter considers the attempted implementation of RDS in the context of such contrasting discourses.

The chapter is organised into the following sections. In section 6.2 I discuss the introduction of HR strategies following RDS and consider the opinions of staff at different levels. Senior managers were keen to stress the benefits of taking a more integrated approach to HR, in the manner that RDS had advocated. Academic staff and line managers were less positive, a point that I illustrate by discussing their experience of two particular areas covered by HR strategies: equal opportunities and recruitment and selection.

In section 6.3 I focus in some detail on performance management and staff appraisal. I explained above that this is perhaps the most contentious aspect of
RDS, with concerns that performance management is a technology of management designed to gain control over individual workers. Such concerns are rooted in a Marxist analysis of the academic labour process and a Foucauldian critique of HRM (Legge 2005; Townley 2002; 1993). In this section I also discuss the individualisation that is inherent in performance management and the implications of that for academic staff.

In section 6.4 I concentrate on the Head of Department role and consider issues arising from the transition of that role into a more formal line-management capacity. Concerns were apparent here that the requirement to formally appraise departmental colleagues challenged existing collegiate norms and was having other unexpected effects.

In section 6.5, and directly relating to the previous section, I discuss managerialism, which emerged as a central theme in many of the academics’ stories. Implementing a more professional system of management is implicit within discourses of modernisation and, as I explained in chapter 2, there has been a growing level of managerialism throughout the UK HE sector (Deem et al 2007; Deem 1998). Accordingly, I consider the various different experiences of, and attitudes to, managerialism at each university.

I provide a brief chapter summary in section 6.6.

6.2 HR Strategies

Reform of HR departments in response to RDS at each case study university was an important stage in constructing the discourse of modernisation and creating the necessary conditions for its subsequent enactment. According to the senior managers I interviewed, such reform was necessary in order to facilitate the successful implementation of a new HR strategy. All three HR directors that I interviewed felt that HR was now well integrated throughout their respective universities. This is significant in the context of HRM theory for, as I explained
in section 1.1, HRM is a strategic approach to management. As a consequence, the effective implementation of HRM requires a close alignment, or fit, between an organisation’s business and HR strategy and, significantly, its organisational culture. This level of integration is central to all models of HRM (e.g., Guest 1997; Storey 1992; Beer et al. 1984). ‘Everything else flows from this process of alignment’ (Armstrong 2006:134). Successful implementation of RDS would, as a consequence, need to demonstrate that the HR strategy was integrated with the universities’ principal strategies and academic mission. If such a degree of fit were not apparent, then it would be very difficult to claim that implementation of RDS had been successful.

In the extracts below the HR directors explain how, in their opinion, HR now plays a much more strategic role, rather than simply acting in a service capacity. Their stories are very positive and each provides a very upbeat assessment of HR’s role.

Oh yes, yeah, I don’t have a worry about integration. Although I think, my understanding…I get it from both my senior colleagues, er long standing senior colleagues who’ve been here for many years, their view is that we’ve moved over the last five years, since the HEFCE agenda’s been running, to a position where we are far more integrated than we were…

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

So I think we do work at every level and certainly with the feedback we get from users that what we do is, in the main, well regarded and well received. I don’t think personnel are perceived as a police kind of role, I mean in some cases we are obviously, where there is a legal compliance issue, it’s partly policing and partly facilitating.

Tess: HR Director, Shaston

…and so yes, because of various things we’re doing there is a greater awareness of the importance of people issues and a greater awareness of
the contribution that attention to those issues can make to delivering the academic ambitions of the institution.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

At both Casterbridge and Budmouth a system of dedicated departmental personnel officers had been implemented. The purpose of this was to forge a closer link between the HR unit and the academic departments, thus demonstrating a commitment to achieving closer integration. By working within departments, the aim was to show that the HR function was clearly aligned with and supportive of the university’s core academic activities. Richard, a senior manager, explains how he believes this development will enhance the overall delivery of the HR function.

Every department here now has a professional personnel officer who is theirs, and each of the officers here will have three or four departments that they look after, so there is direct contact between the head of department and a member of staff, rather than everyone trying to run the personnel directorate.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

This increased profile of HR all adds to the idea of a gradual and ongoing change to the culture of each institution. Senior managers all felt that there were clear benefits to having a more professional approach to managing people, in accordance with a modernisation discourse. They believed that there was a genuine commitment to develop and support people and that the quality of HR support had improved. Whilst acknowledging it was a slow process, they suggested that the values of the HR strategy were gradually starting to filter down through the universities. Yet there was clearly an element of frustration with that rather slow pace of change, as explained by Josh.

And the sorts of things that HR er, personnel has had to do more and more in recent years…in order to comply with employment legislation on the one hand, and on the other hand, institute good practice…filter down to
the departments, and it has made a difference, but I think it’s uneven, and probably not enough of a difference…

Josh: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Thomas below outlines one of the main concerns of senior managers, explaining that implementation is something beyond their control. As I discuss later, this is very much down to the interpretation of those strategies by those with line management responsibility and relates directly to integration.

In an institution this size you can never be sure that the strategies you’ve got are implemented as you would like them to be.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This was very much the nub of the problem for senior managers. They recognised that, with regard to HR initiatives, there was a degree of cynicism present at the operational level. This is an underlying problem for HRM itself. As I explained in section 1.1, the successful operationalisation of HRM is contingent upon the existence of a unitarist environment where staff at all levels have internalised the logic and bought-in to its underlying principles. The following extracts from Michael and Robert demonstrate their concerns about such issues.

I think at the moment it’s probably fair to say that most heads of department certainly wouldn’t be champions of personnel policy…which isn’t to say they won’t do stuff but they’re certainly not converts, er, by any stretch of the imagination, not least because unfortunately, a lot of what we are involved in at the moment just seems to create more work for them, and the bureaucratic overload is severe.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

This stands in stark contrast to Michael’s initial positive response concerning the integration of HR. This point was emphasised in an interview with Robert, a middle manager.
The reality is that most of these strategy documents are treated with a great deal of cynicism by academics. There are some really good initiatives I think, especially to do with HR and the like, but it would be much better to produce shorter, summarised documents that might actually mean something to staff.

Robert: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Such negativity clearly presented a problem. For despite the increased level of HR activity, the presence of personnel officers and the constant rolling out of new strategies, there was a suggestion that very little had changed for academics on the ground. The issues that really mattered to staff were not, in their opinion, being addressed, even where policies had been developed to tackle them. According to several academics and, indeed, middle managers, the primary motivation behind developing these policies was legal compliance and conformity, rather than a genuine commitment to developing people.

For the majority of academics I spoke to it was clear that their attitudes to HR management were formed at a more prosaic level and were strongly correlated with their daily working experiences and, also, the identity of their line manager. The following extracts are illustrative of the type of concerns that were expressed to me. The main argument here appears to be that whilst it might be good to be developing policies, they count for little if no effort is made to facilitate their implementation.

Initiatives such as the […]…they do signal good intentions yes, but there is a lack of joined up thinking in terms of turning that into a reality. This building for instance, it’s old and drafty and suffers from extremes of temperature according to the time of year. But nothing has ever been done to alter that physical problem, so there’s little wonder that people are cynical when they read these documents…

Joseph: Middle Manager, Casterbridge
It is a little bit ironic but, you know, there’s all this stuff about equality, which is fine of course, but this building, I mean, it’s really difficult for wheelchair users to actually get through the door…it doesn’t really send the right message does it?

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

Initiatives like the work-life balance thing… most people were aware of that I think. But of course… it’s ironic really…but the very people who would have benefited from it and genuinely needed some help…well, of course, they couldn’t find the time to get off work and go on the course [laughs].

Andrew: Academic, Casterbridge

Such was the daily experience of many academics for whom the development of policies counted for little, unless there was some tangible evidence of a genuine attempt to improve their working lives.

One particular issue that emerged in all three institutions where policies had been introduced, but were apparently failing to make an impact, was bullying and harassment. The three stories below are indicative of the growing level of concern around the issue.

There’s some issues around, I mean the current Vice-Chancellor doesn’t behave well towards even his senior women staff, you know, there’s a lot of shouting…I mean there’s all this positive working environment and bullying and they’ve all been on a training course, you know… my goodness, that’s dreadful behaving like that… but they don’t see it in themselves. You find there’s quite a bit of concern.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

Yeah, we’ve had quite a lot of cases based around that. The university are trying to deal with it, I mean, a new policy on harassment and bullying has just come out and er, they are training harassment and bullying advisors in
each department, and so we are trying to deal with some of those issues. I’m not sure how successful that will be...

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

The recent staff survey really said it all – two hundred and thirty academics claiming to have been bullied in the past year. You know, that’s clearly a lot of people and it’s a real problem. In fact I think it was a real wake-up call for the university and it’s given a bit of an impetus to the [Bullying and Harassment] policy.

Gerald: Academic, Budmouth

This is important on two levels. First, it provides a further illustration of ineffective policy implementation. Second, and perhaps more significantly, is the suggestion that the increased incidence of bullying and harassment as indicated by the staff survey at Budmouth is a function of an increasingly managerial culture.

The implications of universities taking a more corporate and indeed managerialist approach in response to the challenges of marketisation were explored in chapter 2. As universities seek to take a more performance-led line in the management of people, the pressure increases on line-managers to become more accountable for the performance of their staff. This is one of the central issues that this thesis addresses, for underpinning RDS is the belief that the use of HRM techniques will lead to better standards of people management, which will result in academics performing their roles more effectively. But such a discourse is a contested one.

The notion that academics need to be ‘managed’ to perform more effectively, fundamentally conflicts with collegiate ideals, notions of professional autonomy and academic identity. As a consequence, the relationship between academics and Heads of Department, or line-managers, is fundamentally altered. A tension is introduced into the relationship that did not exist before, as a new frontier emerges that becomes a focal point for a more directive approach to the management of individual performance to take place. Line managers are required to act strategically, implementing corporate polices such as performance management, whilst also attending to the developmental and welfare needs of
their staff. There is a conflict between such imperatives, which is the same one that exists at the heart of HRM, explained in section 1.1. It is the apparent inability of line managers to effectively balance the soft people-related elements of their role with harder, rational issues of budgetary control and cost constraints that has resulted in the claim that HRM is more ‘rhetoric than reality’ (Legge 2005).

As a consequence of that inherent conflict universities are faced by a fundamental problem. That is, RDS simply does not transfer into a university environment because the likelihood of academic staff internalising the logic of HRM is remote. To do so would be to abandon cherished collegiate ideals and notions of identity. No matter how line managers frame their approaches to people management, the requirements of HRM changes the dynamic of the relationship from a democratic to an authoritarian focus. Accordingly, those being managed perceive that they are being monitored and controlled, leading to claims of a more coercive approach by managers. Clearly perceptions of what actually constitutes bullying and harassment differ, but the potential for it to occur is increased by the creation of this new platform for performance negotiations, as Kline (2009) has recently observed.

I now turn to two areas originally highlighted by RDS as priorities for action and policy development - equal opportunities and recruitment and selection – to further illustrate the concerns, as expressed by Joseph, Janet and Andrew above, over the lack of effective policy implementation. These emerged as areas of some significance in the stories of many of the academics I spoke to and there were real concerns that HR strategies were having little effect.

**Equal Opportunities**

One of the central aims of the original RDS initiative was to address the issue of equal opportunities in the sector. HEFCE made it very clear that its funds should not be spent in a discriminatory way and sought to take steps to ensure this. It recommended that universities should develop equal opportunities targets and implement programmes to implement good practice, including equal pay audits and job evaluation exercises (HEFCE 2001 01/16). Each of the universities had
developed policies, but again my findings suggest there had been less progress in terms of implementation. A senior manager at Casterbridge explained his concern over the lack of progress.

…we’ve got a group at the moment particularly working on gender issues, because we are not satisfied that our clearly articulated strategies, that there should be no gender bias…we want to see people promoted regardless of ages, regardless of gender… er, we’re not convinced that even with the changes we’ve made that the culture is changing.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Peggy goes further, implying that perhaps there is a question over the commitment of the university to implement its own policies.

[Casterbridge] is very hot on the theory but less effective in delivery. I mean it’s easy to produce fantastic policies and show them off all over the place, but it always boils down to, oh resource issues, and we just can’t… which clearly compromises their effectiveness.

Peggy: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

The women that I spoke to clearly felt that their respective universities had a long way to go to tackle what they felt amounted to institutionalised sexism. Their stories indicated a rather weary acknowledgement of an issue that goes well beyond the world of HE.

…yeah, I think it is a sexist organisation, but not in an overt way. There’s no sense of harassment…but there are certainly a lot of unreconstructed males around here.

Sophie: Academic, Shaston

…you only have to look around and see that most senior academics are men. There is discrimination going on but nothing seems to be done about
it despite what the policy says. We do have a lot of female dominated areas like health and education where at least there are more women about.

Faith: Academic, Shaston

Such comments illustrate the general degree of scepticism I encountered concerning the value of each university’s equal opportunities policies. This scepticism was usually grounded in the daily experience of the women academics I spoke to, for whom little appeared to have changed. They felt that whilst sexism existed in the universities, it was difficult to explain its manifestation explicitly, as it tended to be perceived and experienced in a rather intangible manner. As Faith above explains, status of particular disciplines was one of the issues. Initial teacher training, where there was a relatively high female presence was seen as low status, although it would never be articulated by anyone. Clearly this is a very subtle process and was alluded to in other interviews, for instance Janet and Liz at Budmouth had this to say.

The majority of staff in this faculty are women, and we even have a woman as chair, but beyond that…well the glass ceiling is still functioning pretty well…

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

…job evaluation is supposed to deal with equal pay issues, I mean it’s why it’s put in place by HEFCE and in principle, therefore, the unions have no opposition to it, yet, the problem is it’s not dealing with the massive disparities in pay, which is not about what grade you’re in it’s about where you are placed on that that grade, so it’s about women and other groups being always placed at the bottom of grades, whereas men will tend to be placed at the top and that’s just not going to be dealt with by a job evaluation process.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

At Casterbridge a group of senior women academics had set up a group to actively address what they believed to be institutional discrimination against women. Martha, one of the members of the group, which operates across the university’s
faculties, explained why the group had been established in the first place. She had attempted to set up a research group, looking at the issue of inequity in numbers of senior women academics, which was agreed to by the university. However, when the university formally set up the group, the directorship was given to a male colleague. Angered by this, Martha then contacted all the senior women academics and administrators in the university, who then sent a joint letter to the Vice-Chancellor outlining their concerns, along with other examples of institutional discrimination against women. The matter was discussed at Council and a group was set up, chaired by a senior women academic to investigate the issue. A survey had been carried out to analyse the extent of the problem, yet, according to Martha, the university was reluctant to publish the results.

The group strongly believed that the problems all stemmed from a very traditional male dominated culture at the top of the university. Although the university has anti-discrimination policies in place, it is felt they make little difference at senior levels, where the problem persists, as Charles explains.

Certainly, in places in the university it feels that there are kind of…I mean women in the university talk about a kind of boys’ club at the top, and senior women…are concerned about things slipping backward.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

Martha, although an experienced and respected academic in her field, told me of her direct experience of the very traditional male dominated culture and the patronising attitudes of some towards women. She had once been invited to sit on an interview panel by the previous Vice-Chancellor.

So in the pre-meeting of the panel, of course I was the only woman there, and it was being decided who would ask what question, you know, so the Vice-Chancellor finally sort of remembered I was there and with a big smile [laughs], he looked over and said [Martha], would you sit there and just look charming my dear?

Martha: Academic, Casterbridge
This senior woman academic was amazed to encounter such attitudes in the present day, especially amongst a group of highly educated individuals. Although the current Vice-Chancellor had made a big commitment initially to tackling gender issues, in her opinion things had now got worse, as evidenced by the fact that the number of women in senior positions had actually reduced.

Such issues clearly go beyond the university sector and are part of a wider societal problem. However, it is the lack of effective policy implementation that strengthens the belief that HRM initiatives, such as RDS, are more ‘rhetoric than reality’ (Legge 2005) and are, perhaps, rooted in a neoliberal modernisation discourse. A lot of the stories in this section indicated that each university had done what was expected by RDS in terms of developing policies and carrying out equal pay audits. The problem appeared to be that there was a failure to act on the evidence that such exercises produced, as illustrated by Martha at Casterbridge. So even though it was apparent that there was a gender imbalance at each university, there was an unwillingness to address the issue.

The implication of this finding is that RDS offered an opportunity for each university to create the impression that it was tackling equal opportunities without actually making any realistic efforts to deal with the underlying problems. It could be argued that this is a particularly neoliberal response. By devolving responsibility for the issue the government sets specific criteria and benchmarks for universities to demonstrate improved performance. Universities respond with the development of policies, commissioning of surveys and undertaking equal pay audits, creating an air of genuine activity which is no more than an illusion, masking a failure to genuinely commit to addressing the issue.

**Recruitment and Selection**

The development of enhanced recruitment and selection processes was another priority area of RDS. Accordingly, I explored this issue with some of the newer members of staff to consider their experience of the recruitment process. HRM emphasises the significance of induction in creating the right impression for a new employee joining an organisation. A well-organised induction programme helps
to allay the initial concerns that afflict most new employees to some extent, and can have long term psychological benefits if the initial impression of the organisation is a positive one (Armstrong 2006). As a consequence, the likelihood of the employee leaving an organisation early, a very costly prospect, is reduced.

A clear pattern emerged in my interviews, suggesting that the induction element of recruitment was not particularly well organised.

I must say though, the induction was not so well handled. I mean everyone was very friendly and everything, but there was no real structure to it… a sort of welcome from the head of department and that was it, which was okay, but it didn’t exactly tell me anything that I needed to know. So I have mainly had to find out for myself and I’m still learning things that I really should have been told earlier, so it really wasn’t very professional at all.

James: Academic, Casterbridge

There were similar experiences at Shaston and Budmouth.

There is some sort of corporate induction event for all staff, I think, er in the department…I’m not really sure, I think I do have a mentor who is…I’m not sure really…

Susan: Academic, Shaston

It all felt very organised I suppose, but the induction on my first day was a bit of a muddle. Nobody seemed to be expecting me… there was a sort of corporate induction event but I went to the wrong one, so all a bit confusing really.

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

I did expect a bit more of a formal induction initially, but there was more later, a big university induction event. There is some kind of a buddy
system apparently, but very little appears to be in place. I think that as a Reader there is a kind of expectation that you will have the common sense to find out for yourself.

Bob: Academic, Budmouth

Induction? I don’t think there was any really.

Troy: Academic, Shaston

Induction to academic departments has always tended to operate in a rather *ad hoc* manner with the expectation, as explained by Bob above, that, as professionals, academics should be able to find out for themselves. Yet the induction process is a vital stage in an individual’s entry to any organisation which, given the strategic imperative of RDS, might be an area where some degree of change could be expected. Yet although it seemed that the HR departments handled the administration of the exercise efficiently, there was little change in the way that induction was handled in the academic departments. These stories illustrate the lack of penetration of HR policies to the appropriate levels and the variability in implementation, bearing out the concerns of senior managers earlier in this section.

The universities’ inability to ensure effective implementation of its own HR policies did little to enhance the general air of indifference towards the HR department that I encountered. As this section has demonstrated, there was a general view amongst academics that the policies associated with RDS amounted to little more than a cosmetic attempt to improve the standard of people management. That view was rooted in their daily experiences of such issues as equality of opportunity and recruitment and selection, which conflicted with the senior managers’ and HR directors’ discourses of modernisation.

In the following section I turn to what was, in many ways, the most contentious aspect of RDS: individual performance management.
6.3 Performance Management and Staff Appraisal

One of the principal aims of RDS was to raise the overall standards of HE delivery in English universities by improving the quality of performance of individual academics. In accordance with a neoliberal discourse of modernisation, the method proposed was a system of individual performance management and staff appraisal. It was one of the six main areas that universities were required to address in their HR strategies (section 3.6). Performance management is also central to the theory of HRM (Guest 1997; Storey 1992; Beer et al 1984) but, as I explained in section 2.2, many question its efficacy given the lack of sufficient evidence demonstrating a link between performance management and improved organisational performance (Keenoy 2007). Other critiques of HRM and its performance management techniques (Legge 2005; Keenoy 1999; Townley 1993) argue that they are used to control and monitor the work of individuals and are the product of a strongly neoliberal discourse.

As chapter 2 showed, this is one of the most contentious issues in the modernisation of HE, as it fundamentally conflicts with an existing discourse of collegiality leading to dissonance and confusion for academic workers. A performance-led approach raises serious questions concerning academics’ cherished ability to work autonomously, challenging academic freedom and academic identity. For such an approach requires academics to identify clear and measurable performance criteria and to demonstrate specifically how such criteria contribute to the wider university aims and objectives. The notion that employer, as opposed to employee, needs should drive a performance management system is consistent with a controlling ideology, in common with a labour process analysis of profit maximisation (Braverman 1974). Such views fuel the concerns of those who argue that academic work is in danger of becoming increasingly commodified and de-professionalised and subject to increasing individualisation, as discussed in section 2.4.

The HR directors, not surprisingly, all advocated a system for reviewing individual performance. They argued that it was an entirely necessary
development that would ultimately provide a more structured career path for everyone. Whilst they recognised the potential for conflict in trying to quantify academic performance, there was an obvious belief in the value of such an approach that was apparent in their respective stories. For example, here Alec explains how he believes performance review satisfies fundamental human motivational needs.

Well, I think I would argue that it is a basic human need to get some kind of recognition for what it is that you are doing. We go all through our lives looking for recognition, analysing people’s comments, deciding if they think we’ve done a good job or not. So I don’t think there’s an option other than we are human beings, to have a system that responds to some of those things. That doesn’t mean you necessarily go down the basis of having an annual review that has a form with a box at the bottom that says you’re a five and I’m a four point five to caricature, there’s nothing that says you have to do it in that way, but I think you do need to think very carefully about the ideal structure for the work.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

This extract from Alec is highly significant, demonstrating his strong belief in the legitimacy of underpinning HRM concepts. For him appraisal is not simply a control mechanism but a system that, if applied appropriately, can satisfy basic human needs. But what Alec has clearly failed to understand is the essential nature of academic work and that, for academics, those needs are met elsewhere. For academics are motivated by the nature of the work itself and derive satisfaction from the support and recognition of their own peer community. Although situated in a particular university, academics tend to be less interested in wider corporate agendas and more involved with their peer communities that usually transcend the confines of an individual institution, as Henkel (1998) has previously argued.

