

Dilemmas of Duality: A study of organisational transition and student progression in a merged institution combining further and higher education.

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This thesis is dedicated, with love and gratitude, to the memory of my parents,
Thomas Dobson (1918 – 2008) and Margaret Dobson (1916 – 2008).

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that the word count is 44,986 words, excluding appendices and references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Halford'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

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Abstract

In England, post - compulsory education is separated by the binary divide of the *Further and Higher Education Act (1992)*, which established different funding and inspection bodies for the respective sectors. However, there are institutions which offer both further and higher education, styling themselves 'dual-sector' or mixed-economy' institutions. Such institutions are situated within a continuum of collaborative arrangements, operating across the sectoral boundaries of further and higher education, ranging from full institutional merger to the franchising of qualifications.

This thesis investigates the impact of institutional merger upon a specific institution, using a case - study approach to explore whether combining further and higher education within a single institution, can create a unified organisation that improves student progression. In doing so, it is situated within the field of higher education policy and explores the historical origins of the university and its contemporary purpose, together with the development and current function of further education. The methods of enquiry include document analysis and primary research, in the form of interviews with students progressing from further to higher education (Level 3 to Level 4), and from Level 5 (HND and Foundation Degree) to Level 6, together with interviews with academic – managers in the merged institution, exploring their perceptions of working in a dual-sector institution.

I argue that full institutional merger produced some unintended consequences, which were in conflict with the rationale for merger, in some instances, but which also resulted in some unexpected benefits. The espoused objectives of the merger, in line with policies to widen participation in, and improve access to, higher education were predicated upon increased progression and cost reductions.

The key themes of this research are widening participation, student progression and organisational transition. The emergent issues of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures, provide the framework for the presentation of research findings.

Contents	Page number
Introduction:	1
Chapter1: The contextual setting	16
Chapter 2: The process and methodology of the research	50
Chapter 3: The case - study site	72
Chapter 4: Staff perspectives	99
Chapter 5: The student experience	126
Chapter 6: Dilemmas of duality	171
Chapter 7: Conclusion	190
Postscript	207
References:	208
Appendices:	221

Introduction

This thesis examines an aspect of contemporary higher education policy, the aspiration to increase the numbers of young people embarking upon undergraduate education. This policy aspiration is expressed as an aim to widen participation in, and improve access to, higher education and a possible means of achieving this aim is through the growth in partnership between further and higher education in mixed economy institutions. Many types of partnership and collaboration models are possible, one of which is the creation of a dual-sector institution, and in this research I use a case-study approach to examine the consequences of merging systems of further and higher education, to create a self-styled dual-sector institution. I will also consider whether institutional merger created a unified organisation which promotes access to and widens participation in, higher education.

Widening participation policy refers to barriers to individual engagement in education (Coffield, 1997) and I will investigate the extent to which the different and divergent systems, within the further and higher education sectors, cause barriers because of sector boundaries, giving rise to the main research question:

What were the implications of the merger of further and higher education, within a single institution, for the promotion of access to, and widening of participation in, higher education?

Together with the following subsidiary questions:

1. What is the student experience of learning and progression in a dual-sector institution?
2. What are the implications of the dual nature of the institution upon student progression?
3. What impact does dualism have upon academic and institutional identity?
4. What are the implications for the future development of policy and practice in dual-sector institutions?

These research questions were informed by a literature review which identified four main literatures. Namely:

- the historical development of higher and further education
- the policy background surrounding the move to mass higher education and the aspiration to widen participation
- organisational theory
- the role and nature of academic management in higher and further education

These literatures suggest four pertinent themes; those of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures, which provided a structure for the collection and analysis of data. The literature review establishes the contextual setting for the case study and forms the basis of Chapter 1, where I explore the historical development of higher and further education, including the perceptions of what we mean by a 'university' and why the binary divide between the further and higher elements of English post-compulsory education is so deeply entrenched. The policy background surrounding the move to mass higher education and the aspiration to widen participation is also discussed, as this created the climate for merger across the binary divide, enabling the formation of a dual-sector institution (Southtown University).

This investigation will consist of three levels:

- The macro - which will analyse the national policy background against which the institutional merger took place
- The meso – which will examine the rationale for a particular institutional merger
- The micro – which will explore the impact of the merger upon academic identities and students' learning and progression experiences within the merged institution.

At the inception of this thesis, in 2006, the role of dual-sector institutions in a possible tertiary system of post compulsory education was much discussed and

debated. In 2004 the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) considered a paper *Towards an inclusive tertiary system for lifelong learning* (Duke, 2005) and subsequently published a collection of papers under the title *The Tertiary Moment: What road to inclusive higher education*, which included mention of dual-sector institutions. The role of dual sector institutions was further discussed at the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) annual conference in 2006 under the theme of “Blurring of boundaries between different sectors of tertiary education”. It is against this policy backdrop that I investigate the fully merged, dual-sector, institution, as one model within the mixed economy of further and higher education provision.