This lack of appreciation was apparently shared by Michael at Casterbridge and, in the extracts below, both he and Alec explain their belief that everyone can
benefit from appraisal with Alec, significantly, rejecting the notion that appraisals are inappropriate for academics because they are somehow different from other people.

…it is essentially a developmental tool, so in that sense it’s at the soft end of appraisal review, which is OK. Done constructively, positively, you know both positive and negative feedback done positively, as it were, you know it helps people to move forwards, connects them with opportunities to develop.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

I think it’s much, much more difficult to argue that academics are somehow unique and they don’t benefit, or they wouldn’t benefit from an annual conversation with somebody about these things in comparison with in other walks of life, where it’s actually fairly normal.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

Alec’s story, in particular, illustrates the fundamental tension between discourses of modernisation and a more traditional discourse of collegiality that I explained in chapter 1. For it has long been argued (eg Halsey 1992) that the nature of academic work does in fact differ from other types of work. As a consequence, such work does not lend itself to a homogeneous HRM approach. Attempts to impose a corporate style of management on the sector are not only inappropriate, but also potentially damaging and may lead to deskilling and degradation through loss of status and commodification (Shumar 1997; Miller 1995) as I discussed in section 2.4. Yet Alec and Michael’s stories are clearly informed by the increasingly dominant discourse of modernisation and serve to reinforce the notion of a shifting locus of power, where senior managers routinely express their discourses of modernisation as the only rational approach to managing universities.
Another issue that demonstrated the degree of divergence between managerial and collegiate discourses concerned the universities’ plans for linking pay to performance.

Er, but clearly more performance related pay is what the VC would like to have, I mean that comes out clearly from the latest pay offer and which people really push against.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

This was clearly a highly contentious area that signals a major challenge to the culture of the academic environment. The whole notion of individual performance management was an obvious concern for many of the academic staff that I interviewed, but by going even further and introducing performance related pay the universities were giving an explicit indication of their intentions to further individualise the nature of academic work.

Charles at Casterbridge provided an example of such individualisation, where incentives were being offered to attract high profile academics to the university.

And it’s clear that in recruiting in that area, at times it’s more like a football transfer market than an employment interview relationship. And there’s quite a lot of concern about, you know, professors who’ve plugged away here and done a lot of stuff for the university er, they’re interviewing for new professorships and people are coming and getting higher salaries and, you know, if the university thinks they are good enough, then it is very much a kind of individual deal, you know, you get the salary you want, you bring your wife, she gets a job, you bring your dog, he gets a kennel, you bring your research project…So if somebody is really wanted, then they have this kind of route for recruiting exceptional talent, which is very interesting, to go through that and see how they do it, which wouldn’t stand up well to review I think.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge
This overt example of work individualisation demonstrates the conflict with discourses of collegiality and the dominant managerial ideology. Charles’ analogy of a football transfer market is apt, for it seems that loyalty only works one way and that management were more interested in recruiting ‘star performers’ who would deliver results for the university. Such an approach, however, is not without risk. By persisting with a performance-led individualistic approach that presents such a challenge to traditional collegiate ideals, universities are not only creating the conditions for conflict and resistance but may ultimately damage the very system that they seek to improve.

It was interesting that the union representatives I spoke to were not against performance review in principle and agreed that it probably is a useful developmental exercise, if carried out effectively. However, that is an important caveat, for the manner in which appraisal was carried out was a concern, as explained below:

Performance review and appraisal varies considerably from department to department.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

I think appraisal can be a positive experience… but I don’t really think they are particularly useful in stimulating performance. I think it depends who is carrying out the process – that does make a difference.

Frances: Academic, Budmouth

Here Frances seeks to disassociate appraisal from performance management, which is interesting, as she seems to suggest a conversation with another can be useful in terms of offering peer support. This would certainly be in line with collegiate ideals and suggests a degree of informality, but clearly that is not in line with the sort of structured, directive approach advocated by HRM theory.

The variability in implementation across departments that Liz and Frances refer to is rather surprising, given the apparent importance placed upon individual
performance management. But Faith and James’ experiences below are quite typical of many that I spoke to.

It is not very effective at all, nothing much happens. I have had three with the head of department and one with a line manager. All that happens is the head says something like ‘oh well, we can’t solve your problems, you’re too good for us, and I expect you’ll be leaving us soon anyway.’ What use is that to me?

Faith: Academic, Shaston

I really don’t know who will be doing the appraisals or how the system operates. Before they created this new school it was a very informal process, done by the head of department and it was fine, but now…well nobody really knows and there is a fair degree of concern…

James: Academic, Casterbridge

Consequently, the stories of many academics concerning the value of appraisal and performance management were characterised by doubt and negativity.

I do believe the whole process of appraisal is inappropriate for academics and what it boils down to is managers keeping an eye on staff. It doesn’t make any difference to the way I do things and anyway, as an academic you shouldn’t really need an appraisal to tell you how you are progressing…it’s such a self-driven career anyway, so what is the point?

Frances: Academic, Budmouth

I think they are more or less a waste of time. I’m just not prepared to set any targets, partly because I’m awkward and don’t agree with the process, and partly because I don’t believe it’s possible to quantify my work in that
way. Now that doesn’t mean I’m not committed to my job, I just don’t believe in that particular process.

Clark: Academic, Shaston

Such feelings amongst staff were perhaps to be expected given the dissonance between the competing discourses that emerged. In their stories the academics emphasised the self-driven nature of their work. Any attempt to manage their performance or direct their work was seen as a direct challenge to the autonomy that is felt to be an essential element of the academic paradigm. This further illustrates the divergence in the discourses of the academic staff and senior managers.

But the stories of the managers who were responsible for actually conducting the appraisals also displayed real concerns over the value of such a process. It was clear that they were worried about the connotations of control associated with appraisal. Here was an explicit illustration of the point made in section 6.2. If the ideology of HRM has not been internalised by staff at all levels then it will be difficult to effectively implement the policies of the HR strategy. Clearly the belief in the logic of HRM that existed at senior management level did not penetrate to the operational levels of the university hierarchy. Such doubts are illustrated by the following two middle managers.

I think academics are supposed to be, you know, free-thinking individuals who can push themselves and all the rest of it, and they don’t really need to be managed like, you know have you done this, er, they’re not working in cubicles like something in Dilbert.

Robin: Middle Manager, Shaston

I suppose it is partially useful in terms of at least spending some time with people and giving them the time to let off steam. But I can’t really give people what they actually want, which is always the same for academics - less teaching and more research time. So I just tend to focus on what can be delivered and really just note the rest in a sort of aspirational way.

Robert: Middle Manager, Casterbridge
It is interesting that Robert appears to concur with Frances above, in noting the value of simply spending time with people. Also significant is the notion of focusing on what is ‘deliverable’ rather than giving academics ‘what they actually want.’ This clearly indicates the real purpose of appraisals, that is to demonstrate progress against performance criteria, but has little to do with meeting the needs of academics. Instead, we get a further sense of the dominant neoliberal ideology which only assigns a value to something that can be measured (section 2.2).

One Head of Department saw more value in operating in an informal collegiate manner and did not bother with formal appraisals at all.

Oh no, I don’t do appraisals at all, there’s just no point to them in my opinion. Staff can fill in the paperwork if they really want to and I will look at them, but no, I believe it is far more important to talk to people. My door is always open and staff know they can come in anytime, and they do.

Mark: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

This story supports Liz and Frances’ comments above concerning the variability in approach between departments, to the extent that Mark simply refused to undertake appraisals. Such examples of overt resistance were quite rare, a point that I discuss in chapter 7. But it was not just middle managers that had concerns about performance management, for senior managers did too, as the following example shows.

During the period of my fieldwork Budmouth was in the process of moving from a fairly benign triennial review that was largely developmental in nature, to a more formal annual process of target-driven performance management. It was clear that this was causing concern at all levels, as I discovered in an interview with a very senior manager, Samuel, who was clearly opposed to the scheme. Appraisal in his view should be for the formative development of the individual, and should be done in a supportive atmosphere where weaknesses can be
addressed. The new scheme was much more target-driven and not, he felt, developmental. He was forthright in his criticism of the decision that had been made at the staff development committee – a committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

It will simply turn into an exercise where individuals just bullshit about their performance. There is no formative element at all…it’s a clear move towards a judgemental system. I will have to comply with it but I won’t enjoy doing so. I think they’ve made a bum decision actually.

Samuel: Senior Manager, Budmouth

This is strong criticism from a senior manager that, as it turned out, was not typical of people in similar positions. However, this thesis clearly demonstrates that not only were many academics opposed to the appraisal process but it seems that many of their managers also had doubts themselves. In the same way that others have previously found (Hope-Hailey et al 2005), there can be little hope for policies that do not gain the support of those who must implement them.

Yet despite this widespread lack of support for performance review, the senior management at each university was obviously determined to continue to pursue its implementation and believed in the value of a performance-led approach. For instance Caroline at Shaston was explicit in her managerial discourse that the existing performance review scheme was far too ‘soft’ and focused too much on individual needs.

…the problem, as with most HEIs, is it’s not a proper performance management system – it’s more still the old fashioned development and review discussion, which is driven by the employee and not by the employer, so there’s a perception that it’s about the individual’s needs and wants as opposed to the department’s needs and wants.

Caroline: Senior Manager, Shaston
Caroline’s overtly managerial discourse is particularly revealing and accords with Townley’s (2002) analysis of HRM, where workers are turned into ‘objects of knowledge’ in order that they may be controlled more effectively (section 2.4). Her rather disparaging reference to the ‘old-fashioned employee driven’ system illustrating perfectly just how much universities have changed, that she could even consider making such a statement. In following this issue up with others at Shaston it became apparent that there was a difference of opinion between some senior managers and the HR director concerning what form their scheme should take in the future.

Here Gabriel explains the plans to move to a more performance driven system.

...and if we are going to reward performance, which is what we want to do, then we’ve got to measure performance and give people targets and give people opportunities to develop and extend and go beyond the job description, and all that kind of stuff. And I think there’s been a tension between our er, between the head of human resources and her views…we don’t agree on this…and the pace at which we need to move in that direction.

Gabriel: Senior Manager, Shaston

When I spoke to the HR director she explained her concerns and confirmed that there was disagreement amongst senior managers.

I think we’ve always used it as a developmental exercise, and that…that’s the struggle we’ve got at the moment, I think. In moving towards more of a performance management and assessment, is that our appraisal scheme up to now has been about an individual’s career development and aspirations (pause)... and I’m reluctant, in fact I’ve been having debates with members of the senior management team about whether we actually try to make it to more of a performance management assessment, and I’m
not sure we can, I’m not sure, whether we should have two separate systems.

Tess: HR Director, Shaston

It is significant that even the HR director had reservations about performance management and recognised the difficulties of pushing for a more judgemental system. This perhaps confirms the findings in section 5.3 concerning the perceived threat to the collegiate culture at Shaston, with which many of the longer serving members of staff identified. As one of those members of staff herself, it is likely that a mixture of personal and professional reasons influenced Tess’s comments.

Also interesting here is the inference of a clear corporate agenda emerging from both Caroline and Gabriel’s stories. For despite the reservations expressed by Tess about the nature of the judgemental and individualistic performance management system, it is clear that the collective discourse of modernisation, expressed by senior management (here and in chapter 5) took precedence. This suggests a specific strategy to individualise and weaken the collective power of academics as a further element in creating the conditions necessary to enact the modernisation agenda.

I explored the potential tensions and apparent reservations concerning moves towards a more performance-led approach in some detail with senior managers at each university. There was clear recognition the trend towards a more business-like, corporate approach signalled a significant culture change for academic staff in terms of expectations of performance. For instance Donald at Casterbridge, recognised this dissonance in academic attitudes.

…we put up with bad performance a lot more than industry does, that’s probably very true historically…it’s notoriously hard to sack an academic for poor performance. And so we just continue to muddle on and put up with this and so on, whereas in industry you just sack the person and get on with it and take the risk that it would go to tribunal and you have to pay
a lawyer – pay a lawyer, just get on with it…that’s not an academic attitude.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

At Casterbridge there had been a recent change that required staff to achieve new criteria linked to performance before being promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer. The real difference here was that previously it would have been possible to remain as a lecturer, whereas now the expectation was that progression was to be achieved through improved performance. This is clearly in line with HRM theory and notions of continuous improvement, but once again reveals a fundamental lack of management understanding of exactly what academics seek from their work. As explained above, academic motivation is characterised by subjectivity, rooted in self-identity and cannot simply be reduced to standardised performance criteria. As a consequence, it is not necessarily true to say that a lecturer who wishes to stay at that level is neither progressing nor improving their performance. Yet under neoliberal conditions of modernisation, anyone that is unable to demonstrate progress against pre-determined performance criteria is automatically labelled as an under-performer.

Henry, a senior manager, explains the serious implications of this development.

…you now have to be very sure that you have clear performance targets laid down and that if they aren’t meeting them, mechanisms to address that problem. So that you’re sure that progression is appropriate. That injects a degree of management and a style that we’re not used to and inevitably some colleagues are very nervous about that, because they can see that if somebody doesn’t make the standard, they’re going to be sacked… ultimately that’s what it means. If you cannot get the thing right you are going to have to say to that person, ‘you cannot progress to the career rank, therefore you have no career here.’ That’s a pretty hard message.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge
However, after acknowledging the potential pitfalls, he soon reverted to the sustaining modernisation discourse to explain the benefits.

On the other hand, it means that most people will get there, they know how to get there, supported and managed, and it comes along sooner. It has good financial implications for individuals. It should be for most people if we get the hiring right in the first place, absolutely straightforward, actually a much better supportive environment.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

There is no doubt that individual performance management was the most contentious area of each university’s HR strategy, and shows the impact of RDS at the operational level. Many of the academics I spoke to recognised the real tension between the traditional approach of managing people in a collegiate manner and the individualistic nature of performance management. The senior managers accepted there was a tension too, but argued that collegiality was not necessarily compromised by performance management, in their managerial discourses. It was clear that they believed the benefits which accrued from pursuing the wider corporate agenda, far outweighed any local difficulties associated with adapting to change.

What is particularly striking is the manner in which the respective university managements persisted in their efforts to implement HRM and promote a performance-led approach to management. As I discussed in chapter 2, there is a significant body of evidence questioning the value of HRM (Boselie et al 2005; Wall and Wood 2005; Guest et al 2003; Wright et al 2003). Further, there is a growing awareness of the difficulties that arise when attempting to implement such a homogeneous regime into organisations that are characterised by complexity and variability (Boxall and Macky 2009). Donald, a senior manager, noted this particular issue.

And I think this idea that it’s possible to project certain images of personnel management into a university that is not really in accord with
Donald’s comments provide an effective conclusion to this section and also serve as an introduction to the next. I discussed the important role played by line managers in the implementation of HR policies above, including the perception of some that this was a weak link in the universities’ attempts to modernise and become more business-like and to inculcate a performance-led culture. Such concerns focused on the variability of management styles between departments and lack of commitment to HR policy amongst line managers themselves. Accordingly, in the next section I consider the implications of placing such an emphasis on this role.

6.4 Heads of Department as Line Managers

The traditional role of departmental head came under significant pressure to change in line with the modernisation agenda at each of the universities following RDS. Indeed, RDS was predicated on the belief that more effective management of academic staff would lead to enhanced overall university performance. There is now an expectation that Heads of Department should be helping academic staff to develop their careers by identifying performance criteria and setting objectives. This had, potentially, created a new focal point for a more directive approach to management and was a sensitive issue. Consequently, the role of Head was becoming increasingly significant in terms of how academics experienced their daily working lives. Others have previously noted the relationship between the leadership qualities of front-line managers and individual staff commitment (Purcell and Hutchinson 2007).

Senior managers clearly wanted Heads to take a more directive, line management role than in the past, when they acted in more of a coordinating and representative
capacity. As such, many Heads now found themselves in what can be described as a typical corporate, middle management role. Consequently, they had to find a balance between acting strategically on the one hand, whilst also considering operational issues on the other, as Humphrey and Stephen explain.

My role is to interface with the rest of the university and allow the academic staff to focus on their research and teaching … I act as a buffer between the university administration and all the bureaucracy and the academic staff. As long as academics can get on with their research they aren’t too bothered about other strategic issues and are happy to let me get on with it.

Humphrey: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Part of the head’s role is to explain to staff the reasons behind many of those changes in the university and then try to calm their righteous anger.

Stephen: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Several Heads talked about the pressures this created on them. They felt that the emphasis on performance was especially challenging, particularly where under-performance was the issue.

I find it the most difficult thing that I do. I mean I suppose for people who are doing what you would normally expect of them, you know, it can be quite useful in terms of simply offering advice and guidance – I guess it’s a kind of counselling role almost. But where there is someone who does not appear to be pulling their weight I just find it so difficult to handle. You know, sometimes I’m appraising people who are actually more senior than me and, one way or another, they tend to get what they want anyway…that’s really very difficult.

Peggy: Middle Manager, Casterbridge
Here Peggy concurs with Faith at Budmouth (section 6.3) that there is a distinction between the supportive, counselling aspect of the role and a formal appraisal, with the suggestion that the former is more useful.

From my interviews with several Heads, it seems that to be successful in the role of line manager – which includes being accepted and trusted by academic colleagues - a pretty unique blend of skills is required including administrative ability, interpersonal ability as well as an academic focus and, certainly in Casterbridge and Budmouth, a credible research track record. As Henry explains it presents quite a challenge to find that sort of person.

… they aren’t too thick on the ground that kind of person. You are more likely to get the person who thrills to the minutiae of professional management. Or if you get somebody who is a good scholar, educator, respected by colleagues for those qualities, seen by colleagues as somebody who can move the department forward in its cause, and you get him or her to be the head, but that means them sacrificing their research career it’s going to be much harder for them to accept the post…”

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Such was the problem faced by senior managers. Given the increasing significance of the role there was a clear justification, they argued, for seeking to proactively identify the leaders of the future. At Casterbridge there was a plan contained in the HR strategy to identify ‘emergent leaders’ at an early stage and work with them through HR to develop their leadership skills. It was also suggested that a degree of incentivisation might be necessary in order to make it a more attractive option, as this senior manager explains.

And within the reward process we have to accept that these jobs should be paid as additional money because they are exceptionally demanding management, demanding a skill set. But it will also mean a recognition that when you finish that, you don’t necessarily get that rolled up in your
salary ‘till the end of time [laughs] because you’re no longer doing that job.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

But there were reservations as to the efficacy of such a policy in practice. A similar scheme was being developed at Budmouth where this senior manager expressed her reservations to me.

I’m not really sure whether it is such a good idea. I have no doubt that they are very adept at identifying those who put themselves forward for these posts…but what about those who don’t? My concern would be that some very good people get overlooked and those who are more, how shall I put it, managerially inclined, tend to get on at the expense of other potentially good people.

Rhoda: Senior Manager, Budmouth

The problem that Rhoda highlights is important. For the suggestion that line management should become a career path of its own that is somewhat removed from the traditional academic career ladder is more in line with managerial discourses, echoing Deem’s (2004) work on manager-academics. Traditionally at the older universities, like Casterbridge and Budmouth, Heads of Department were elected democratically from within departments. Successful candidates usually served a three-year term and then returned to their academic role when someone else was elected. Such a rotational system was a fundamentally important aspect of collegiality and ensured that the Head of Department was never too far removed from academic concerns.

Yet the principle of rotationality was coming under pressure from senior managers who saw it is an outdated and inefficient system. They wanted to move away from the traditional method of democratic elections and instead, implement a more modern and ‘business-like’ system of appointed managers as Richard, a senior manager, explains.
And that old idea of Buggins Turn to, well you’re really a teacher and a researcher, but we all have to do it, and this is your three years of hell, and then you can be relieved of that and have your research year and a sabbatical and someone else takes over…sits very uneasily with the strategic demands and drivers which call for particular skill-sets and leadership ability.

Richard: Senior Manager, Budmouth

Richard employs particularly ‘business-like’ terminology with regard to strategic demands and drivers, characteristic of the legitimising discourse of modernisation. Michael, below, points out what for him, is the obvious folly of the old system, which is completely out of line with the needs of a modern university. Such stories demonstrate that, for senior managers, this move is entirely rational according to the needs of the modern HE environment.

The thing that’s amusing me – why do people vote for bad people? Because a whole load of other things…people don’t vote for change, people vote for their friends, they vote for somebody because they don’t like them, you know, make them be head of department, that’ll sort ‘em out. You know all sorts of agendas get pedalled in a sort of electoral type approach.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

The situation at Shaston was slightly different, as rotationality did not traditionally take place in the same way as in the pre 92 institutions. What had changed here, as I explained in section 5.3, was that a whole new tier of management had very recently been created, called management PLs, to support the Head of Department. This was a clear indication of the senior management’s belief that the university had no alternative but to become more business-like in its affairs. But as I discovered, there was resentment amongst academics over the creation of what was perceived to be an unnecessary, managerial role, leading to further tensions. Hence the issue was, in fact, common to all three universities.
This managerialisation of the Head of Department role presented a further dilemma that challenged academics’ discourses of collegiality. The main concern was that such developments were leading to their universities becoming far more managed environments. Clearly the problem for the university was to strike a balance between better and more effective management, whilst avoiding those feelings of being controlled by management. The following quote from Ella summarises the views of many academic staff.

It is difficult, I don’t want to feel like I’m being managed, but then again I do feel the management could be more effective. I mean there are still individuals who get away with absolute murder, its unbelievable really. But I do think it is absolutely crucial that we retain the rotational system as it avoids people becoming entrenched into that management role. In a way it helps to keep alive that feeling of not being managed...it’s so important.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth

This is a crucial point made by Ella. According to her story there is a clear recognition and acceptance of the fact that a department needs someone to manage it. But there is a subtle distinction between that, and the emerging managerial model that requires the Head to manage, or micro-manage, the individuals within a department. Stephen, a Head of Department, explains the distinction further and illustrates the divergence between the academics’ collegiate ideals and discourses of modernisation.

Well, managing academics is always going to be a challenge, but the key is not to try and impose things on them…we’re all here for the same reason and it’s that shared academic interest that binds everyone together. So I think you have to act in that collegial way… it’s the only way to manage.

Stephen: Middle Manager, Casterbridge
This is of fundamental importance and goes to the heart of the debate concerning the role and purpose of the university. It also highlights the paradigmatic shift at the level of senior management and above. It is the notion of shared academic interest that is the key to understanding the issue. For all the management reforms, predicated as they are on business efficiency and discourses of rationality, implicitly assume that academic endeavour will, itself, become subject to greater efficiencies. Yet the academics’ discourse is constructed around the rather unique nature of academic work, arguing that it that cannot easily be subjected to a corporate model of business efficiency. As Ella made clear above, there is an obvious need for good management in universities, but that is very different from saying that all activities should become subject to a controlling, target-driven, performance-led technology that is managerialism (section 2.4).

Despite these concerns the role of line manager continued to assume greater significance in terms of policy implementation with a concomitant impact on academics’ experience of work. It was also becoming increasingly difficult for line managers themselves to maintain their own research careers and contribute to the shared academic endeavour. Coping with the competing demands of the management part of their role had clearly taken its toll on these three Heads of Department.

It’s a very time-consuming role and my research career has pretty much been put on hold. I do accept that makes me more of a manager than an academic, but it is problematic, especially when I come to the end of the headship as I’ve lost all momentum where research is concerned. I know that most of my colleagues, the heads, feel the same…it does need looking at…

George: Middle Manager, Budmouth

I don’t enjoy coming into work anymore, because you never know what the hell is going to come your way…

Mark: Middle Manager, Casterbridge
At times the role has been so stressful that I considered resigning. I didn’t really want the role, although I did put myself forward at the time. I have a year’s sabbatical at the end of this year and frankly I just can’t wait for it to come. My identity as a [social scientist] has suffered.

Peggy: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

Here then were three Heads that were coming to the end of their period of tenure and were clearly ready for a change. Such was the level of exhaustion apparent in their respective stories that it would not be difficult for someone to make the case for reform of the rotational system. Yet the more serious concern was that tension between a growing level of managerialisation and collegiality.

According to discourses of modernisation, frequently expressed by senior managers at each university, managerial reform is an essential requirement in creating the conditions necessary to ensure ongoing improvement in organisational performance. The provenance and subsequent trajectory of these discourses was discussed in chapters 2 and 3. However, my data points to a number of highly important issues that challenge such notions. These include a change in the collegiate relationships within departments to a more directive, managed environment that threatened individual academic identity. Also, Heads of Department were, effectively, having to abandon their own academic careers due to the demands of managerial agendas, including the operationalisation of a much disputed performance management system. Hence the managerialisation implicit in the modernisation agenda that was supposed to lead to more effective delivery of university academic agendas was in danger of having quite the opposite effect.

Accordingly, in the final section of this chapter I turn to a consideration of managerialism specifically.
6.5 Managerialism

The previous section demonstrated that, following RDS, the Head of Department role had become increasingly significant, particularly with regard to the impact on the way that academics experienced their work. Tensions were apparent due to the contrasting views of senior managers and academics concerning what constituted ‘good management’ and notions of ‘managerialism.’ I offer the following explanation of each based on my own experience as a specialist in management, as a member of a management school and of managing and being managed (managerialism was also discussed in detail in section 2.4).

Management is a necessary and mutually beneficial process of organising, coordinating and communicating to facilitate the smooth running of an organisation that is, in varying degrees, the responsibility of all. Managerialism is a distinct ideology asserting the prerogative of management to control and direct the actions of subordinates, who must submit to hierarchies of power and authority, demonstrating compliance with managerially imposed performance targets.

Clearly, this draws a very sharp distinction. It is, however, necessary to do so in order to convey the degree of tension between discourses of managerialism and collegiality, which is one of the central elements that I address in this thesis. It was definitely one of the more contentious elements of the universities’ modernisation agendas. Senior managers were certainly aware of the issue but maintained that because change would lead to a better system all round it justified the reforms. As Michael explained

I mean you’ve got to try and do it in an effective way and an efficient way but, there isn’t a way that doesn’t introduce at least more control…so it’s a huge overlay of bureaucracy er, there isn’t a real choice. We’ve got to try and get it efficient, we’ve got to try and get people on the ground to understand why it’s necessary, but in fact it fundamentally, in the end, is a better way of managing and, you know, try and make it work for them.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge
Senior managers employed this kind of sustaining discourse to demonstrate their recognition of the concerns about managerialism, but that ultimately there was no alternative. For them it was possible to draw a distinction between good management and managerialism, which was explained by Warren, a middle manager, this way.

…the former [managerialism] is about creating systems where people are afraid of making decisions so often highly paid managers can hide behind the system. The latter [good management] is about making a decision and justifying it rationally.

Warren: Middle Manager, Budmouth

This is an important distinction, for there is an implicit acknowledgement that academics, in common with other professional knowledge workers, will inevitably question the decisions that are made. This is very much the norm in an academic environment rooted in traditions of collegiality and democratic decision-making. It also helps to explain some of the difficulties that arise when attempting to move to a more managed system. For, central to Michael’s story above, is the notion of control, which is justified as essential in order to ensure an efficient operation of the business. Yet the implied reduction in the degree of control exercised by academics that is associated with such managerialism presents a fundamental challenge to their established academic ideals. Henry acknowledges the point here.

It’s clear that we have a much more managerial style than we used to…and that’s more accepted and there are times now, without thinking about it much I’ll just go ahead and do things, whereas in the old days probably I would have taken it out for discussion and reached a consensus and so on.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge
It would seem apparent, then, that growing managerialism has resulted in a clear and identifiable transference of power and control away from the majority of academics and towards a small group of managers. Discourses of managerialism have become increasingly dominant and self-fulfilling through repeated assertion by managers and reinforcement by managerial techniques, introduced by RDS. As a consequence, the growing hegemony of the discourse serves to increase management power further. As the discourse becomes more dominant, it is possible to see the how advocates of managerialism begin to question the validity and, indeed, the veracity of the former system, as Alec does here.

There’s nothing wrong with managing well, but that’s quite different to managerialism. I think the way the term managerialism is used is a caricature that is often used, and is set against a slightly unrealistic view of a certain past if not the realities of the present. What people portray as collegialism was a way of allowing, if you like, informal power to be allowed to be exercised, and avoiding the more formal power, and so you could argue that what’s happening is much more of a formalisation of power. Formalisation of management structures.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

Alec’s story here is clearly rooted in a modernisation discourse. Not only is collegiality portrayed as outdated, but he also questions whether it ever really existed. Hence, accusations of increasing managerialism are characterised here as an irrational resistance to change from those who are opposed to modernisation, in an echo of earlier work into such developments (Clarke and Newman 1997).

Alec’s notion of ‘formalisation of power’ is also significant. I explained in section 3.2 how, under conditions of collegiality, universities were granted significant freedom to engage in teaching and research in order to fulfil their socio-economic obligations, furthering the advancement of knowledge for the ultimate benefit of civic society. Accordingly there existed a general acceptance of the primacy of academic knowledge from which academics derived considerable authority and status. Yet, under conditions of modernisation, that
freedom is curtailed, as universities are now expected to make a far more direct
contribution to the national economic interest. Notions of learning for learning’s
sake are supplanted by neoliberal conceptions of business need, skills and
employability, thus challenging the original source of academics’ authority and
status. In order to demonstrate their compliance with government agendas
universities have developed internal systems, processes and procedures to satisfy
the needs of the various external auditory and regulatory bodies (section 2.3).

As a consequence of this formalisation of systems that Alec referred to managers
and administrators assume far greater powers and responsibilities, further eroding
the status and authority of academics. What has happened is a subtle shift
concerning the strength of the discourse of what constitutes the best method of
organisation and operation in universities. According to a labour process analysis
(section 2.4) significant power is conferred upon those with the ability to control
such agendas. The relationship between managers and academics is, thus, recast
as significant degrees of power and authority have been transferred to managers
and administrators from this agenda-setting ability. Lukes has considered such
subtle power shifts where there exists ‘a contradiction between the interests of
those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude’ (2005:28).
According to Lukes, people tend to acquiesce when they become resigned to the
situation, although the potential for conflict remains.

Coincidentally, during my fieldwork in 2006, the main academic unions, AUT
and NATFHE, undertook industrial action over that year’s pay offer. The action
took the form of a one-day strike and a marking boycott. This episode provided
an ideal opportunity to explore suggestions of a more confrontational management
style and a growing divide between the strategic and operational levels, in what
became a rather bitter dispute nationally. The following three stories explain what
happened at Shaston and Budmouth.

There was a great deal of conflict. Management showed a different side in
the dispute and HR didn’t come out very well either. There were some
heads sending out threatening letters demanding to know what people
were doing. You were not able to take assignments unless you signed a
form guaranteeing that you would mark them. Any kind of goodwill completely evaporated. There was plenty of ill feeling and there is now a feeling that anyone who took part in the action is being targeted in terms of increments and promotions. For instance, I had been told to expect four increments for the course leader role, but in the end I only got one.

Faith: Academic, Shaston

…the VCs approach was rather aggressive, and it did get very confrontational… thankfully the action was called off before it really came to the crunch.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth

…there was a very confrontational stance in Council for instance, you know, they were acting rather like Victorian mill-owners..

Warren: Middle Manager, Budmouth

Whilst it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions, the academics that I spoke to all felt that the management response to the industrial action was far more confrontational than anything they had experienced before. Such a stance would certainly be characteristic of an increasingly managerialist mindset, as suggested by Warren in his analogy of Victorian mill-owners. There was other evidence to suggest that managements were seeking to impose a more assertive style.

At Casterbridge for example, I was told of a department that had ‘under-performed’ in the last RAE exercise. Senior management’s response was to re-align the department towards teaching, only support particular areas of research according to themes and to bring in an appointed manager to coordinate the process, as Charles explains.

…you know, they brought in a sort of hired gun to sort things out. That’s the sharp end of central planning beginning to impact on individual careers.

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge
There was a significant degree of concern regarding this development. The language used by Charles is pertinent and conjures up images of management trouble-shooters, combined with Stalinist central planning. I raised the subject with one of the senior managers. Not surprisingly, it was a rather sensitive matter but, as the following quote illustrates, any suggestions of top-down managerialism were strongly rejected.

Now, that focusing down is the particular thing where you could say; yes, professional management is driving out collegiality. But because we say yes we are still a collegiate institution, we still recognise the value of these disciplines, we still say that we are giving equal status to those who are not the five star researchers, because they are equal in value to our education strategy, but then that means that collegiality doesn’t mean that you give them the resources to do the research that the institution doesn’t want them to do. I think this is the reality of the modern era.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

So according to this particular managerial discourse, being collegiate in the modern era is about making sensible business decisions which will benefit the university as a whole and the academics within it. Thomas explains that the university has several strategies to promote, including teaching and research, and has to make rational decisions about which to support and which not. The (ironic) justification being that such a strategic approach will, ultimately, provide more opportunities for staff to develop their careers.

The plan to develop particular research themes referred to in the example above emerged as another potentially divisive issue. For management it was all about providing greater clarity and focus around the research effort, but for staff was an issue that went to the heart of their individual academic freedom, as suggested below.
Well this idea of focusing on particular research themes needs to be very carefully handled. The danger is that you are seen to be constraining the freedom of academics to pursue their ideas…research cannot be produced to order. Academics by their very nature tend to be unconventional in the way they operate and it’s so important not to stifle their creativity…it will have to very carefully managed.

Edward: Academic, Casterbridge

Such examples serve to illustrate the notion of a growing distance between a managerially focused tier of senior managers and the rest of the academic staff. For the latter, the idea of pursuing research themes was not only an overt example of directive management, but one that fundamentally challenged academic freedom, central to their collegiate ideals. Yet there had apparently been little opportunity to comment on the move in the traditional democratic manner. As Charles says above, the under-performing department was dealt with by a ‘hired-gun’ brought in to sort out the problem. It all served to reinforce a growing belief that managerial control was exercised from the very top of the university hierarchy, with opportunities to comment becoming significantly curtailed.

It was not just the academic staff who were concerned at such developments. I interviewed a number of senior managers who also felt they exercised little in the way of real decision-making power, as Donald suggests.

Well, the university says that it is creating a management structure that invests much greater authority in the deans…I daresay the Prime Minister feels that he is in control of nothing too [laughs] um, I don’t feel in control of anything that really matters in terms of the faculty. I do a lot of paperwork, I respond to a lot of things, I sit at a lot of committees and I have an occasion to say what I think about lots of things. I don’t feel that I’m in strategic control of the fundamental direction.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

This was certainly a common theme from middle managers, but it was surprising that some senior managers felt the same way. A number of people I interviewed
suggested that, in line with the more business-like approach, finance departments now exercised significant power.

…the finance department wields an awful lot of power, because they get everybody scared, I mean everything’s seen as a drain on the budget, you know nothing’s an asset, everything’s a cost and heads of department are scared. Finance managers seem to have that kind of hold on every policy, so whatever the policy is they kind of trump it by ‘well, we can’t afford it…’

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

So although budgets are devolved to departments, in effect it is in a very constrained manner as most control rests with the executive group. There is a centralised system of financial resource allocation…well I call it bran tub finance, you know, where various grey criteria are applied…

William: Senior Manager, Shaston

Despite this concern apparent throughout the universities, most people had reached a stage of rather grudging acceptance of the inevitability of the current situation. Indeed many respondents, although unhappy about the degree of managerialism and increased bureaucracy they experienced locally, tended to recognise that a lot of it was as a result of increasing government pressure impacting on universities. There appeared to be little in the way of opposition or even organised resistance. Below, Frank and Donald explain why they think this might be.

I think there is a reluctance to challenge senior management. So when something comes out for consultation there’s a very limited response and so hardly very reliable… and that’s probably down to, you know, fear – people too scared to put their head above the parapet...

Frank: Middle Manager, Shaston
I would say the big problem in this university at the moment is that we, most people feel that they get brought into the discursive loop on matters too late to have any influence on the trajectory of what is being decided. They produce what is necessary after full and proper consultations within their own spheres, they present them and they have to be accepted. People on the receiving end simply feel, disenfranchised.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Donald’s analysis of the situation succinctly conveys the views of many that I interviewed. It is clear that universities have changed considerably in response to wider global pressures. In order to maintain tight control in such an environment, the suggestion is that senior managers have taken measures resulting in a significant centralisation of power at the top of university hierarchies. Policies that are developed to maintain control were not, it was felt, being effectively implemented and often faced significant ideological opposition from academic staff. Nevertheless, there is an apparent feeling that the modernisation agenda will continue its inevitable trajectory.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which each university attempted to operationalise its modernisation agenda by implementing new technologies of control. Although there was a general lack of awareness of RDS at each university, my data shows the ways in which HR strategies were starting to have a discernible impact on the lives of academics.

The HR strategies developed at each university in response to RDS formed a key part of the change agenda and were strongly supported by senior managers. But effective integration proved to be problematic, mainly because academic staff had not internalised the values of the HR strategy, a necessary pre-condition according to HRM theory (section 1.1; 2.2). Such was the clash between, on the one hand, HRM with its focus on individual performance management and, on the other,
notions of collegiality, academic freedom and identity, that academics believed the HR strategy was designed to reduce their autonomy and increase management control. Consequently, implementation of policy was ineffective and failed to penetrate all levels of the university hierarchy.

Despite such problems of implementation and integration, performance management and staff appraisal was starting to affect academics and was clearly perceived by them to challenge collegiality. RDS had initially emphasised the significance of performance management, which, it was believed, would lead to an improved standard of individual academic performance. Yet the insistence on such a performance-led approach betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the ways in which academics derive job satisfaction, which transcends such individualistic corporate models and is rooted in peer recognition. Attempts to link pay to performance served to reinforce perceptions of an increasing individualisation of academic work.

The Head of Department role had assumed much greater significance with Heads expected to take a far more directive approach to the management of individual staff performance. Tensions were emerging concerning the nature of the role and the extent to which generally accepted notions of good management were being supplanted by neoliberal conceptions of managerialism. Heads themselves found that the increasing managerialisation of the role was damaging their research careers and changing their relationship with academic colleagues. Such problems were challenging some of the central claims and assertions of RDS concerning the management of academics.

People at all levels believed that there had been a significant increase in managerialism at their respective universities. This was generally believed to have arisen from the increasingly dominant managerial discourse of what constitutes ‘good management.’ In the context of discourses of modernisation concerning the purpose of a university there has been an evident transference of power away from academics to a small, remote group of senior managers. Management responses to industrial action and an increasingly directive approach
to academic departments provided evidence of what was perceived to be a form of ‘top-down’ managerialism.

In the next chapter I consider the apparent challenge to discourses of collegiality arising from such changes. I discuss the response of academic staff to the changes, what, if any, resistance took place and consider the wider implications of the changing landscape of higher education.
Chapter 7
Collegiality and Resistance

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 explained the changes that had taken place at each case study university consequent to RDS and the introduction of an HR strategy. Discourses of modernisation had influenced the implementation of these changes, which led to the emergence of a more overtly managerial environment as each university sought to adopt a corporate style of management. HR strategies were starting to have an effect, with academics increasingly becoming subject to individual performance management and staff appraisal, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness across departments. Heads of Department were coming under pressure to assume a more directive line management role and this presented a challenge to the preservation of their own academic identities and individual research profiles. Collegiate relations within departments were also challenged by such managerialisation as Heads of Department were increasingly required to monitor the individual performance of their ‘subordinate’ academic colleagues. As a consequence of all this, the conditions under which academics were required to carry out their work were slowly changing.

In the context of such change there was a growing belief amongst academic staff that senior management was becoming rather remote and detached. This was partly to do with an insistence on pursuing a model of HRM that did not fit strategically with the core purpose of a university. Academic staff did not ‘buy-in’ to the logic of HRM or the values of the HR strategies and this undermined the effective implementation of RDS. Also, as I showed in section 6.3, the HR directors failed to appreciate that individual performance management simply did not chime with academics, for whom job satisfaction and work motivation is a more subjective issue, rooted in the nature of the work itself and peer recognition.
that transcends institutional boundaries. Such polarisation of discourses suggests the existence of a distinct management strategy to increase control over academics through a process of work individualisation designed to weaken their collective power and thus, enhancing management’s ability to pursue their corporate agenda. For academic staff, notions of what actually constitutes ‘good management’ were challenged by this increasingly dominant discourse of managerialism.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which staff responded to these transitions. Although I found evidence of underlying dissatisfaction amongst academic staff, there was little suggestion of any serious resistance. Yet such change through ‘modernisation’ presents a significant challenge to existing orthodoxies and collegiate traditions (section 3.2). Long established traditions of collegiality emphasise the concept of a university as ‘a community of equal scholars’ (Farnham 1999:19) that was effectively self-governing. Collegiate universities were thus:

…quasi-hierarchies, based on academic reputation and on operational responsibility, and on committees exercising decision-making power.

(Nedeva and Boden 2006:276)

Collegiality is rooted in a collective approach to making decisions through democratic processes. The legitimate authority of academics is accepted and recognised, deriving as it does from their academic standing. Discourses of modernisation challenge collegiality, arguing that universities are better managed by a system of corporate governance that confers authority on managers to make strategic decisions based on principles of market need and economic efficiency. HRM further challenges the collective aspect of collegiality through its inherently individualistic approach to managing people. In the modern, managerial university, collegiate notions of learning for learning’s sake are supplanted by discourses of entrepreneurship, business need and graduate skills, most recently expressed by the government in Higher Ambitions (section 1.1). Implicit in all of this change, as I explained in section 6.5, is a subtle shift in power relations, where power is transferred to managers.
and administrators through their ability to control the methods of work
organisation as a result of the hegemony of managerialism.

Clearly this amounts to such a significant challenge to traditional values of
collegiality, academic freedom and identity that it would, perhaps, be
surprising if there were no resistance from academics. As I explained in
section 2.4, resistance can be seen as an entirely rational response to a change,
by workers who perceive the likelihood of a detrimental effect on their working
conditions. Given the nature of academic work, grounded as it is in critical
enquiry and analysis, it seems intuitively unlikely that academics would
passively accept management proposals without subjecting them to some
degree of intelligent scrutiny, in the way that Anderson (2008) has previously
found (section 2.4).

But as Lukes (2005) has shown, people often acquiesce in the face of dominant
power when they become resigned to a situation. Some may even start to
believe in the utility of the new situation, as expressed by those executing the
power but, significantly, as Lukes argues, there remains a ‘latent conflict’
where the conditions for acts of resistance are always present. Such resistance
can be manifested in a variety of overt or covert ways.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how staff responded to the changes in
their respective universities, following RDS and the implementation of HR
strategies. I begin in section 7.2 by reflecting on the various notions of
collegiality that were held by staff at different levels of the university and the
extent to which these were challenged by managerialism. Given the changes
discussed above, it was important to gain an insight into current opinions in the
context of RDS and increasingly powerful discourses of modernisation, in
order to better understand the reasons behind any resistance. It was clear that
collegiality was still an important element of academic identity and this was,
apparently, recognised by senior managers. However, the extent to which
collegiality could survive in the modern, managerial university was the subject
of much contention.
In section 7.3 I consider how staff responded to the changes at their respective universities in the context of these collegiate ideals. I reflect on academic staff’s attitudes to work and the extent to which their collegiate ideals were challenged by the changes associated with discourses of modernisation. In the context of the rather polarised debate concerning discourses of modernisation and collegiality, central to this thesis, it is important to gain an insight into the views of those whose work was affected as a consequence.

In section 7.4 I consider the impact of the changes to the democratic processes and procedures of each university. This is a further significant aspect of collegiality that traditionally enabled academics to be involved in decision-making. Many that I spoke to felt that the organisational restructuring, discussed in section 5.3, had seen universities’ democratic processes supplanted by a formalised, hierarchical decision-making system that further eroded collegiality and resulted in a top-down system of communication. Yet, the drumbeat of modernisation insists there is no alternative for universities – in section 5.3 I explained how implementation of RDS was contingent upon such a hierarchical structure. As a consequence, I discuss the impact of the changes on the established democratic processes at each university and also consider related developments to the universities’ communication systems.

In section 7.5, I turn to the issue of resistance to change, which, as explained in section 2.4, usually arises in response to a perceived threat to or change in an individual’s circumstances. Accordingly, in this section I show how there was evidence of both overt and covert forms resistance and I discuss the different ways in which that resistance was manifested. This is followed by a summary of the chapter in section 7.6.
7.2 Collegiality

It was evident that the industrial action of summer 2006 (section 6.4) had, to some extent, tainted relations between senior management and academic staff. The dispute had certainly reinforced the perception of a growing level of managerialism that was challenging collegiality and increasing the distance between senior management and the academics. Despite this tension, both senior management and academic staff generally seemed to agree that there was a need to establish more effective systems of management, although perhaps for different reasons. Many of the academics suggested that there needed to be a better standard of management, which was perceived to be, at best, variable.

…I mean it had to be tightened up – there are some terrible practices going on.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

Yet, as section 6.5 showed, there is a clear contrast between the kind of improvements to the standards of management called for by Liz and the managerial model that appeared to be emerging at each university following RDS.

Staff at all levels of the hierarchy did agree that collegiality and established democratic processes were challenged by a top-down managerial style and that such an approach was not appropriate in a university. However, as I showed in section 6.5, the attitudes of academics and senior managers were polarised around the extent to which each university successfully avoided such managerialism. The following quote from Donald, a Dean, demonstrates the nature of the problem that has emerged.

We used to have a very collegiate management system. In the sense of departmental meetings we were our own separate faculty and just about every member of staff went to all departmental meetings, all faculty
meetings. There’d be about fifty or sixty of us, it was quite large, but you
know, if half a dozen people weren’t there - where are they? I’m now
dean of a faculty of four hundred academic staff - we can barely raise a
quorum of fifteen.

    Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Here, Donald implies that since staff believed they no longer had a genuine input
to decision-making they no longer saw any point in attending department
meetings. Whereas previously, the departmental meeting had been the focus of
colleigate decision-making, now it was felt that the senior management executive
decided policy with little genuine consultation, lending support to the notion that
there has been a transfer of power away from academics. Rather than mount any
serious protest, staff appeared to have accepted the inevitability of the situation
and withdrawn their involvement, in the manner suggested by Lukes (2005).

Senior managers at each institution had a rather different view and rejected
suggestions of the existence of a top-down approach and lack of consultation. For
them, as suggested in section 6.5, what was actually happening was a necessary
formalisation of management systems and processes. Such a discourse was
usually accompanied by a questioning of the reality of a collegiate past, as
illustrated by Alec.

    Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

… my own theory is that there is a huge amount of mythology about what
universities are like, and there’s this mystical past that we’re moving away
from, where universities were these collegial self-governing organisations
where everyone was terribly nice and structured and so on er, and if you
actually pause to think about it, it’s actually a lot of nonsense. If you go
back to the nineteen fifties, nineteen forties and on to the nineteenth
century, universities were really ruled by rods of iron by the professor in a
particular discipline and the assistant professors, were his, effectively,
private property.

    Alec: HR Director, Budmouth
Alec is a moderniser and he suggests that those who continue to pursue notions of collegiality are perhaps not engaging with the realities of the modern era and are in some sense ‘anti-progressive’ (Clarke and Newman 1997). However, there is a certain irony that in Alec’s characterisation of the past he talks about professors, not managers, being in charge, which rather undermines his own argument.

For the academic staff, collegiality was still characterised as being a fundamental aspect of university life. Some that I interviewed acknowledged that they perhaps had hints of rose-tinted memories, but all agreed that the spirit of collegiality was at the heart of a university’s ethos and that time pressures and an increasingly corporate management style were gradually eroding it. Charles, here, summarises the concerns of many in this respect.

There’s this kind of confusion between the old collegiate feel, there’s still some nods in the direction of that, but you know, collegiality, I think we are being restructured away from that…

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

Despite such pressures, the collegial tradition was still highly valued by academic staff. Definitions varied considerably, but all centred around the notions of shared ownership, working together supportively, informality and a collective will. Yet following RDS, there has been a formalisation of processes and procedures, a transfer of power to a small managerial elite and an individualisation of working practices through the introduction of HRM. As discussed in section 6.2, given such dissonance it is, perhaps, unsurprising that academic staff had not ‘bought in’ to such ideals.

The issue of informal social networks clearly illustrates senior managers’ lack of understanding of the various different aspects of collegiality and the ways in which academics derive job satisfaction. A number of academics explained how, until relatively recently, people had been able to meet for coffee or lunch in a senior common room, on a regular basis. This aspect of collegiality had played an important part in the way that academics experienced their work. At Shaston,
with the university being so small, staff would socialise with colleagues across the university. Edmond, a long-standing member of staff explains how things used to be.

Er…I mean it all sounds anecdotal does this, but I guess it’s inevitable in any organisation in the modern age isn’t it, when organisations go through such tremendous change, that part of that collegial spirit which used to exist twenty years ago isn’t quite the same these days. I mean the institution I came to we regularly, er, it was the done thing, wherever you happened to be teaching, at ten to eleven everyone would gravitate towards the senior common room, and you’d sit and you’d talk together and actually quite a lot of business was done, quite apart from the sort of mutual friendship support. Now that doesn’t happen anymore, er, staff do’s always used to be well attended and that doesn’t happen quite so much anymore…

Edmond: Senior Manager, Shaston

Now, the senior common room Edmond talks about has been replaced with a staff rest room that is largely used by administrative staff. Time pressures mean academics tend to stay within the confines of their school. The increased numbers of contract staff, combined with a greater degree of staff turnover, have had the effect of diluting what apparently used to be a very collegiate atmosphere. Below, a newer member of staff and then a more experienced one tell us what they think of the change at Shaston.

Well I’m told there used to be a thriving social scene but I just missed it when I started! There is very little social activity and it is probably to do with increased workloads.

Faith: Academic, Shaston
One of the big mistakes was to get rid of the Senior Common Room and replace it with a Staff Common Room. Nobody goes there, except the admin staff. That was where academics came together from across the university and a sense of camaraderie developed, but now any ideas of collegiality have long gone.

Sophie: Academic, Shaston

It is clear that appropriate social space for academic staff to meet, combined with the preservation of social rituals and traditions, were all felt to be essential aspects of a collegiate ethos. At Budmouth, I discovered a variety of experiences, according to where staff were physically located in the building. In one department a regular coffee break took place at 11.00am every day in the rest area in the centre of the department building. I attended this social event and it was quite apparent that this informal gathering played an important part in structuring the working day and strengthening the social bonds throughout the department. According to one senior manager there was an obvious reason to maintain such traditions.

It is so important to maintain these kind of informal gatherings. People do work better if they are happy – it’s a simple idea, but it remains very important.

Anna: Senior Manager, Budmouth

However, this contrasts significantly with another department, in the same faculty, but located in a comparatively new building, as Frances and Bob explain.

… there is no recreational area for staff, no shared social space, which results in a degree of disconnection from things and can be a little isolating

Frances: Academic, Budmouth
Well… there is no staff common room where people can congregate and socialise in that way, which is a shame, as people tend to stay in their rooms. There is not a lot of interaction between colleagues.

Bob: Academic, Budmouth

The provision of an appropriate social space had apparently not figured in the plans when designing this new building. Consequently, as Frances and Bob suggest, those opportunities for informal socialisation, an important aspect of collegiality, simply do not exist. Their characterisation of staff feeling isolated, with little interaction between colleagues suggests a rather sterile and individualistic environment, resulting from the original design of the physical space not factoring in the social element.

The contrasting views concerning the importance of social space provide a further insight into the tension between collegiality and managerialism. Both Faith and Sophie, at Shaston, talked about the camaraderie and the important social networks that developed in the senior common room. The image of a place where ideas were exchanged informally and ‘business being done’ are portrayed as a fundamental aspect of collegiality. Yet the decision to close the senior common room was taken on the basis of an assessment of efficient utilisation of space. According to the dominant managerial discourse, such a space was not seen as contributing anything tangible to the core business of the university and was certainly not generating any income. Thus, it was closed and a smaller, joint rest room provided for all staff. A rational, cost based decision had been made on the grounds that space would be utilised more effectively. Yet, as a consequence, not only is the new rest room considerably under-utilised, but, academics’ practice of collegiality has been further eroded.

Here then, is another manifestation of the modernisation agenda where space is viewed in terms of income generation potential, squeezing out the capacity to factor in the rather intangible nature of human social interaction and collegiality. Problematically, under these new regimes, any benefits that may be derived, such as improved morale, cannot easily be quantified and under conditions of
neoliberal governmentality (Dean 1999) something can only be judged effective if it can be measured (section 2.2). Managerial technologies such as HRM offer a means of linking human behaviour to quantifiable performance criteria. Clearly, the intangible nature of the complex relationship between social interaction, reinforcement of collegiality, morale and improved performance do not accord with such rational discourses.

I explained in section 6.4 how the Head of Department role was becoming particularly significant for academics as it developed into an increasingly managerial role. It also became clear that line managers’ attitudes to collegiality had an effect on the way that academics experienced their work. For many academic staff the main focus of their work experience was at the level of the individual department and I found evidence to suggest, certainly at Casterbridge and Budmouth, that an element of collegiality survived at that level. As a consequence, for those people, any negativity towards increasing managerialism, and an erosion of collegiality, tended to be directed at senior, rather than operational management.

I think collegiality is pretty ingrained in [Casterbridge] and there are definitely some very strong departmental identities.

Andrew: Academic, Casterbridge

I do believe that collegiality still underpins the way things are done… there is a lot of goodwill and a generally supportive attitude around the place.

Bob: Academic, Budmouth

Yet, as I explained in chapters 5 and 6, at Casterbridge and Budmouth there is a move away from smaller departments to create much larger business-focussed operating units, following RDS. According to senior managers, such a move would enhance operational efficiency. It was also a necessary pre-condition for successful implementation of individual performance management systems by a formal tier of line-management. Concerns were apparent amongst staff that collegiality may not survive this move, as expressed by Edward.
… things will be very different in the new school and that informal, collegiate style is unlikely to survive. A number of new appointments have been made recently in accordance with this new initiative to pursue research themes, so it will inevitably dilute the departmental ethos that we used to enjoy.

Edward: Academic, Casterbridge

So where staff had been based in departments of around ten people it had been possible to retain a degree of informality that characterised a collegiate approach. But for senior management the concept of large numbers of small departments was simply not an efficient way of operating, according to their managerial discourse. The decision to formalise the structure and create larger operating units was entirely the product of that discourse. Such a rational approach to decision-making did not take into account the intangible nature of individual staff satisfaction, in the same way that the relationship between collegiality and social space could not be quantified. The perceived consequence for academics was a potential further erosion of collegiality.

I explored the above issue with a Dean of faculty where a number of reorganisations had led to the creation of larger, merged departments. Whilst he recognised the concerns of academics, he felt that the overriding need for reorganisation had to be addressed. Interestingly, in the extract below, he argues that the decision had, at least, been made in the traditional democratic way. His hope was that staff would come to accept the democratic decision, even if they didn’t agree with it, as the outcome of a collegiate process.

We had an open debate about it and voted on it, and faculty voted to do this…the process meant that people could feel that we had a fair look at the issue, decided it in traditional academic way and those who
disagreed…for the most part are saying ‘fine that’s the decision, now let’s get on with it and work together to make it work…

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

In this extract Henry suggests that modernisation and collegiality can co-exist. It is interesting that he felt his approach to managing the change process was indicative of the rather hybrid approach to managing universities that is now emerging as he explains here.

We’re out there, I think …you have to, I think, yeah, find the right way forward and mix some managerial and collegial styles.

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

It has been argued by others that a hybrid form of new managerialism is emerging in the HE sector (Deem et al 2007) and here is a senior manager suggesting that such an approach is necessary. It seems that the critical point in terms of mixing managerial and collegial styles as he suggests, is about getting an appropriate balance between the two. The academics that I spoke to clearly felt the balance was strongly tilted towards the managerial style.

In this section I have considered the various different ways in which academic staff at all levels of each university’s hierarchy characterised collegiality. There was a belief amongst academics that collegiality was being eroded by modernisation. Senior managers, alternatively, argued that modernisation was entirely necessary and that underpinning collegiate traditions could, actually, survive in a modern setting. The increasingly corporate approach to management and organisational restructuring at each university following RDS further challenged collegiality in a number of ways. Merging small, socially cohesive departments to create larger, business operational units had the effect of diluting collegiality by a process of formalisation. This was reinforced by the creation of hierarchical structures where decisions were increasingly being made by managers and not through the usual democratic structures and processes.
In the next section I turn to consider the manner in which staff responded to such changes and the extent to which their collegiate ideals were challenged by increasingly powerful discourses of managerialism.

**7.3 Responses to Change**

Given the significant change that had taken place at each institution, and indeed throughout the whole sector, it was important to try to understand the nature of that change and what effect it was having on academics and the way they felt about their work. Clearly it was difficult to form a definitive picture, but a number of issues emerged to reinforce the idea that change was having a heterogeneous impact across the sector and according to where you were in each institution. It was also possible to discern differences between the pre and post 92 universities. In the former, whatever changes were made there was always the recognition by management that the core academic purpose, of excellence in research, could not be forgotten.

It’s pretty hard work, but what you’re trying to do is get a 5* in the next RAE, and you know that if you don’t, everything else counts for nothing. However brilliant your personnel practice, if [...] doesn’t get, doesn’t maintain its 5* equivalent status then all hell will let loose, so in that sense they’re very clear.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

It is interesting that Michael here acknowledges that the purpose of his HR department is to support the academic endeavour. That was certainly not the experience of all the academics I spoke to, who felt that the essential purpose of these research-intensive universities was, in fact, being compromised by the increasing influence of HR and a growing management focus. As Henry tells us here, that strength of opinion differed throughout the university.
…it depends on what part of the university you go to I think. People are more used to change, certainly than they used to be. The Arts faculty also resisted, much more fiercely than the other parts of the university, all of the QAA arrangements. I think they detest the RAE even more than the other parts of the university. So that means they don’t…buckle down and get on with the job, and jump through the hoops that are necessary…

Henry: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Such different responses according to academic department were apparent at each university. At Shaston, for example, I was told that the Department of Geography was the most opposed to change. This provides a further insight into academics’ collegiate ideals. For as Henry explained above, the main focus of activity for most academics was at the level of the individual department. This point was also discussed in section 5.3, where it emerged that, despite organisational restructuring at Casterbridge, departments remained the main ‘engines’ that drove organisational activity.

Notions of departmental identity figured highly in academics’ stories when asked about their attitudes to work. The stronger the sense of allegiance to the department - which was usually correlated with a supportive attitude from the Head of Department - the greater the degree of satisfaction that was apparent.

…I mean the [staff attitude] survey showed that people felt they belonged to departments rather than the university. Their loyalty was to a smallish group rather than the bigger group. I think that’s knocked right through so that head of department would see themselves as fighting for their department rather than implementing a university policy on their behalf.

Andrew: Academic, Casterbridge

People do tend to identify with their departments, and that comes informally as well as through formal departmental events.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth
Such findings resonate with the work of Henkel (1998) and are particularly significant in this research. There is a clear suggestion that academics were able to distance themselves to a degree, from the managerial discourse, as Lidia suggests here.

People are certainly aware that [Casterbridge] is attempting to become more corporate but they don’t really identify with that vision at all. Most people are so busy getting on with their own teaching and research that they never really look beyond their department and what’s going on there.

Lidia: Academic, Casterbridge

Lidia reinforces the notion, discussed in section 6.3, that academics do not generally identify with corporate missions and, rather, derive satisfaction from the support and recognition of their own peer academic communities. As Liz argues below, for many, working in higher education is more than just a job, it is an opportunity to work in an area that really interests them, and that sense of vocation still appears to override everything else that was going on around them. So in this argument, Liz is suggesting that there are still significant benefits to working in HE, especially for those working in research-intensive universities, such as Budmouth and Casterbridge.

…you see, people generally enjoy their work, so there’s this kind of trade off that if it’s shit, well it’s a lot better than what we could be doing elsewhere, and it’s a lot better than how it could be in a lot of other universities.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

In the following group of extracts we get a sense of the slightly ambiguous nature of academics’ attitudes to their work. A mixture of frustration at the growing managerialism is contrasted with positive feelings concerning their own work.
I’m mostly very positive about my role, I think, and pretty happy in my work. There is a slight feeling amongst my colleagues of being the foot-soldiers who are very dispensable and not really figuring in the bigger picture. So, yes, the day-to-day job is fine, but you do feel rather like a minion without a meaningful voice, with things being done to us rather than with us.

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

I am very lucky. I am able to pursue my research and do what I’m interested in. Working in higher education is a vocation and I really do feel very lucky to have a job that allows me to pursue my interests.

Alan: Academic, Casterbridge

[Shaston] is still a good place to work at the moment, it suits me. I have a permanent position, which counts for a lot, so it is not necessarily because of [Shaston], but it suits my needs at the moment.

Faith: Academic, Shaston

Significant here is the fact that Janet, Alan and Faith each talked about deriving satisfaction primarily from the nature of the work that they do. By implication, institutional matters are of, at best, secondary importance. As Lidia suggested above, individual institutions tend to be seen as convenient locations for academics to carry out their work and, as a consequence, overarching corporate missions are unlikely to generate any strong feelings of identity.

One of the recurring themes to arise from academics’ stories concerned the importance placed on retaining the ability to work autonomously. This essential element of academic work was discussed in section 2.4, where I argued that academics maintained a kind of ‘bargained autonomy’ in return for complying with corporate objectives such as production of research articles, teaching greater student numbers and form filling (Miller 1995). In section 7.5 I show how some believed that, in practice, this was precisely what was happening at their university. Despite the other concerns expressed by academics associated with
modernisation, most academics that I interviewed felt they had retained the ability to work autonomously.

I have plenty of autonomy, I am free to come and go as I please, and as long as I do my job then nobody bothers me...

James: Academic, Casterbridge

The best way to manage me is to leave me alone – and that’s what has happened.

Clark: Academic, Shaston

Quality of working life, that’s the key to me. I mean I could easily earn much more as an accountant in industry than I do here as a lecturer. But I value the autonomy I get here. You know, the trust that I will get on and do my job - that counts for a lot too.

Troy: Academic, Shaston

Such ambiguity is illustrative of the rather complex nature of academics’ response to discourses of modernisation and managerialism. Clearly, the ability to concentrate on one’s interests in teaching and research is of primary importance to an academic. Any challenge to that is likely to result in dissonance, leading to tension and potential conflict. As I discussed above, there was little evidence of any serious conflict, or challenge, to the increasing managerialisation at each university, which is perhaps explained by academics’ belief that autonomy still existed. It also reinforces Lukes’ (2005) notion, discussed in section 6.5, that people often acquiesce in the face of dominant power, even where the interests of those in power compromise their own. Significantly, however, in Lukes’ analysis, the conditions for conflict remain present.

As a consequence of the above, questions arise concerning the efficacy and, indeed, validity of certain management discourses concerning the need for change. RDS is a case in point. Most academics felt that the adoption of an individualistic approach to people management did little to improve their working lives. As discussed in section 6.3, the use of HRM was felt to be more the product
of a management desire for control than any genuine commitment to individual staff development. In discussing academics’ attitudes to their work it became clear that there was a genuine sense of frustration at what were perceived to be inappropriate changes and increasing managerialism. Such changes were believed to be adversely affecting the working conditions of academics and, as a consequence, were potentially damaging to the university as a whole.

In the next section I explore the ways in which changes to organisational structures had affected the democratic processes and structures of each university. Traditions of democratic involvement represent a further aspect of collegiality that is challenged by modernisation and managerialism. Accordingly, I consider the extent to which the ability of academics to be involved in decision-making had been affected and also the related effect of restructuring on the systems of communication.

### 7.4 Democratic Structures and Processes

I explained in section 5.3 how each university had reorganised its organisational structures in an effort to create a more streamlined and efficient system of management, in response to RDS. There was an assumption on the part of senior managers that the existing system of relatively flat structures and democratic decision-making was not only outdated, but also inefficient. It was argued that restructuring, would enable each university to become more ‘business-like’ in its affairs so that it could deliver its various agendas more effectively and to the ultimate benefit of the staff and, in particular, students. This modernising discourse resonates with notions of the ‘corporate university’ model advocated by the Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985). The senior managers I interviewed all claimed that restructuring had led to better systems of decision-making and that communication had improved as a consequence.

Such a change was potentially problematic for academic staff because, as I explained in section 7.1, academic involvement in the democratic processes of the university was valued element of collegiality. Organisational restructuring was
largely believed to have eroded that ability and there was a perception amongst academics that genuine democratic involvement in decision-making had been replaced by a top-down system of communication that did little more than pass information down the hierarchy. The status and authority conferred on academics under conditions of collegiality was, then, further challenged by such managerialism.

Senior managers certainly recognised that there were concerns about communication, but tended to focus on this specifically, rather than addressing the wider issue of academics’ declining ability to be genuinely involved in decision-making. All three universities carried out staff attitude surveys in an attempt to gauge opinion about communication and a variety of other issues, as Alec tells us.

I persuaded the university that we needed to do a staff attitude survey, and that will become part of an ongoing process, to find out what were areas of difficulty and what needed to be done. So that’s one of a number of initiatives that will be done and will continue, to try to improve our internal communication, to get more information about what managers and the managed feel about working here. So that will then help the university to focus its future HR strategy on areas that actually matter and make a difference.

Alec: HR Director, Budmouth

Alec clearly believed in the utility of attitude surveys, which are also a favoured tool in HRM theory (section 1.1), offering the ‘certainty’ of a measurable set of results. Yet the effectiveness of such an approach in gathering reliable and accurate data is clearly open to question. Low response rates, the tendency for respondents to ‘cluster’ around neutral replies, or even those who feel particularly aggrieved by some course of events ‘letting off steam, all have the potential to skew the results and present an inaccurate picture.
Notwithstanding such concerns, I discussed the results of the respective surveys with each of the HR directors. Tess, at Shaston, highlights that, for many academics, poor communication was perceived to be a problem.

The staff-survey picked up peoples’ concerns about communication becoming too top-down…without sufficient opportunity for consultation. Other comments [reading]; policies seem to arrive already framed and time for comment is minimal…

Tess: HR Director, Shaston

The survey at Budmouth highlighted similar concerns as Liz told me.

Top negative perceptions [reading] – sixty eight percent of the university who filled it in, disagree that there is good communication between various bits of the university, fifty seven percent said they were dissatisfied with communication within the university, fifty four percent disagreed with the view that management was open and consultative…which all fits with what we sort of know anecdotally.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

Emerging from the staff attitude surveys carried out at each university was a clear degree of dissatisfaction concerning the lack of genuine consultation and involvement. This was confirmed by many of the academics I spoke to who, although generally supportive of such initiatives, tended to see staff surveys as more of a public relations exercise by HR. They remained unconvinced that anything would actually change as long as senior management continued to pursue a corporate agenda that, they believed, eroded democratic structures and, effectively, excluded academics from genuine involvement. In this sense, focusing on communication was perceived to be a management strategy designed to avoid addressing the real issue. The following three stories serve to illustrate the concerns of many.
People like me, you know, the academics that I work with, don’t really feel part of the wider university strategy. I suppose communication is quite good, but there’s a clear divide between academics and senior managers. We are not genuinely involved in that sense.

Janet: Academic, Budmouth

…so yes, I do feel involved in terms of day-to-day issues, but not in terms of strategic decisions. Science strategy for instance tends to be the preserve of one or two dominant professors and the dean and that’s it really. Most plans are at least brought to the institute meetings, so there is a degree of consultation, but I don’t think people feel really involved.

Ella: Academic, Budmouth

I mean at my level I don’t think there is any real involvement in decisions, that is done by the senior academics.

Maryann: Academic, Budmouth

These three stories all serve to reinforce the notion, also discussed in section 6.5, that there has been a transfer of power away from academics to senior managers. Clearly in any large institution it is going to be difficult to involve everyone in all decisions. Staff recognised that a balance needs to be struck between decisions which are clearly the preserve of management and those which should go out to consultation, but felt that their ability to be genuinely involved had been eroded. Management used electronic forms of communication heavily in an effort to at least provide the necessary information to staff about what was going on in the university. Although, as Josh explains below, there are limitations to the effectiveness of such methods.

Yes, communication is always the major problem in a place like this and I think it…as I say, the more transparent we are it…it’s easy to overload people with information, I mean most of the information’s there on websites, newsletters, but people don’t look at websites and newsletters.
And actually to get to the level of detail where people fully understand it, there just aren’t enough hours in the day.

Josh: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Although Josh has identified the nature of the problem he does not offer anything by way of a solution. The clear message from this senior manager is that there really is no alternative but to continue with such an approach. The necessity of modernisation is deployed to argue that any associated difficulties that may arise are outweighed by the advantages that such change brings.

Thomas, whilst also recognising the issue, did feel that the university had managed to strike an appropriate balance that still allowed staff an opportunity to comment on proposals via the traditional route.

I think in an institution the size of a university… it is always a difficulty in getting, firstly, communication through, as a two way process, and secondly ensuring that you get the right balance, between driving forward, strategies that have been debated and discussed and actually seeing them realised. But nevertheless, it does seem to me that we have managed to maintain a tradition of involvement through departmental meetings, faculty boards, while driving forward a very clear focus.

Thomas: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Yet the systems that Thomas is talking about are precisely the ones that are apparently being eroded by ongoing management reorganisation and the associated transference of power. As I explained in section 7.2, academic staff had stopped attending departmental meetings because they believed they had ceased to play a genuine part in the university’s decision-making machinery. For staff, the use of email and website announcements by senior management was seen as a further indication of the top-down approach, and as a substitute for genuine consultation. The following extract from Liz illustrates the nature of the frustration in this regard.
With regard to HR policy developments I think if there wasn’t a union…nobody would have any understanding about what was going on with various policies within the university. If I think of some of the things we’ve had to say…you can’t do this, they would just put those things in place and no one would know about them, I mean in theory they are up on the website for you to see, but we’re not told when for example, changes are made to harassment and bullying policy…no one’s ever told that, we’re not directed to come and look at the new changes, what do you think of them? And all that the university is doing is putting it up on the website, which you may or may not see, so that’s not proactive enough in order to gather those people’s opinions. And some of the things the university thinks are benign and for the good of people are certainly not. At the moment they are suggesting cutting our sick pay entitlement, you know, various things which are clearly not.

Liz: Union Representative, Budmouth

Liz is making two important related points here. First she talks about the inadequacy of the university’s communication systems, where simply posting information on websites is not felt to be genuine communication. Such a form of downward communication has been described as a one-way system that not only provides a very limited form of involvement (Marchington et al 1992) but, is also individualistic in nature. Liz then goes on to suggest there is a difference of opinion concerning the degree of importance placed on particular matters, in this case sick pay entitlement. This provides a further suggestion of the growing divergence between senior managers’ values and the collegiate ones held by academics. It also strengthens the notion that there is a distinct management strategy to limit the power of academics by diluting the democratic processes of the university and creating the illusion of consultation.

I explored this further with Michael, the HR director at Casterbridge. Here, he acknowledges the existence of a senior management divide as a problem, although prefaced with the view that there really was no alternative but to continue along the modernisation path, just as Josh did above. In the following quote he also illustrates how such a divide is likely to develop.
…and if I’m really brutally honest I’m not sure I’m in touch with views on the ground, I’m not sure my team is…and I think that’s an issue. If I had to identify some of our weaknesses as a function then that would be one. You know, I move around a group of people – pro vice-chancellors, deans, heads of department etcetera and in the end, if I analyse my diary, apart from the odd intervention with somebody else, I’m probably meeting a relatively small group of people on a regular basis, and therefore your whole world starts to get skewed. You know, if we’re all doing that, then gradually the senior management team sort of floats off the top of the organisation [laughs], floats away.

Michael: HR Director, Casterbridge

Michael’s story here is highly significant as it illustrates an inherent problem of taking a more managerial approach. He suggests that a whole new management paradigm has emerged where senior managers exist in isolation from the rest of the university, echoing my findings in section 5.2. Michael admits that he and other senior managers are probably not in touch with ‘views on the ground’ but, interestingly, does not indicate any intention to do anything about it. This is perhaps the central point. Many of the senior managers I interviewed did, apparently, recognise the problems associated with modernisation. However, whenever challenged, returned to their legitimising managerial discourse, arguing that there really was no alternative.

That legitimising discourse is a recurring theme throughout this chapter, as it was in chapters 5 and 6. In fact it was repeated by senior managers so often that it almost seemed to have assumed the status of a management mantra. Many of the academics I interviewed believed that senior managers were becoming increasingly remote from the rest of the university and operated in a very insular manner, following their own managerial agendas. There is a clear suggestion that a form of groupthink (Janis 1982) had taken hold. As a consequence, any challenges to the prevailing modernisation discourse were dismissed and alternative approaches simply rationalised away. So despite the very real
concerns that were apparent amongst academics, even at quite senior levels of the hierarchy, these were simply seen as barriers to change that would ultimately be overcome by the undoubted logic of their managerial discourse.

Such findings reinforce the notion that there has been a distinct managerial strategy designed to weaken existing democratic processes and collegiality by a process of individualisation in which genuine academic involvement in decision-making has been superseded by a one-way system of top-down information giving. In the context of such a challenge to traditions of collegiality and threats to academic identities, it is clear to see that the conditions for resistance exist. Accordingly, I turn to a consideration of that issue in the following section.

7.5 Resistance

I explained in section 3.3 that resistance is a complex psychological response to a change in an individual’s circumstances that could be perceived as either a threat, or damaging in some way (Buchanan and Huczynski 2004). Resistance to such change may take the form of individual acts of mischief (Watson 2002) by developing ‘coping strategies’ (Noon and Blyton 2002), including \textit{inter alia}, minor acts of sabotage, pilfering, or non-compliance with instructions. Resistance may also be collective in nature, usually involving trade unions taking industrial action in response to a perceived threat to their working conditions (Salamon 2000). The industrial action of 2006, discussed above and in section 6.4, is an example of such action.

For many of the academics that I interviewed at Budmouth and Casterbridge it was clear that the ability to take refuge in their own research, teaching and peer groups was, in effect, a form of individual coping strategy. As discussed in section 7.3, the ability of academics to maintain their autonomy and to preserve departmental identities counteracted much of the growing corporatisation and increasing managerialism within each university. At these universities, there
remained a clear recognition at all levels of the primacy of the core academic purpose. So for the academics here, the growing business focus was a source of frustration, but not seen as something that, as yet, challenged that essential purpose, from which they derived their identities.

As a consequence of this, as I suggested in section 7.3, questions do arise concerning the validity of the claims concerning the need for change implicit in discourses of modernisation. I discussed in section 5.5 the perception amongst academic staff that HR was a remote department that, effectively, had little positive impact on the life of the university. In section 7.4 Michael, an HR Director, acknowledged the general detachment of senior management, including HR, and their inability to remain in touch with the views ‘on the ground’. As such, ‘management’ becomes an end in itself and one that is not necessarily legitimated by sufficient evidence that it leads to any improvement in the delivery of the university’s core academic agendas. This is the same problem, discussed in section 2.2, that continues to undermine the claims of those who argue that HRM leads to any improvement in the management of people. Such claims are not supported by any tangible evidence. This serves to further strengthen the suggestion that such shifts are the product of a neoliberal strategy designed to gain control over academic labour.

The situation at Shaston was slightly more problematic. The ability to take refuge in academic work, in the way that academics at Budmouth and Casterbridge did, was becoming compromised by the wider pressures of massification and ‘customerisation’. As a consequence, Shaston academics had to balance the competing demands of rising student numbers and management imperatives to increase pass rates, with the emerging pressures of research and third-mission agendas that came with achieving university status. This, in the context of a growing level of managerialism, compounded the level of concern and frustration that was common to all three universities. Such examples illustrate how the impact of the modernisation discourse is variable in pre and post 92 universities. However, although the pressures differed at each university, the response was homogeneous: managerialism, control and the centralisation of power.
I found little evidence of active, or overt resistance, but I did find examples of covert resistance taking place at different levels of the university. The clearest example of a direct form of resistance was from Mark, the Head of Department at Casterbridge, discussed in section 6.3, who simply refused to carry out appraisals because he did not believe in the process.

There was evidence of some active resistance at Shaston too, where the impact of the changes was the most significant. One school in particular was particularly resistant to the management reorganisation, to the extent that academic staff did not accept the authority of the newly created tier of line managers, and simply bypassed them by going straight to the Head of School as he explains.

And we’ve got a couple of guys, you know, who’ve been here for years, and they can be a bit nowty, so I can deal with them, but they just won’t have anything to do with my management PLs. It is tricky, because I don’t want to be seen to be undermining them, but what else can you do?

William: Senior Manager, Shaston

This certainly was a ‘tricky’ problem for William but, despite his claims to the contrary, he was clearly undermining his management PLs, and perhaps inadvertently, resisting the university’s strategy of management reorganisation.

But, as Michael explains below, resistance was not usually an overt process but, rather, took the form of a more complex kind of passive resistance.

And it’s not necessarily active resistance, but it can be either passive or just not doing the job…you know, leaving a meeting having made a decision, and nothing happening, you know that sort of thing. I’ve got caught a couple of times with sitting in a meeting of vice-chancellor’s group and the deans and three heads of division, saying ‘well, do we agree to do this or not?’ ‘Blah, blah yes we agree.’ And taking that as an absolute cast-iron reliable, sort of bedrock position and then taking action
as a result, only to realise later that the impact, although everyone was agreeing, they weren’t really... they were only buying in to the consequence of agreeing it.

Michael:  HR Director, Casterbridge

This is significant and further illustrates the difficulties that are likely to arise when attempting to translate a corporate business model into an academic setting. Here, Michael is suggesting that Deans, themselves senior managers of the university, are not always prepared to operate in the unitarist manner that is called for by HRM. Whether this provides evidence of resistance to the managerial discourse at a senior level is unclear. However, it does suggest that attempts to implement a homogeneous managerial strategy into an environment characterised by complexity are likely to face significant difficulties. Further, if there is lack of support at that level, then it is very likely to spread in a kind of ripple effect throughout the university. Charles explains this further.

…policy from the centre faces quite a lot of hazards in getting down, it’s still the heads of department saying this is the policy I’ve been told to… sort of distancing themselves from it, you know what I mean? So people like [HR Director] may make agreement but then have some trouble delivering it…if they’re doing a heads of department briefing on issues… you know they can’t require heads of department to be there, you know, so… it’s more of a trickle down system where the people who are interested turn up and the people who behave badly don’t, you know.

Charles:  Union Representative, Casterbridge

This is highly significant and further illustrates exactly what degree of power, both formal and informal, is invested in the Head of Department role, as already shown in chapters 5 and 6. Senior management are hugely reliant on Heads for seeing that the university’s HR policies are effectively implemented. The impact those policies may, or may not have on academic staff, depends significantly on the attitude of the Head. As Charles suggests, the support for managerial discourses amongst Heads of Department is variable, which, as I discussed in
section 6.2, severely compromises the ability to effectively implement RDS. At this level, there is still a very clear commitment to collegiate and academic discourses and a significant lack of ideological support for the managerialist values underpinning each university’s HR strategy. Hence, it seems the attitude of these front-line managers has a lot to do with the ways in which academics experience the effects of the modernisation agenda and their attitudes to work, in a further echo of Purcell and Hutchinson’s (2007) findings.

Senior management did appear to understand the reasons for resistance, but there was a clear frustration at the slow process of change as the following two senior managers illustrate.

Trying to get academics to engage is a problem because they don’t want to do it, so there’s loads of tensions. It’s an uphill struggle.

Caroline: Senior Manager, Shaston

…it’s taken a lot longer to be accepted and adopted than I would have imagined and it still hasn’t been totally accepted and adopted, and I know [the vice-chancellor] gets very frustrated and frequently he makes the point, deans are now empowered, it’s deans’ responsibility. I think in some faculties the change has been minimal. It’s been a very, very slow process.

Josh: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Caroline’s managerial tone is particularly revealing and both she and Josh convey a sense of the degree of management frustration at what is seen as academics’ intransigence. There is a clear implication that academics, through their unwillingness and resistance to change, are hindering the effective implementation of RDS. But, despite the frustration, there appeared to be very little sense that anything could be done to overcome such barriers. Given the clear reservations expressed by many Heads of Department and the fact that many academics failed to engage with RDS, questions continue to arise concerning the validity of the whole change process. The desire to increase control over academics in the belief that it will lead to better overall institutional performance,
appears to be the most likely reason behind managements’ continued attempts to implement such an apparently incompatible initiative as RDS.

To illustrate the non-engagement of academic staff, several that I spoke to suggested that there was an element of ‘playing the game,’ where forms were completed, or boxes ticked to satisfy administrative requirements and reinforcing the notion of bargained autonomy discussed in section 7.3. Others simply employed a strategy of deleting emails and ignoring ‘unnecessary’ administrative requests.

Oh yeah, I mean I’ve always found that just ignoring things seems to be a pretty effective strategy. Everything comes via email doesn’t it? So you just delete that and carry on as before [laughs].

Troy: Academic, Shaston

There are forms for everything now, and I think there’s a real tick box mentality about that. So it all looks good for the QAA, but I know that staff only go through the motions to get the forms filled out. But just filling out the form is clearly no guarantee of quality, so I do wonder who is kidding who here.

Robin: Middle Manager, Shaston

Definitely, there is a real audit culture now, but most people tend to comply, you know, tick the right boxes, fill out the paperwork and so I don’t really get the sense of any serious level of resistance developing over it all – people just do what is necessary.

Mark: Middle Manager, Casterbridge

These examples indicate that a number of generic strategies are employed by staff to resist what were perceived to be unnecessary bureaucratic demands. Yet the critical point remains: even when academics were ‘playing the game’ by simply ticking the right boxes, they were being shaped by a neoliberal inspired managerial agenda and gradually becoming enfolded into the dominant managerial discourse. This forced compliance was, then, effectively changing the
conditions under which academics carried out their work, leading to further individualisation and erosion of collegiate ideals.

Some academics that I spoke to provided examples of very personal ways of dealing with the pressures of a changing environment, and had effectively made the decision not to engage with the modernisation agenda.

In this school I’ve got a directive that says, in relation to my research activity I should be going to - I forget what it is, I mean I ignore it – I should be putting in bids with colleagues, I should be attending international conferences, I should be aiming to write two publications a year, as well as everything else I do, teaching de dah de dah…So, I mean it’s obviously not sensible in the long term as a long term career development to ignore something like that, but I ignore it because I’m near the end of my career…

Charles: Union Representative, Casterbridge

I made a decision a long time ago to maintain a decent work-life balance, and I know that as a result of that decision I probably won’t progress much further in my career, and I accept that. Now, I have colleagues who are regularly working twelve-hour days and are just hugely over-working, and their health is clearly suffering – I don’t want that.

Andrew: Academic, Casterbridge

Clearly Charles and Andrew had very specific reasons for resisting the changes to their environment. But for most, the ability to simply ignore audit requirements was becoming increasingly constrained by a growing pressure to comply with bureaucratic demands, demonstrating individual accountability. So despite the evidence I found of academic resistance to, and non-conformity with the changes that followed RDS, it was evident that there had been a gradual change to the working conditions of academics. Lidia, a Casterbridge professor, reflects on the situation.
Overall, there seems to be a general feeling of frustration with the current system, and all the attempts to manage things more effectively seem to miss the essential point of HE. There’s not a huge level of disquiet, and academics can see through most of the nonsense and treat it with disdain, while getting on with their own work as they always have done. All of which leads you to wonder...what on earth is the point? It all seems to be such a huge waste of time and effort.

Lidia: Academic, Casterbridge

Lidia’s rather damning critique of modernisation as a fairly pointless managerial exercise neatly summarises the views of many of the academics I interviewed. However, the serious question that this thesis seeks to addresses is the extent to which such managerialisation is actually part of a wider neoliberal policy trajectory that seeks to reconstitute academic roles and the nature of their employment relationship. So although, according to many of the staff I interviewed, there was little to suggest any improvement in the way each university managed its affairs following RDS, it was clear that a significant degree of change had taken place. Almost imperceptibly that process of change was transforming academics into compliant, individualised, neoliberal subjects (Dean 2007; Rose 1999) as the modernisation agenda started to have a tangible effect, albeit very gradual.

The implications of such change clearly raise serious questions concerning not only the way in which universities are being managed, but also, about the future direction of the HE sector. Although many of the initiatives that I have discussed, including RDS itself, appear flawed and apparently ineffective, the general trajectory towards modernisation continues. That trajectory continues to be influenced by the hegemonic neoliberal discourse that clearly informs government policy-making. I explored some of the wider issues with Donald, a dean at Casterbridge.

I do think that, shall we say, society at large, government does not know what quite to expect from universities. It wants them to be too many
different things. You know they are … universities…at the end of the day, many of them, not all, at least in principle, independent institutions and don’t actually have to acquiesce in as much as, shall we say, the drive toward government led managerialism and intrusion as in fact they have chosen to do. Somewhere along the line either a policy decision or some sleepwalking took place. And I think we have all paid a pretty heavy price for this.

Donald: Senior Manager, Casterbridge

Some examples of the price apparently being paid by universities to which Donald alludes are evident in the data I have presented in this thesis. Policies that were ostensibly designed to improve efficiency have quite serious implications going beyond that objective and suggesting a quite different agenda altogether.

7.6 Summary

The emerging theme throughout this and the previous two chapters is of a growing divergence and, indeed dissonance, between the stories of senior managers and those of the academic staff. The former offered a clear and unified narrative that modernisation was essential, given the current context of the changing, global HE environment. The latter clearly believed that the logic of modernisation was flawed and conflicted fundamentally with their underpinning sense of collegiality. Accordingly, they treated the associated managerialisation and bureaucratisation with disdain and resisted some policy initiatives all together.

I began this chapter by considering notions of collegiality held at different levels of the university. Collegiality remained a critical part of the ethos of a university for academics, founded on notions of shared ownership, a collective will and informality. It was evident that senior managers did not fully appreciate the strength of such ideals and continued to pursue their modernisation agenda and attempts to implement RDS. The consequence of the ensuing formalisation of
processes was a growing level of managerialism and individualisation that strongly conflicted with academics’ collegiate ideals.

The responses of academic staff to such changes and challenges to their collegiality were varied, highlighting the different experiences in pre and post 92 universities. At Budmouth and Casterbridge academics were still able to take refuge in their research, whereas at Shaston academics were coming under significant pressures arising from its relatively new university status. It was clear that the main focus of activity for many academics was at the department level, with wider, corporate agendas attracting little interest. Accordingly, many felt that they still retained a degree of autonomy, but there was an obvious sense of frustration at the managements’ persistence with a managerial agenda which was perceived to be gradually changing the conditions under which academics performed their work and damaging to the university as a whole.

The organisational restructuring that had taken place at each university had led to the creation of a ‘corporate’ model in the manner suggested by the *Jarratt Report* (CVCP 1985). As a consequence, academics believed that traditional democratic processes and procedures had been supplanted by a centralised system of management decision-making. Senior managers recognised academics’ concerns but were united in their belief that there was no alternative but to change. It was felt that opportunities for academics to be genuinely involved in decision-making (an important aspect of collegiality) had been eroded. Consultation had been replaced with a top-down system of one-way communication. Such changes suggest the existence of a distinct management strategy to limit the power of academics by a combined process of individualisation and managerialisation.

It was clear that in the context of such change the conditions for resistance had also been created. Despite the variability in the impact of change, the same pressures of increasing managerialism, control and centralisation of power and an individualisation of their working conditions faced academics at each university. Overall there was a general feeling of inevitability about the changes and a clear and growing divergence between the discourses of academics and senior managers. There was some evidence of resistance which was mostly covert.
Examples included academics ‘playing the game’ and ‘ticking the right boxes’ to satisfy management. Yet, by doing so, it was apparent that academics were gradually becoming enfolded into the managerial discourse as the process of modernisation was, almost imperceptibly, changing the conditions of their work, transforming them into neoliberal subjects.

In the following chapter I turn to the conclusions that arise from the data analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7. I consider the implications of these issues in the context of the broader research questions that I explained in section 1.2 and which have shaped this thesis.
Chapter 8
Conclusion: Moments of Vision?

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has charted one aspect of the significant period of change that the landscape of HE has undergone in the last 20 to 30 years in response to wider global pressures. In section 1.1 I explained how there has been a growing recognition that universities can make a significant contribution to national economies in the context of the global knowledge economy (Epstein 2007; Marginson 2007). It is a widely held belief that the development of a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce is essential to provide a source of competitive advantage in the context of such a global economy (van der Wende 2003). Consequently, in the UK there has been a concerted effort to increase the HE age participation rate to 50% of 18 to 30 year olds (DFES 2003). The UK government’s most recent vision for the future direction of HE, Higher Ambitions (BIS 2009), re-emphasised the ideology that universities should become more business-facing, focused on equipping graduates with the skills they need to become more employable. Academics, in the spirit of HRM, are expected to internalise such logic, align themselves to such policies, and become more responsive to student needs accordingly.

In the context of such changes universities have sought to restructure themselves and ‘professionalise’ their systems of management following a hierarchical, corporate model, in order to become more ‘business-like’ in their affairs. This professionalisation also extends to the manner in which people are managed. Following the UK government’s RDS initiative (HEFCE 2001), universities have turned to HRM in order to monitor more closely the performance of academic staff in the anticipation of this leading to a closer alignment of individual and organisational goals. This transformation of universities into large corporate
bureaucracies (Scott 2000) and the multiple pressures of massification, marketisation and managerialisation of the HE sector raises serious questions concerning the very purpose of the university and the role of academics within.

This thesis therefore set out to consider the local impact of a global phenomenon. By concentrating specifically on the attempted implementation of RDS in the UK HE sector, my aim was to critically assess the extent to which the professional autonomy of academics is challenged by HRM. The subjective and often complex nature of academic work requires such autonomy and the ability to self-manage. That ability is challenged by the controlling and individualistic technology of HRM and, as a consequence, has further implications for the UK HE sector as a whole. Accordingly, in this chapter I return to my original research questions (section 1.2) and reflect on the issues that have emerged in this thesis and discuss their significance in the context of that broad aim.

This chapter is structured as follows: In section 8.2 I return to my original research questions and provide a brief summation and explanation of the key findings in the context of this thesis.

Then in section 8.3, I briefly consider the questions and issues that emerged during the course of this thesis and reflect on how I tackled these and what, with the benefit of hindsight, I might have done differently. I finish by suggesting a future area of research building upon my work here.

Finally, in section 8.4, I offer some comments on the significance of this original piece of research. Ultimately, RDS has led to a huge growth in HR departments and a heightened presence of HR personnel in universities. But the attempts to impose a controlling model of HRM and to individualise the work of academics has led to a complex picture, characterised by contestation and a subtle form of collective resistance.
8.2 HRM and the Individualisation of the Academic Worker

My principal question was: to what extent and how do contemporary HR strategies in HE reflect a neoliberal policy trajectory that seeks to reconstitute academics’ role and the nature of their employment relationship? I answered that by addressing four specific research questions on which I reflect in turn in this section, before returning to my principal question in section 8.4

My first question was: what is the policy context of HE in the UK that impacts ultimately on academic staff and how has this been translated into HR strategies, notably the RDS? In order to answer this question I began by considering the broader context of globalisation within which changes to UK HE have taken place. In section 2.2 I explained the nature of globalisation and the way in which it has led to a period of significant social and economic change. This, due in large part to developments in transport and technology that have effectively compressed space and time (Urry 1998; Appadurai 1996), resulting in a world of overlapping communities of fate (Held 2005) and a greater degree of economic interconnectedness (Held and McGrew 2003). Globalisation raises a number of serious questions, including the manner in which national governments respond to the challenges of this new global orthodoxy.

That response by governments across the world has, increasingly, been informed by the powerful discourse of neoliberalism. Central to that discourse is a fundamental belief in the virtue of free markets as the best available means of distributing resources efficiently. Economic deregulation, privatisation and reduction of state intervention have enabled competitive market economies to develop. Free market principles now apply to both the private and public sectors where, it is claimed, only the fittest survive. The dominance of this discourse cannot be underestimated and is a critical element to understanding the issues that this thesis examines. For neoliberalism has led to the emergence of two related discourses – modernisation and individualisation - which have informed and shaped the UK government’s response to globalisation, including their plans for the organisation and control of HE.
Modernisation describes the process of change and reform that business organisations underwent in order to reorganise their operating practices and procedures so that they could compete more effectively in the competitive market context. Modernisation is justified by a virtuous discourse of reasonableness and rationality as an entirely necessary response to the pressures of the modern era. Those who question the need for such reform are routinely dismissed as being anti-progressive (Clarke and Newman 1997) and out of touch with reality. But the individualisation that is associated with modernisation has potentially far-reaching consequences.

Individual freedom as a concept is central to neoliberalism since the effective operation of free market economies is reliant upon the ability of individuals to make informed choices. Yet those choices are constrained (Rose and Miller 1992) under conditions of governmentality (Dean 1999) where, as Boden (2005) following Foucault says, government maintains indirect control and ‘conducts our conduct’ through its various regulatory bodies and agencies. Such bodies espouse individual freedom on the one hand yet seek to monitor individual performance against their own standardised benchmarks and performance criteria on the other. The consequence of this individualisation of society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) is a growing pressure on individuals to make the right choices and to survive in this risk society (Beck 2000). Notions of self-identity come under increasing scrutiny (Giddens 2005) with the potential for greater social inequalities (Shaoul 2008; Levidow 2002) leading to a corrosion of character (Sennett 1998).

As section 2.2 showed, this individualisation of society is reflected by changes in the workplace and in the organisation of work. Employers have sought to by-pass traditional collective industrial relations and individualise employment contracts (Brown et al 1998) through the introduction of systems of individual performance management according to the ideology of HRM. This individualistic approach to managing people (Armstrong 2006; Storey 2001) has become the dominant philosophy in the neoliberal context, emphasising the legitimacy of management to control and direct subordinate workers. Employers are also making greater use of flexible working arrangements in order to cut costs. As a consequence of such
changes work, for many, has become an increasingly insecure experience. Discourses of management control that assert the managerial prerogative have now come to dominate debate and are increasingly difficult to contest in the hegemonic neoliberal context of modernisation.

In chapter 3 I explained how the neoliberal context of modernisation and individualisation was clearly and explicitly influencing the UK government’s HE policy. There has been a coherent development of policy, following a distinct trajectory that I traced back to the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) and was reasserted most recently in Higher Ambitions (BIS 2009). Central to that policy discourse was a government strategy to gain control over the organisation and operation of the HE sector arising from the growing awareness of its strategic economic significance. The Thatcher governments of the 1980s had the effect of cementing the dominance of neoliberal discourses and fundamentally altered the relationship between the government and HE. Severe cuts to HE funding in this period meant that universities had little choice but to seek additional sources of income and become more closely involved with the business sector. At this time the Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985) was an enormously influential proponent of the corporate model that has become the template for the modern university, serving as a catalyst that led to much of the subsequent managerialism. The Education Reform Act (1988) and the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) enshrined in law the foundations of subsequent fundamental changes to the operation and organisation of the entire UK HE system. The adoption of market principles and creation of a mass system of HE delivery has resulted in a complex system with a diverse array of institutions competing on an unequal footing for an ever-diminishing unit of resource. Subsequent New Labour governments have enthusiastically persisted with their own brand of neotechnocratic managerialism (Reed 2007) and modernising agendas.

As section 3.6 explained, RDS was the inevitable product of a sustained discourse of neoliberalism insisting that, in order to improve university performance in the context of globalisation, academics should be managed more effectively. In this context HRM accorded entirely with such discourses and offered a system of management that married a nurturing, developmental approach to managing
people with an ability to control and direct the work of academics by monitoring their individual performance against measurable criteria. HR strategies in HE were, then, entirely the product of a neoliberal discourse that enabled the government to control the work of academics at a distance, in a manner characteristic of governmentality (Dean 1999).

My second question asked: how have the processes of reform of HR in HE been implemented and managed and to what effect? I showed throughout chapter 5 how senior managers regularly employed discourses of modernisation to justify the changes that were taking place at their respective universities. All of those that I interviewed were convinced of the need for change and that their respective universities had no alternative but to restructure and modernise their operating systems and procedures, in order to survive in an increasingly turbulent and competitive global HE environment. This was actually one element of a distinct strategy to create the necessary conditions to effectively implement HR strategies following RDS. There were two parts to that strategy which I explain below.

The first part involved signalling a change of culture at the top of the institution. Section 5.2 explained the symbolic significance of appointing a new VC in demonstrating that change and then giving them responsibility for taking the message forward. At Casterbridge, for example, the VC had been appointed with a specific remit to modernise what was perceived to be an ‘under-performing’ university. At all three case institutions it was clear that the VC role was hugely influential in providing a kind of totemic leadership, acting as a catalyst for change. All of which was very much in line with the recommendations of the Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985), advocating the need for VCs to operate in a chief-executive capacity, much like in any other corporate enterprise.

The next part of the strategy required each university to undertake an organisational restructuring exercise, which I explained in section 5.3. According to the senior managers I interviewed, the existing systems of democratic structures and collegiate procedures were no longer ‘fit for purpose’ in the modern environment. Such structures were characterised as too diverse, inefficient,
unresponsive to change and belonging to a past age when conditions were entirely different. Under conditions of modernisation, it was argued, a more streamlined, rational and efficient structure was required. Such structures would facilitate a more business-like approach based on clear lines of accountability and systems of budgetary control. Business units, headed by line managers would become the main focus of activity in a structure based on a corporate hierarchical model. A management team would run each unit and much of the routine administrative work would be transferred to the appropriate professional administrators. The result, it was argued, would be a more effective delivery of university agendas, to the obvious benefit of the student/consumer. Yet academics were concerned at the transference of power to managers and administrators implicit within such hierarchical structures.

Such arguments clearly reflect the dominant neoliberal conception of the modern managed university. But organisational restructuring had a further purpose and was a necessary pre-condition for enabling the introduction of HRM regimes of control. RDS stressed that improved university performance was contingent upon more effective management of people through the use of HRM. Section 1.1 explained that HRM requires a particular kind of structure to enable line managers to be more closely involved in managing the individual performance of their staff. The creation of business units and the transformation of the Head of Department into a more formal line management capacity engenders the hierarchical management structure required for HRM to be enacted.

So this was the first stage in a distinct strategy to create the conditions necessary to enact RDS and implement HR strategies. Senior managers liberally employed discourses of modernisation, emphasising that modern conditions dictated that universities respond in such a manner. University performance, it was argued, would improve to the benefit of staff and students alike. Such arguments are difficult to contest, rooted as they are in dominant neoliberal ideology, although there was little supporting evidence produced beyond the ‘obvious’ logic of the argument.
However, as chapter 5 showed, there was an alternative discourse that ran counter to the neoliberal values expressed in the senior managements’ strategy. This was the traditional discourse of collegiality which remained important for academics and from which they derived a particular identity. The democratic structures that senior management were so keen to reform and modernise formed an intrinsic part of academics’ collegiate ideals and beliefs concerning the purpose of a university. As a consequence, this polarisation of discourses led to a number of concerns for academics and which had the effect of limiting the effectiveness of the senior management strategy.

The main concern which academics expressed was the overtly managerial focus that was signalled by the new organisational structures. They felt that decision-making was increasingly being informed by a rationale of economic efficiency rather than student learning and other more traditional academic considerations. Accordingly, senior management were perceived as losing touch with the essential purpose of an academic institution as their attempts to become more business-like overshadowed everything else. Academics were not necessarily opposed to change where they perceived a clear need for it, but the obvious concern was that much of the change was purely and solely the product of a discourse of modernisation. The formalisation of processes did not necessarily lead to improvements and sometimes quite the opposite. Section 5.4 showed how attempts to relieve academics of some of their administrative workload by handing it over to a professionalised administrative function had the counter effect of actually increasing academics’ workloads significantly. For academic staff this amounted to surrendering further power to administrators who were then enabled to make decisions based on business efficiency. As a consequence, academics felt the status and authority derived from their expertise had been eroded.

Academics were also concerned at the rationale put forward to justify the restructuring of existing departmental structures. Departments had originally been created to reflect academic coherence and collegiality, based around subject specialisms with which academics identified strongly. At both Casterbridge and Budmouth academics characterised departments as ‘the engine of the university.’ But the organisational restructuring had created larger departments, justified on
grounds of operational efficiency and business need, which, it was argued, took no account of what academics valued or their sense of identity. At Shaston academics were clearly concerned that the university was trying to do too much too quickly without establishing adequate foundations for change. Significantly, there were concerns that all of the modernisation and restructuring had the potential to detract from the university’s key strength as a very successful, small student-friendly institution. Academics identified strongly with that original purpose, but less so with the new corporate mission.

It was clear then that academic staff had not fully accepted the senior management’s case for organisational restructuring and the need to take a more business-like approach to their affairs. This clearly acted to limit the effectiveness of the strategy to create the conditions to implement RDS. But there was a more fundamental problem that management faced which concerned the degree of acceptance, or ideological ‘buy-in’ to HRM. I have explained throughout this thesis (eg sections 1.1; 2.2; 6.2) that the effective implementation of HRM is contingent upon an appropriate degree of strategic fit and must be integrated throughout the organisation. Staff at all levels must accept the logic of HRM and become committed to the strategic success of the organisation for the ultimate benefits of all stakeholders in the business. Any pluralist divisions must yield to a harmonious, unitarist atmosphere. Individual performance management and staff appraisal are central components of the approach, which relies on line managers to monitor and nurture the performance of their subordinate staff in the pursuance of strategic corporate goals. The acceptance of such an ideological approach was, I argue, always likely to be in doubt in a university setting.

The inherent difficulties of creating such conditions in the majority of business organisations has consistently undermined HRM, leading to persistent claims that it is more rhetoric than reality (Legge 2005). My research strongly indicates that this has proved to be the case in HE too. Academics at all levels of the hierarchy, including some quite senior managers that I interviewed, had simply not internalised the logic of HRM. The HR department was perceived to be rather remote and of little consequence to the majority of academics. Heads of Department in particular, who occupied the line management roles upon which
HRM is so reliant, had serious doubts concerning its efficacy. HRM is an inherently individualistic approach to managing people that conflicts fundamentally with collegiate ideals rooted in supportive collegial networks and collective endeavour. Academic freedom and identity are challenged by a system that calls for measurable individual goals to be identified and linked to wider organisational objectives.

Attempts to integrate HRM were founded on the belief, expressed in RDS, that academic staff would actually benefit from such a performance-led approach and that appraisals would help them to develop their individual careers more effectively. But this ignores the fact that academic work does in fact differ from other types of work (Halsey 1992) and does not lend itself to a homogeneous HRM approach. I explained in section 6.3 that academics derive satisfaction from the support and recognition of their peers and tend to be less interested in corporate agendas and more involved with their wider peer communities which usually transcend the confines of an individual institution (Henkel 1998). As a consequence, the HRM approach led to confusion and dissonance for academics who saw this agenda as a further attack on their professional autonomy and collegiate ideals through a strategy of individualisation. Continued failure by each university to implement its own policies effectively, for example concerning equal opportunities and recruitment and selection as I explained in section 6.2, served to reinforce the perception of a gap between the HR rhetoric and the reality of academics’ daily experience.

As a consequence of such ideological differences at all levels of each university’s hierarchy it was unsurprising that the strategic alignment and ideological buy-in that HRM is contingent upon did not develop. As a consequence, HR strategy was not penetrating all levels of the hierarchy and implementation of policy was variable and, thus, undermining its effectiveness. Even where HR officers were appointed to particular departments in an attempt to create a closer link between HR and universities’ academic departments this was perceived as further managerialism and erosion of academic authority.
My thesis shows that, at least in these case study institutions, the implementation of HR strategies was ultimately ineffective. There was a lack of ideological buy-in amongst academics at all levels and the policies simply did not penetrate throughout the institutions. Despite this, it is clear that there had been a shift of power away from academics to managers and that the dominance of their discourse was such that it was starting to have a tangible effect. I address this issue below.

My third question asked: how have staff responded to these HR strategies and their attempted implementation? I explained in the previous section that the implementation of RDS had been at best variable and ultimately limited in its effectiveness. The lack of ideological support for HRM amongst academics and line managers meant that HR policies achieved only low levels of institutional penetration. There was a growing frustration at senior management’s insistence on pursuing an approach that was felt by most academics to be inappropriate in a university setting. Consequently, RDS was perceived to be an extension of the increasingly managerial approach that was also emerging and challenging academics’ collegiate ideals, causing further dissonance and uncertainty.

Many of those that I interviewed remained oblivious to the specific existence of their university’s HR strategy, as section 5.5 showed. This lack of awareness extended beyond academics to the people who were responsible for its implementation. The overwhelming response amongst academics when asked about specific HR policies was characterised by doubt and an element of cynicism. Most felt that policies had been developed to demonstrate legal compliance and conformity, rather than arising from any genuine commitment to develop people. I explained in section 6.2 how equal opportunities and recruitment and selection were just two areas where it was felt that policies were failing to make an impact. There were other examples too. Some academics talked about the irony of developing policies promoting equality of opportunity that failed to address the rather basic issue of ensuring that the buildings themselves were accessible to people with disabilities.
Bullying and harassment was a particular problem that had been identified in the staff attitude surveys at Budmouth and Casterbridge. It was felt by many that this important issue was simply not being addressed by HR policies. Such feelings only served to reinforce the notion that RDS was an integral part of a managerial strategy designed to increase control over academics and their work. Section 6.2 showed how RDS was a particularly neoliberal response in this respect, where devolved responsibility led to the development of policies and commissioning of surveys and created the illusion of activity but failed to tackle the underlying problems.

This perception of control was further strengthened by academics’ experience of one particular aspect of HR strategies: staff appraisal and individual performance management. Significantly, this was one of the central elements of RDS, predicated on the belief that appraisal leads to better management of people by providing clear direction and focus against which performance can be measured. But the majority of the academics and indeed, many of their line managers felt that such an approach was simply not appropriate for the kind of work that they do. Nothing appeared to demonstrate better, the folly of attempting to introduce such a homogeneous approach to managing people in an area characterised by diversity and complexity (Boxall and Macky 2009), than this aspect of HRM.

It was simply not feasible, academics argued, to identify clear and measurable performance criteria for the nature of their work, which demands high degrees of flexibility and subjectivity. Academic work does not necessarily follow a pre-determined agenda and cannot be boiled down to standardised performance criteria. There was even greater concern that such criteria should be linked to wider university aims and objectives, which suggested a controlling management agenda designed to constrain academic freedom. These were precisely the kinds of concerns discussed in section 2.4 by those arguing that there has been a de-professionalisation and commodification of academic work brought about by increasing managerialisation and individualisation.
The contrast in the views of the HR directors and those of the academics was particularly stark in this respect. The former group, grounded as they were in HRM theory, could not see how anyone could fail to benefit from such an approach, which satisfied basic motivational needs by providing support and guidance and the ability to reward performance. Yet, as I explained above, academics still identified strongly with a discourse of collegiality and, as a consequence, felt greater allegiance to peer academic communities, from where they derived the collective support and recognition that could not be replicated by an individualistic, employer-led corporate system of control.

However, despite such ideological differences and ineffective implementation, it was clear that academics’ working conditions were changing and that there had been a subtle shift in power relations away from academics to senior managers and administrators. I explained in section 7.4 how the existing democratic and collegiate processes had been weakened by a distinct managerial strategy of individualisation. Accordingly, genuine academic involvement in decision-making had been superseded by a one-way system of top-down information giving. The status and authority of academics that used to exist under conditions of collegiality had, therefore, been eroded. The implication of this, according to academic staff, was that management control had significantly increased, fundamentally altering the nature of the academic employment relationship. What had previously been a mutually supportive collegiate community of equal scholars had been transformed into a hierarchical model of knowledge exploitation, more akin to a Marxist conception of the labour process (Braverman 1974). In the context of such a degree of change that challenged traditions of collegiality and threatened academic identities it was clear that the conditions for resistance had been created.

Yet despite such a divergence between the strategy of senior managers and the beliefs of academics I found little to suggest any real or active resistance. In common with Anderson’s (2008) findings, academics appeared to have a pretty clear understanding of what was going on and tended to treat much of the managerial agenda in a rather dismissive manner rather than mount any serious challenge. As I showed in section 7.3 academics had largely withdrawn their
involvement from departmental meetings, which were perceived to have become little more than ‘rubber-stamping’ exercises. At Casterbridge and Budmouth in particular, academics tended to take refuge in their own departments and concentrate on their own research. Increasing paperwork and audit demands tended to be perceived as an irritant that had to be complied with, but not something that caused any serious resistance. Section 7.3 demonstrated that academics appeared to be operating a form of bargained autonomy, as suggested by Miller (1995), by ticking the boxes and completing the forms to satisfy the administrators. Most felt they retained autonomy in the organisation of their work.

For the academics then, it appeared that they had resigned themselves to the inevitability of much of the change to their working environment. Although there was a clear element of frustration at many of the changes, the fact that most felt they had retained a degree of autonomy and were still able to concentrate on their ‘own work’ and take refuge in their own peer communities appeared to transcend such concerns. I explained this rather complex response in section 7.3, by drawing on the work of Lukes (2005), suggesting that academics had perhaps acquiesced in the face of the powerful managerial discourse even though it presented such a huge challenge to their interests and undermined their own authority. However, although they appeared resigned to the situation, as Lukes argues, there remains a ‘latent conflict’ where the conditions for resistance remain. As I found there were various examples of both overt and covert resistance at all levels of the university.

The industrial action of 2006 (section 6.4) was an interesting illustration of the continued existence of organised collective resistance to counter the perception of a whole-scale individualisation at the workplace. Although this national action was not directed against individual managements per se, it was interesting to hear of the rather confrontational response of the senior management at each case study university, reinforcing the perception of an increasingly managerialist approach. There was little evidence of direct forms of resistance, with the exception of the Casterbridge Head of Department who refused to carry out staff appraisals as he did not believe in them and the long-serving Shaston academics who refused to
recognise the authority of the newly created management PLs. But as I showed in section 7.5, resistance tended to take a more covert, or passive form and was evident at all levels of the hierarchy. The Casterbridge HR Director told me of the difficulties he faced when even very senior managers, who had agreed to something in a meeting, went away and carried on as before. Such examples serve to illustrate just how difficult it is to create the kind of unitarist support for corporate strategy in large and complex organisations. With people at all levels of the hierarchy, Heads of Department in particular, resistant to or simply not fully espousing the values of the HR strategy and its inherent individualisation and controlling ideology, it is unsurprising that implementation of the RDS agenda was limited in its effectiveness.

Such findings suggest that RDS was an ultimately flawed strategy that attempted to introduce an approach to people management to universities based on a model that had already been shown to be questionable in its effectiveness. As I explained in section 2.2 there is a distinct lack of evidence demonstrating a link between HRM and improved organisational performance (Boselie et al 2005; Wall and Wood 2005; Guest 2003; Wright et al 2003). Yet this is the model that the government championed in its support for RDS. The fact that each university should persist with such an ineffective approach suggests the existence of alternative intent. As I explain in the following section, that intent was characterised by control.

My fourth question asked: what discernible impact have HR strategies and initiatives had on universities as institutions and academics as employees? It was clear that each of the three case universities had adopted a corporate system of management resembling the model originally advocated by the Jarratt Report (CVCP 1985). HR strategies were an integral part of that corporate model that had led to a centralisation of power at the top of the management hierarchies. A small senior management group was effectively controlling the strategic direction of each university and, significantly, HR Directors had become increasingly influential. This transference of power away from academics signalled a significant challenge to the previous collegiate model of the university. As a consequence, many of the academics I spoke to believed that senior managers had
become so disconnected from the rest of the university that a form of ‘groupthink’ (Janis 1982) had taken hold. Certainly, senior managers were so confident in the logic and rationality of their own managerial discourses that they had little difficulty in rationalising away competing discourses, including collegiate ones, and characterising them as being out of touch with reality.

The significance of RDS is best understood in the context of this increasingly powerful and hegemonic discourse of managerialism. For although the HR strategies appeared to be having little discernible effect, suggesting that RDS was an ultimately flawed approach in the context of HE, my data points to the existence of a rather more complex situation. RDS made the production of HR strategies a prerequisite of securing HEFCE funding. Throughout the six years that the RDS initiative was running, universities were required to demonstrate to HEFCE what progress had been made in implementing their HR strategies and how the funds had been utilised. Consequently, university HR departments concentrated their efforts on developing strong narratives to convey to HEFCE exactly how successful the implementation of their strategies had been. Whether or not the reality matched the supporting narrative was less important than this pointed concentration on HR strategies. Over time, this constant focus ensured that HR strategies soon became an accepted part of the fabric of each university. Their existence was therefore yet another aspect of the increasingly powerful neoliberal discourse of modernisation concerning the nature of the modern university.

Over time, as each university became more managerial in its approach, this HRM drumbeat became more assertive, with senior managers constructing a whole new discourse that questioned the existence of a collegiate past. The former university systems were subjected to a sustained ideological assault deploying the discourse of modernisation. Such arguments led to further dissonance for academic staff, for whom collegiality remained an important aspect of their identities. This was particularly evident at Shaston, where it was felt that modernisation was beginning to compromise their key strength as a close-knit, collegiate community that had long been an attraction to students. Yet despite such concerns the
managerial environment, of which HR strategies formed an important part, had emerged as the dominant model at each university. In this context HR strategies were presented as an entirely appropriate response and portrayed as an essential means of providing support and guidance for academics.

So although HR strategies appeared to be limited in their effectiveness they actually did have an impact and led to significant changes in the conditions under which academics performed their work. That impact was variable, but of growing significance and manifested in a variety of ways. As section 6.3 showed, despite the variability in implementation of performance management systems (in many ways the defining element of RDS), it was clear that they were starting to have an effect at each university. There was increasing pressure on Heads of Department to undertake appraisals and to demonstrate to senior managers that they were monitoring the performance of academics in their department. Although there was evidence of resistance to this at various levels of each university’s hierarchy, including amongst Heads themselves, appraisals were gradually becoming the norm for the majority of staff. Senior managers at each university stressed the developmental aspects of appraisal, whilst academic staff were clearly more concerned at the connotations of a more directive, controlling approach.

The individualisation of academic work implicit in such a strategy is one of the more serious developments associated with the managerialisation of universities. The HRM imperative that requires individuals to identify quantifiable performance criteria linked to wider corporate aims and objectives presents a significant challenge to academic identities (Clegg 2008; Berg et al 2004; Henkel 2000). Such an approach constrains academic freedom and autonomy and individualises academics by turning them into ‘objects of knowledge’ through the ‘panoptic gaze’ of HRM (Townley 2002). It also reinforces the notion of a growing divide and transference of power from academics to managers.

Another example of the impact of HR strategies, linked to the above issue, concerns the increasing managerialisation of the Head of Department role. In an echo of Deem’s (2004) findings, Heads of Department at each of the universities,
assisted by management teams and specialist business support professionals, were coming under pressure to assume a more managerial approach. Although many attempted to resist such pressure, increasingly they were required to justify their operations within the context of tight budgetary constraints. As a consequence, the former collegiate relationship between Head of Department and academics was evolving into a far more directive, corporate line management model. Now with an eye to their budgets, heads increasingly had to focus on individual staff performance, in order to ensure effective utilisation of their human resources. As a consequence, their performance was increasingly being judged through the results of their staff, creating a new frontier of control and the potential for tension and conflict.

The fact that incidences of bullying and harassment had increased, as section 6.2 showed, serves only to reinforce the notion that a more directive approach was emerging. For this is the reality of the rather insidious side of HRM (Legge 2005; Townley 1993). Management control is achieved by individualising the employment relationship, then closely monitoring the performance of individuals and singling out those ‘under-performers’ for whatever remedial action is felt appropriate. Despite the ‘soft’ rhetoric of HRM, it remains a tool that is designed to maximise performance and increase productivity. On the evidence of this thesis, whether or not such an approach is an effective method of managing knowledge workers is clearly open to question.

Academics rationalised such changes by arguing that, despite such pressures, they had retained their autonomy. But that autonomy was being constrained gradually too. At Casterbridge, for example, senior management were keen to develop particular research themes. This, it was argued, would provide greater coherence to the university’s research agenda as well as enabling a more efficient allocation of resources. Yet the concern expressed by academic staff, that such a move could constrain academic freedom and curtail creative innovation, goes to the heart of the question of what a university is actually for. Humboldtian ideals and notions of learning as a social good, discussed in section 3.2, are thus subsumed into discourses of rationality and market logic. The application of rational cost-
based arguments when deciding whether or not a programme should run, as happened at Casterbridge, may make good business sense but conflicts sharply with the traditional university mission to advance knowledge and understanding.

Academics’ autonomy was further constrained by an array of internal bureaucratic, audit requirements to satisfy external bodies such as the QAA. Here was an explicit example of government control extending right into academics working lives (Laffin 1998) in an attempt to micro-manage universities (Deem et al 2007). As section 7.5 demonstrated, the consequence for academics was an increase in the amount of paperwork that had to be completed to provide evidence that a particular task had been completed. Academics dealt with this mainly by employing a strategy of ‘playing the game’ and ticking the right boxes to satisfy administrators. But, critically, this forced compliance was changing their working conditions and further eroding collegiality as academics became further enfolded into the managerial discourse. In the same way, it was becoming increasingly difficult for academics and their line managers to ignore senior management calls to attend staff appraisals. Although many talked about ‘going through the motions’ and not really engaging with the process, they had become an accepted part of the universities’ operating procedures despite their contested nature.

In section 8.4 I draw together the critical issues discussed in this section, returning to my principal research question and offering some final comments on the significance of my research. Before that, in the following section, I consider any questions that were not fully addressed in my thesis and reflect on whether or not I might have tackled the subject slightly differently.

8.3 If I Knew Then What I Know Now…

Since I began working on this thesis in 2002 the UK HE sector has continued to change and the policy trajectory explained in chapter 3 has continued unabated and perhaps even accelerated. My personal experience of working in HE continues to be characterised by ongoing change and, if anything, a greater degree
of uncertainty than eight years ago. At that time the government’s RDS initiative had only been in existence for one year and since then, as my data shows, it has had a considerable effect on the working conditions of academics. HR departments have continued to grow in most universities and academics are increasingly subjected to a performance-led style of management, with staff appraisals having become a common experience for many.

As an academic specialising in HRM I set out with a fair degree of scepticism and significant doubt that RDS was appropriate in a university setting. I have seen little to change my mind. It seems to me that the ideological clash between collective traditions of collegiality and individualistic, managerial HRM remains. However, it is quite obvious universities are operating under entirely different conditions today than, say, 20 to 30 years ago and that there is a need for some degree of change and reflection on operating practices and procedures. This may well extend to the manner in which people are managed in universities. Clearly academics are only too well aware of changing global conditions and, as my data shows, recognise the need for good management, but remain wary of managerialism. I argued in section 6.5 that there was a sharp distinction between the two and I do believe that this is a key issue that requires further debate and, ultimately, clarification.

One of the issues I have discussed in this thesis is the rather polarised nature of the debate concerning the most appropriate method of managing a university, between those I described as the ‘modernisers’ and the ‘traditionalists.’ There appeared to be little common ground between the two discourses and this is one matter that I did not fully address. For if HRM does not effectively transfer to a university setting then it is surely important to consider exactly what is the most appropriate method of managing academics and other knowledge-workers who require high degrees of discretion and autonomy. This is an important line of inquiry to be developed in the future.

I explained in chapter 4 how I had originally set out with four case-study institutions, but that the fourth had withdrawn for reasons of which I am still unsure. Clearly the inclusion of a fourth institution would have strengthened my
findings even further and as section 4.3 showed, I made considerable efforts to keep Weatherbury in my study. On reflection I might have tried to contact another post 92 university, but time constraints were a genuine issue that prevented this. I also explained in section 4.2 how I considered sending a questionnaire out to selected respondents in a large sample of UK universities and to carry out some quantitative analysis. I remain of the opinion that despite not doing so I have still generated sufficiently robust data to tell me why things were happening in response to RDS rather than what people felt about it, which is more significant. With the benefit of hindsight and if I were giving advice to someone else, I would probably suggest that a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data would be useful in terms of triangulation and strengthening the analysis. I may also take the opportunity to do some further research by developing a questionnaire based on the findings of this thesis, thus taking my own advice.

8.4 Moments of Vision

In section 8.2 I restated my principal research question which sought to critically assess the extent to which academics’ role and the nature of their employment relationship had been reconstituted by HR strategies in the context of an increasingly neoliberal policy trajectory. In this final section I return to that question and offer some final comments. In the answers to my questions above it is clear that neoliberalism has come to dominate debate concerning the role and purpose of the university under conditions of modernisation. In Higher Ambitions (BIS 2009) the government made its most explicit statement yet, demonstrating a strong belief that universities should become training grounds for business organisations, equipping graduates with the skills that will enable them to become more employable. Academics, accordingly, are seen as service providers who are expected to deliver government agendas and be responsive to student/customer needs. Collegiate traditions and notions of learning as a social good have little part to play in this modern society. Global competition and discourses of modernisation demand that universities must operate in the national strategic interest.
As I have explained in this thesis, that is the inevitable outcome of a policy trajectory that can be traced back to the 1960s, gaining momentum throughout the Thatcher years of the 1980s and finally assuming today’s hegemonic status which is given expression through powerful discourses of modernisation and managerialism. There are serious concerns about the nature of the HE environment that has developed, expressed in stark terms recently (Callinicos 2009; Kline 2009) as I explained in section 1.1. The current system of mass HE delivery has become so subordinate to market principles as to create an environment characterised by continuous change, insecurity and stress, where academics are subject to a growing intensification of work and a reduction in their autonomy.

Discourses of managerialism now dominate debate concerning the role of the university and appear to have been accepted by all major political parties. Senior managers have also been captured by the discourse and have largely acquiesced in the face of government controls, focussing on business and enterprise agendas, graduate employability and generally becoming more ‘business-facing’ and ‘business-like’ in their affairs. A recent survey of Vice-Chancellors’ annual pay and benefits suggests that they have been well rewarded for such loyalty (THE 2010). As this thesis shows, under such conditions, there has been a clear transference of power in universities away from academics to senior managers and administrators. RDS was one part of a government strategy that led to this situation.

As I explained in chapters 2 and 3 there has been a growing recognition of the significance of universities as sites of knowledge production in the context of the global knowledge economy. As a consequence, governments sought to ensure that they maintained control of the strategic direction of universities and the academics within. The first element has largely been successful as section 2.3 showed. Through a gradual process of neoliberal policy-making the government has gained control of the sector externally, from a distance (Nedeva and Boden 2006; Rose and Miller 1992). A complex network of audit and regulatory bodies, including the QAA and the funding councils in England Scotland and Wales
exercises considerable authority over the manner in which universities deliver their various teaching, learning and research agendas. Those controls also extend into universities where academics are now required to comply with a variety of bureaucratic audit requirements and quality assurance mechanisms, in order that the university is able to provide an audit trail to satisfy those external bodies.

RDS was an attempt by the government to gain further control over academic workers. In this respect they have only been partially successful. The central element of each university’s HR strategy was individual performance management and staff appraisal. As I explained in section 1.1 this is the part of HRM that seeks to control workers through its panoptic gaze, offering a moment of vision in which each individual’s performance is laid bare and subject to judgemental scrutiny by managers. As a consequence, hierarchical power is clearly reinforced by a process of individualisation and an increasingly powerful discourse arguing that there is no alternative for universities but to modernise and become more ‘business-like.’

Over time the power of that managerial discourse has become so strong that academics have largely acquiesced, rather than mount any serious resistance. For them it seems to be more realistic to comply with the managerial agenda and instead go through the motions of compliance. This is very much in line with Miller’s (1995) notion of bargained autonomy. Yet by doing so, academics have gradually and almost imperceptibly became enfolded into the managerial discourse and their conditions of work have changed accordingly. For despite minor acts of resistance and ‘game-playing’ forms do get filled in, the boxes do get ticked and appraisals are completed, thus reinforcing the managerial agenda further. Consequently, much of academics’ former authority and status has been transferred to management and, ultimately, collegiality has been eroded.

Yet notwithstanding this, as I explained above, the government strategy has only been partially successful, for the discourse remains contested. The impact of RDS was variable, as my data shows and the result is a complex picture in which academics have surrendered some powers, but not absolutely. It is clear there has been a degree of individualisation of the employment relationship and some
erosion of collegiality. But this is to ignore the rather unique nature of academic work and the strength of academic identities. RDS was designed to align the performance of academics with corporate university agendas through the individualisation of performance. In fact academic work has always been quite an individualistic endeavour, but always within the collective context of a supportive peer epistemic community. The individualisation that RDS sought completely mis-judges academic identity and underestimates their ability to challenge managerial discourses intellectually. Attempts to inculcate academics into corporate agendas are always likely to be met by such intellectual scrutiny, as Anderson (2008) has previously shown.

My thesis has shown that RDS was one element of a neoliberal policy trajectory that did indeed seek to gain control over the work of academics within universities by attempting to impose a model of HRM, dictated by HR strategies. Such a model is designed to individualise the employment relationship creating moments of vision in which the performance of individuals may be judged. The hegemonic neoliberal discourse of managerialism requires that workers operate within measurable, corporate guidelines. Yet the method chosen was flawed and although academics’ conditions of work have clearly changed, they have not been reconstituted. For the gradual and quite subtle process of neoliberal subjectification that has taken place over time, has been met by a more subtle form of collective academic resistance, rooted in traditions of collegiality, the trace of which is still influential. The result is a complex picture of organisational resistance which, as my data shows, is manifested in a variety of different ways and at different levels of the hierarchy.

This thesis has provided the first detailed qualitative analysis of RDS since its launch in 2001. Early reports commissioned by HEFCE (Deloitte and Touche 2002; Office for Public Management 2002) offered a generally upbeat assessment of RDS, arguing that it had focussed the minds, resulting in a more professional approach to HRM. Guest and Clinton’s (2007) study also suggested that there had been some ‘improvement’ in the HR function. My research paints a rather different picture. There is no doubt that HR departments have grown and that there is a growing presence and level of involvement of HR personnel at all levels.
of the university hierarchy. But more significantly, it reinforces the notion that a homogeneous model of HRM is unsuited to an area of work that is characterised by complexity. Academics and other knowledge workers require the freedom, autonomy and high levels of discretion to operate effectively. Continued attempts to erode such conditions not only lead to confusion and uncertainty for academics but, ultimately, risks damaging the core of the academy itself.
Appendix 1: University Expansion in the UK Up To 1992

The Ancient Universities
1214    Oxford
1290    Cambridge
1411    St. Andrews
1451    Glasgow
1495    Aberdeen
1583    Edinburgh

The Civic Universities
1836    London
1837    Durham
1845    Belfast
1893    University of Wales
1880    Manchester
1900    Birmingham
1903    Liverpool
1904    Leeds
1905    Sheffield
1909    Bristol

The ‘New’ Civic Universities
1926    Reading
1948    Nottingham
1952    Southampton
1954    Hull
1955    Exeter
1957    Leicester
1962    Keele
The Plate-Glass and Technological Universities

1961  Sussex
1963  York
     East Anglia
1964  Strathclyde
1964-65 Essex
     Kent
     Lancaster
     Warwick
1966  Aston
     Bath
     Bradford
     Brunel
     City
     Loughborough
     Surrey
     Herriot-Watt
1967  Stirling
     Salford
1968  Ulster
1969  Open University

(Source: Farnham 1999)

The ‘New’ Post 1992 Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polytechnic</th>
<th>New University Title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hatfield</td>
<td>Hertfordshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>Sheffield Hallam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>De Montfort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>West of England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>Northumbria</td>
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<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolverhampton</td>
<td>Wolverhampton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>Kingston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>Manchester Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth (Polytechnic South West)</td>
<td>Plymouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Staffordshire</td>
<td>North Stafford (now Stafford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>Leeds Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamorgan (Polytechnic of Wales)</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>Oxford Brookes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teeside</td>
<td>Teeside</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>Liverpool John Moores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent</td>
<td>Nottingham Trent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Bank</td>
<td>South Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of London</td>
<td>London Guildhall (merged with North London to form London Metropolitan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central London</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames</td>
<td>Greenwich</td>
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<tr>
<td>North East London</td>
<td>East London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huddersfield</td>
<td>Huddersfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>Central England (Birmingham City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North London</td>
<td>North London (merged with London Guildhall to form London Metropolitan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>Middlesex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>Central Lancashire</td>
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<td>Humberside</td>
<td>Humberside</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bournemouth</td>
<td>Bournemouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglia</td>
<td>Anglia Polytechnic (Anglia Ruskin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West London</td>
<td>Thames Valley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Pratt 1997)
Appendix 2: Respondents at Each University By Pseudonym

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUDMOUTH</th>
<th>CASTERBRIDGE</th>
<th>SHASTON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR Director</td>
<td>HR Director</td>
<td>HR Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alec</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Tess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Representative</td>
<td>Union Representative</td>
<td>Union Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SENIOR MANAGERS**

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Richard
- Chairs of Faculty: Rhoda; Mary
- Institute Directors: Anna; Samuel; John
- Pro Vice-Chancellor: Thomas
- Deans of Faculty: Josh; Henry; Donald
- Heads of School: Barbara; Edmond; William
- Institute Director: Caroline

**MIDDLE MANAGERS**

- Chairs of Department: George, Warren
- Heads of Department: Joseph; Mark; Judith
- Management PLs: Jacob; Robin; Frank
- Humphrey; Robert; Peggy; Stephen

**ACADEMICS**

- Reader: Bob
- Research Fellow: Janet
- Senior Lecturers: Ella; Maryann
- Lecturers: Gerald; Frances
- Readers: Matthew; Edward
- Professors: Sarah; Lidia; Martha
- Senior Lecturer: Andrew
- Senior Lecturers: Clark; Faith
- Lecturers: Sophie; Troy; Susan
- James; Alan
Appendix 3: Interview Schedules for Semi-structured Interviews

3.1 Questions for Academic Staff

1. INTRODUCTORY

To build a profile of the university and its people – can you tell me a little bit about your professional background and previous experience? (knowledge of previous regime?)
How long in current role in this department, at this university etc?

For newer staff:

How does it compare with previous institution?
Does it meet your expectations?
What was your impression of the recruitment process/induction/mentoring?

There are a number of themes and issues I am investigating and I have spoken of these with people at the very top, through to departmental level, now want to try and get a feel for how this compares with the experience of people on the ground.

2. MODERNISATION

Believed by many [senior managers/government] that HE sector is changing and that universities have to change, to become more professional and take a more managed approach generally – have you experienced this/how is it manifested/your views as an academic?

Do people identify with the corporate vision of [institution]? (Does this conflict with your belief of what an academic institution is all about?)

There is a new VC at [institution] – has s/he had a chance to make an impact yet? How is s/he perceived? Comparison with last one?

Change – seems to be an ongoing programme – what impact on you/colleagues?

How do you think the role of the academic has changed over recent years? Is there a better career structure today?

[example of local change] – there have been mixed responses to this – how is this perceived?

3. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

Many HEIs now trying to professionalise and follow a more corporate model – how does this impact on academic staff? ie Would you say you identify specifically with the department or the faculty?

How would you characterise your department? (morale, team spirit)

How about communication within the department/faculty?/What degree of consultation within your department/the faculty? (Is there a particular strategy for the department/faculty – do you feel ownership of this/no interest?)

Do you feel that you have a voice within the department/university?
What about the management style of your Head of Department? Other senior staff/line managers?

4. MANAGERIALISM

Collegiality – variety of responses to this, it seems in some faculties that there is an element remaining, can it continue in this more managed environment? (Increased bureaucracy, control mechanisms? Or A Golden age that never was?) What does it mean to you?

Managerialism – plenty of literature to suggest this is increasing in universities. Is there a greater focus on a more professional, managerial approach? How would you characterise the management style at [institution]?

How do you respond to the suggestions that academic work has been degraded, work has intensified and control has been surrendered to managers?
How about the recent papers suggesting that a kind of audit culture is emerging?

5. HR ISSUES

The HR Strategy – are you aware of it? How important are such things in HE? Degree of consultation?

The strategy talks about enhanced staff development activity focused on leadership & development; performance management & reward – has this been apparent?

Is there a feeling that HR issues are genuinely integrated throughout the university’s decision-making processes?

How do people see the role of the HR department generally? There to help or somewhat removed from their daily lives? Who would you go to if you had an HR problem? (line-manager/HR dept)

What about Appraisal/Performance Management – how effective/appropriate is this? (A judgemental or developmental system, dependent on the ability of the appraiser?)
Does this help in career development? Have you ever felt that personal goals have been blocked or not supported? How is under-performance handled?

Equal Opps – a key area identified by RDS – how does [institution] measure up?

Individualisation – given some of the above issues, does it feel that there is greater pressure to perform as an individual, the notion of ‘communities of scholars’ no longer a reality? Implications – stress, insecurity?

6. ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE

Recent Industrial Action – what was the experience of this – will it affect future conduct of employee relations? Any lingering resentment?
Implications of changes to HE - is there a sense that traditional notions of HE are under threat? – does morale suffer or is there an acceptance of the realities of the modern era? Are people becoming more instrumental?

7. CONCLUSIONS
Overall, how would you characterise your feelings about working at [institution] – is it a good place to work?

How would you describe your feelings about the future of the HE sector generally? Are you optimistic about the future?
3.2 Questions for Heads of Department

1 INTRODUCTORY
(To build a profile of the university and its people) I would like to start by asking you if you could tell me about your background and past experience? (how useful, what lessons learnt)

2 ROLE OF THE HEAD
How long have you been a Head of Department? How large is the department? What is the management structure?
Can you tell me about your role? How would you characterise the role? (management, academic?) Is it rotational?

Communication within the department – what are the main channels? How effective?
What is the relationship with the Dean – eg how much autonomy, degree of responsibility, budget?
What is the strategy for the department, what future plans?

Do you have particular targets for particular areas? Are these subject to review at appraisal? (how about if you, or your department under-performs?)

3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES (if not covered above)
I’m interested to find out people’s views on the current structure within [institution]– does it function effectively?
Can you explain the decision making structure – what degree of involvement for staff? (Notions of collegiality?)

Is there much communication laterally, between Heads?
What degree of involvement is there with senior managers?

4 ROLE OF VC/LOCAL ISSUES
How influential do you believe the VC has been and what are people’s expectations of the new/current/incoming VC? How do you see the role of the VC these days – do you get the sense that people support the strategic direction?

Degree of change – future strategies – does this result in overload? Or passive resistance?

Are academics largely supportive of what is happening [local institution example] – are you able to get a sense of the organisational climate? - do you get any sense that academic staff are resistant to any of the changes?

4 HR ISSUES
I would like to explore HR issues particularly- how do you see your role in terms of implementing HR/Personnel issues? (is it your responsibility? Do you keep in touch with developments in HR? Is support/development available?)

What degree of involvement with HR department? How useful, visibility of HR Director?

How would you characterise your overall approach to people management? (is it a priority or an add on?)

Does managing academics present any particular challenges/require particular skills?
How about Appraisal and performance management generally – there is a fair amount of negative literature around these issues, especially in HE – what has been your experience? (degree of acceptance – how is under-performance handled?)

How do you think the role of the academic has changed over recent years – would you say your expectations of what a lecturer should be doing has changed? Is there any sense of a generational divide – old and new school? (individualisation of the employment relationship?)

How about equal opportunities – how does your department look in terms of ethnic mix, opportunities for women? Plenty of recent research suggesting stress and insecurity characterise the work of academics – is this an issue, are you coping with it?

How important is the HR Strategy? Does it help to genuinely integrate HR/Personnel issues? Were you consulted? How important are such things in HE today? How significant was the Hefce R&DS strategy for the sector as a whole? Is there a better career structure as a result?

5 MODERNISATION/MANAGERIALISM
I would like to focus on the more general area of modernisation of HE – the debates over increasing managerialism for example – how do you think [institution] looks in this respect?

Is there a greater focus on a more professional, managerial approach? (anything to do with HR strategy?) How does this square with the traditional view of academia in terms of collegiality? (Increased bureaucracy, control mechanisms? Or A Golden age that never was?)

How do you respond to the suggestions that academic work has been degraded, work has intensified and control has been surrendered to managers? How about the recent papers suggesting that a kind of audit culture is emerging?

6 CONCLUDING
What do you consider to be your biggest challenge currently?

Finally, is there anything else you would like to add or something you think I should consider?
3.3 Questions for Senior Managers

1 INTRODUCTION
(To help build up a profile of the university and its people) I would like to start by asking you if you could tell me about your background and past experience? (useful experience?) How long have you been in your current role?

2 SENIOR MANAGEMENT
I want to try and develop a picture of how the senior management operates at [institution] and get a feel for the strategic direction so first, can you tell me about your role? How would you characterise the role? (academic, manager)

How does the senior level of management actually operate – is there a senior management committee? (relationship with Senate/Board of Governors?)

How much influence does the VC have – what degree of devolution?
How effective is this system?
The role of Council and Senate – proactive or ceremonial?

3 HR ISSUES
I would like to get an idea of how you work with the HR director, can you explain a little bit about that?
How would you characterise your relationship? (do you see your role as managing or leading?) Does he report directly to you?

What is the decision making process for HR issues – is there a committee – what reporting system? (how effective)

Can you explain the main aims of your HR Strategy? How effectively are personnel issues integrated? To what extent are HR issues at the centre of all strategic decisions? How important are such things in HE today? How significant was the Hefce R&DS strategy for the sector as a whole?

Areas such as performance management and appraisal figure quite highly in the Hefce agenda, but have attracted a fair degree of criticism – what has been your experience?

4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES
I would like to try and find out a little more about the structure at [institution] – can you explain how it operates (in theory and practice)? Does it work? (Explore new and old structures)

How would you characterise the Faculty/School head roles – what degree of power and authority? How much HR responsibility invested in the position?
How do they report to senior management?

And what about Heads of Department – in terms of HR?

[Explore current strategic initiatives at institution] Do you get a sense of support or any evidence of resistance to the plans? (How was this dealt with?) Are there particular HR implications in the plans?
5 MODERNISATION AND MANAGERIALISM

I would like to broaden things a little and consider the general area of the modernisation of HE – the debates over increasing managerialism for example – how do you think [institution] looks in this respect?

Is there a greater focus on a more professional, managerial approach? Increased bureaucracy, control mechanisms? Does HE have to adopt a more ‘corporate’ or managed approach?

How does this square with the traditional view of academia in terms of collegiality? Was this ever an issue at [newer institution]? Still an issue [older]?

Has there been a tendency to move towards more individualised contracts?

How do you respond to the suggestions that academic work has been degraded, work has intensified and control has been surrendered to managers? *(A Golden age that never was?)*

How would you characterise the climate at [institution] amongst the majority of staff – are you confident that you are in touch with views on the ground?

6 CONCLUDING

Overall, how would you characterise the situation at [institution] in the context of the current situation in HE?

What are the biggest challenges currently – in the sector/[institution]? How do you see the sector developing in the future – greater divide between teaching and research institutions?

Finally, is there anything else you would like to add or something you think I should consider?
3.4 Questions to HR Director

1 INTRODUCTION
Could you tell me a little bit about your own background and past experience please? Was that useful experience?
(compare different sectors/industries any lessons learnt that help in HE?)

2 ROLE OF HR DIRECTOR
I wonder if you could tell me something about your current role? How long you have been in your current role?(how has it changed over time? )
How do you see your role in terms of the overall operation of the university?
In terms of policy and strategy making who do you work with?
Do you feel there is a genuine integration of HR issues in the overall strategic agenda? (how achieved, how checked?)
Could it be strengthened?

Do you think this a common view in the institution?
Does the size of the institution have any bearing on this?
(Explore commitment of VC/Senate/Board of Governors to HR issues)

3 ROLE OF HR DEPARTMENT
I would like to find out a little bit about how your department relates to the rest of the uni, so firstly, can you give me an idea of the size of your department, how many staff? (compared to how many staff at institution?)

How do you relate to/communicate with other departments eg finance, marketing, faculties, schools etc (regular meetings, link person, email)

How do you see your role, or your department’s role in relation to the academic departments? (eg advisory, support, partner - good relationship?)
Has this evolved over time, how effective is this relationship?
How much responsibility is devolved to departments – what degree of control retained by HR department?

Overall, do you believe that staff recognise and understand your role within the university?
(Is there any significance in the title – Personnel or HR?)

4 HR STRATEGY
I would like to look at the HR Strategy specifically now and firstly could you explain the process that led to the creation of the strategy?
(who involved, what timescale) (new VC – was this important?)

What degree of consultation with staff in drawing up the plan – was there a chance for genuine feedback, involvement and communication at all levels? (has this resulted in ownership/who owns it?)

How influential was the Hefce (RDS) initiative? What is your opinion of this initiative – has it helped the sector generally, was the funding sufficient, should there have been more?
Do you think it will be successful in improving the overall standard of people management ie when it becomes ‘embedded’ as Hefce hope?
Was this an appropriate initiative – is it what HE needs or do you think that something else was required- are there special HR issues in HE that do not apply elsewhere? (particular issues of managing academics?)
Who would you say are the key individuals in terms of implementing the strategy?

Overall, how effective do you believe the HR strategy is – does it inform debate in other strategies? (how do you measure it, could it be improved)
(Explore soft and hard HR issues)

5 HR ISSUES
I would like to try and get a feel for the general climate within the university and spend a little time considering staff opinion or attitudes – eg do you carry out any form of satisfaction surveys – how do you get feedback?

There are a number of issues which traditionally have been quite contentious in various industries/sectors, and figure highly in the Hefce guidelines, for instance performance management and staff appraisal – what has been your experience of this? How successful has your scheme been? (does it actually happen?)
(explore the notion of academics requiring freedom to manage their own work, individualised rewards, incentives – how to overcome perception of divisiveness)

There has also been some evidence that managers themselves do not enjoy conducting appraisals, and in HE that they are not equipped for the role – have you had this problem and how have you coped with it? (academics as managers?)

Does HR assess its own performance – what techniques?

6 INDIVIDUALISATION
Finally in this area, one of the issues I am investigating in my research is the extent to which we have seen a shift away from a more collective, collaborative approach to employee relations to a more individualised contract (change in public sector – New Public Management) I wonder if you could tell me your views on this, is there an attempt to focus more on the individual rather than negotiate collectively (is this a good/bad thing/natural development?)

How would you characterise your relationship with the trade unions?
To what extent is there a collective approach to decision-making? (any areas unions not involved?)

7 STRATEGIC PLANS AND CONCLUDING
[Explore local strategic initiatives] - how are you preparing staff for this and what are the key HR challenges? (how are you tackling it, who involved)
Might this require more management and expanded HR dept?
Following on from this – what about other big challenges – pay and rewards?
(How being handled, what problems, what lessons learnt?)

Finally as we are coming towards the end of our time, I wonder if there is anything else you would like to add or something I might need to consider?
3.5 Questions for Academic Trade Union Representative

1 INTRODUCTORY
(Trying to build up a picture of the university and its people) I would like to start by asking you if you could tell me about your own background and past experience? (useful preparation?)
How long have you been in your current union role?
Can you tell me about your role? How much time spent on union activities?

2 UNION ORGANISATION
Can you tell me a little more about the union’s activities here – how well organised? (Size of committee, degree of involvement, reps. throughout schools/departments)

How much involvement and consultation? How seriously are the union’s views taken?
How would you characterise the relationship with management?
Who do you work with mainly? How would you characterise that relationship?

How effective are the Personnel people? Is there a genuine will to work collaboratively? (size of the department?)

3 ORGANISATION STRUCTURES
I’m interested in the structure of the organisation as a whole - does it ensure a voice for employees at all levels?

To what extent are people consulted and involved in strategic decision-making?
Do they want to be?

Is there union consultation with Heads of Department or the line managers below them?
How effective are the various Heads, line managers etc? (seem to be increasingly prominent in HE today)

Where do you think the real decisions get made? Where is the real power base – or is it dispersed?

How much influence does the HR director have?

4 HR STRATEGY
I would like to explore the whole idea of the HR Strategy -how does this work in practice? What degree of focus on people related issues?

How important are such things in HE today? How significant was the Hefce RDS strategy for the sector as a whole?
How would you explain [institution] approach to HR? (integrated, appropriate)

How much consultation with unions over the HR strategy – views on this?
Are there particular issues at [institution] or particular faculties/departments with issues?
5 ROLE OF VC/LOCAL PLANS
It seems that the VC role is becoming increasingly important (Chief Executive as figurehead of the university) – how effective has current VC been? (pro-VC?)

Are academics largely supportive of what is happening [local institution example] – are you able to get a sense of the organisational climate? - do you get any sense that academic staff are resistant to any of the changes?

6 MODERNISATION/MANAGERIALISM
I would like to focus on the more general area of modernisation of HE – the debates over increasing managerialism for example – how do you think [institution] looks in this respect?

Is there a greater focus on a more professional, managerial approach? How does this square with the traditional view of academia in terms of collegiality? (Increased bureaucracy, control mechanisms? Or A Golden age that never was?)

How do you respond to the suggestions that academic work has been degraded, work has intensified and control has been surrendered to managers? How about the recent papers suggesting that a kind of audit culture is emerging?

Has there been a tendency to move towards more individualised contracts? (Current pay negotiations)

7 CONCLUDING
Overall, how would you characterise things at [institution] in terms of the nature of the employment relationship? How about morale – at [institution] – throughout the sector?

Finally, is there anything else you would like to add or something you think I should consider?
Appendix 4: Sample Transcript With Coding and Analysis of Interview with Tess, HR Director at Shaston University

MW: I wonder if you could explain a little bit about your role and say how you would characterise your role as personnel director?

T: I suppose organisationally, I mean unusually the HR role is on the senior management team. Now I know that's not common in a lot of HEIs, but again it goes back to the previous principal believing that HR was an important strategic area, that needed managing alongside other strategic areas like finance and registry type work. So, my sense of it is that there is a recognition and acceptance that HR has a role to play at various levels, and when I think about it in the course of a week, the work that we have done, I've just been talking to the team about that, we've worked a lot with individuals this week and we've worked with heads of department on particular issues. I've also worked with directors and board of governors last night, so I think at every point of the organisation there are ways in which we are asked to provide advice, or we make an intervention without being asked to. But we're also... I think we're also here much more working with and through the heads of department, in that the heads of department here, I think they accept that they have a more... I think they are more managerial. They do accept their responsibilities for managing a group of staff. Whereas at Birmingham in the pre-92, they didn't particularly, they were a head of department because it was Buggins Turn – it on a three-year rotation, so they did it because it was their turn. So there wasn't quite such an acceptance that, you know, my job here is to help this group of staff – to do what they're good at and advance the cause of the institution. So I think we do work at every level and certainly with the feedback we get from users that what we do is, in the main, well regarded and well received. I don't think personnel are perceived as a police kind of role, I mean in some case we are obviously where there is a legal compliance issue, it's partly policing and partly facilitating. And in a lot of cases it's actually, I suppose, almost empowering managers, supervisors. One of my staff has spent a lot of time in the last few weeks working with a head of department who has got a particular performance problem, and rather than us dealing with it directly we've
done it by supporting the manager and talking them through the various strategies they might want to use to help resolve that particular issue. We haven’t directly seen that individual, but it’s always through the manager.

MW: So it sounds like you are fairly confident that HR issues are integrated throughout the university, would that be true?

T: I hope so, I think they are. I don’t think there’s a particular silo or bucket where...I don’t think people think ‘oh that’s an HR issue, I’ll go to HR and talk about it.’ I think they think, ‘well I’ve got a problem with a particular person, where can I go and get advice and support from...’ But I don’t think they chuck it to us and say ‘you sort it out.’ I think there is an acceptance that it’s their problem as well.

MW: And is that because of your rather unique role on the senior management team?

T: I don’t know. I don’t know whether that’s got much to do with it...or the way in which managers’ roles here are seen, conceived and operated. I mean in some cases, I always worry when you set up something like, a health and safety officer, or an equality and diversity officer, that everyone else then chalks the issues in to those people, not actually thinking ‘well it’s still my health and safety problem, I’m the supervisor and I’m going to go and get some advice on how to resolve it’ and not ‘I’ve got this health and safety problem so I’m going to bug it to him because he’s the health and safety officer.’ So it’s trying to get people to accept the responsibility for those kind of issues and know where to go to get the best advice to deal with it.
Appendix 5: Introductory Letter Sent to Institutions to Outline Aims of the Research Study

[Insert addressee]

[date]

Dear

Following our telephone conversation on Monday, as discussed, here is a little more information about my research and the kind of assistance I am asking for.

I am a lecturer in HRM undertaking PhD research on a part-time basis and, having completed the initial literature review, I am now looking to organise the fieldwork for my research. This will essentially involve a detailed study of a number of higher education institutions, representing both the pre and post-92 sector. The focus for my research is on the strategic management of HR/Personnel within the sector as a whole. I am particularly interested to discover how different institutions actually manage this strategically and ensure that the HR strategy is effectively integrated into all areas of the institution’s activities.

In order to achieve this, in the first instance I would like to interview the person involved at both a strategic level (usually with the Vice-Chancellor and Board of Governors) and with a responsibility for the operationalisation of the strategy. Clearly, I would assume this person to be the HR/Personnel Director and I would be asking questions about the development of the HR strategy, how it is implemented, how successful it has been and, perhaps, plans for the future. Such an interview would probably need to last between one and two hours, obviously depending on availability. One of the objectives of this interview would be to identify the key people in terms of implementing the strategy, and it would then be my intention to interview some of these. At this stage I cannot say who they may be, but I would envisage that departmental heads or line-managers would emerge as key players here. I would then want to speak with lecturing staff, in order to discover their opinions, and in this respect it may be useful to try and arrange a small discussion group within a school or department. Finally, I would also like to speak with trade union representatives involved in negotiations over the strategy, and also to spend a little time reading any appropriate documentation that is available.

I realise that all of this may sound quite demanding and, as someone working in the sector, attempting to balance full-time work and part-time research, I fully appreciate the time pressures involved. However, due to the part-time nature of my study the fieldwork will necessarily have to take place over a period of time, which is essentially defined by the next academic year. I would hope to be able to carry out the initial interviews, as described above, at some stage in the autumn term before Christmas. Following this I would expect to visit each institution another two or possibly three times (again depending on availability) to carry out the remaining interviews and discussion groups. I
believe that by spreading the fieldwork over the course of an academic year I will be able to minimise the disruption to participating institutions.

I hope that this gives you a better idea of what I am actually looking for, and I shall be very grateful if you will let me know if you think your institution would be willing to help me in my research. If you need any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

MA Waring
Senior Lecturer in HRM
Appendix 6: Information Summary to Explain Purpose of Research to Respondents

The focus of my research is on HR strategies within HEIs prompted by an interest in Hefce’s RDS initiative and a general rise in the prominence of HRM and what could be termed private sector influenced practices in the public sector. Having reviewed the literature it suggests two broad responses: 1. Advocates who believe that more professional people management is essential to ensure that academics are able to deliver a higher quality of work in an increasingly competitive environment. 2. Critics who see the developments as inappropriate in the HE sector, undermining long established traditions of collegiality and collaboration and that it is contributing to declining staff morale. So far there is little empirical work to demonstrate the reality of the situation, hence this study to try and discover what is actually happening within HEIs.

This will essentially involve a detailed study of a number of higher education institutions, representing both the pre and post-92 sector. The focus for my research is on the strategic management of HR/Personnel within the sector.

In each institution will begin by interviewing the Personnel Director – other key personnel (pro VC), departmental heads, line managers, union reps, staff.

Confidentiality – will anonymise each institution/individual (check OK recording interview, opportunity to see transcript)

General topics will examine:-
What changes have taken place in your institution and what were the reasons behind them?
What has been the response by staff?
How has the process been managed?
What is the impact on staff?
What are the implications at unit, school, strategic level etc?
How effective is the strategy and how is effectiveness measured?
Who are the key individuals in strategy implementation?
Explore HR Strategy
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