The differing systems of further and higher education, co-existing within a dual-sector institution, influence organisational cultures creating a possible tension. The term dual-sector institution, or ‘dual’, is used by Garrod and Macfarlane (2006) to describe the institutions that span the divide between the ‘further’, ‘vocational’ or ‘technical’ sector of post - compulsory education and that normally referred to as ‘higher’ education (UNESCO, 1997). During the last ten years, there has been a growth of dual-sector institutions in the UK, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, where several higher education institutions (HEIs) have merged with further education colleges (FECs), community colleges or polytechnics. The international survey undertaken by Garrod and Macfarlane indicates that these ‘duals’ operate divergent models of managing the challenges of cross-sector education, characterised as unitary or binary. I shall use the term

binary to refer to the divide between further and higher education in the English system of post - compulsory education, reinforced by the *Further and Higher Education Act* of 1992, when different funding regimes for each of the two component parts were established. This use of binary, to refer to the two consecutive parts of the current post -compulsory system, is in contrast to a previous use of the term, to refer to the two concurrent parts of the higher education system which existed prior to the 1988 *Education Reform Act* (ERA). Before 1988, the public component of higher education (the polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education) was funded by the local education authorities (LEAs), and was differentiated from the universities, which were funded directly by the government. The term binary continued to be used between 1988 and 1992, when separate funding bodies existed for the polytechnics/colleges and the universities. Parry (2005) refers to the system created by the 1992 Act as dual, however, I shall use the term binary, in accordance with the Garrod and Macfarlane definition, described above, to refer to the sequential divide within post - compulsory education, which can enable dual-sector organisations to exist. Garrod and Macfarlane (2006) state that there is no internationally established definition of a dual-sector organisation, in terms of the relative proportion of further and higher student registrations; rather that institutions claiming the dual designation espouse an equal commitment to both further and higher education.

In exploring the extent to which a fully merged institution, in the current English binary system, retains elements of duality, and with what consequences, this

thesis is situated within the field of post - compulsory education policy, and the related public discourse that promotes widening participation in higher education, in pursuance of social justice.

To engage in this discourse, it is necessary to establish an understanding of the terms higher education, widening participation and student progression, as a backdrop to the discussion. Gorard (2006) in reviewing widening participation research cites the following definition of higher education from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website:

Higher education courses are programmes leading to qualifications, or credits which can be counted towards qualifications, which are above the standard of GCE A-levels or National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3. They include degree courses, postgraduate courses and Higher National Diplomas. Higher education takes place in universities and higher education colleges, and in some further education colleges.

The Government's target for widening participation in higher education is that 50 per cent of the 18 - 30 population will be participating by 2010 and that to achieve this participation rate, it will be necessary to attract students from those groups traditionally under-represented in education and training, primarily low income families and low participation areas. According to Coffield (1997), a successful learning society should provide access to high quality, post compulsory education and training for all, leading to individual learning, national economic prosperity and social integration. Gorard discusses the extent to which participation in learning depends upon a simple application of human capital

theory, citing Coffield (1999), which assumes that individual decisions are made on the basis of their calculation of the net economic benefits of participating in education and training. This application would render it necessary for governments promoting a policy aspiration to widen participation to remove the barriers preventing individual engagement. The notion of a barrier can be applied to the binary divide between further and higher education, and the attempt to remove these barriers, by institutional merger, is a key theme of this research.

The third term, student progression, is more problematic, as there is no commonly agreed definition. Funding policies tend to focus upon retention and achievement, rather than progression and destination, Also, there are different dimensions to progression; which can be vertical, lateral, or into apprenticeships and employment. The problem, for the researcher, is not in defining what constitutes progression, in terms of an individual's lifelong learning journey, which can be attenuated and circuitous, but still subject to an extended definition. Rather, in obtaining reliable and comparative data against which to measure assumptions and draw conclusions. When collecting data, I shall use vertical progression, the movement to a higher level programme of study, as the basis for sample selection. The issues of locating and analysing appropriate data sets are discussed more fully in Chapter 2, as part of the research methodology. However, according to Gorard and Smith (2006) government policies to promote widening participation and improve access to post compulsory education, in order for the UK to compete effectively in a global knowledge and high skills

economy, are made without robust data to evaluate the effects of these policies. This assertion is significant to my methodology and is corroborated by the problems encountered in identifying accurate data sets, especially at a national level, and in drawing meaningful conclusions regarding progression from further to higher education, when the respective data are compiled on a different basis, even at the institutional level, and there is no unique signifier for individual students, to aid the tracking process.

The creation of a dual-sector institution, and the impact it has on student progression and institutional identity, cannot be analysed meaningfully without consideration of the wider context in which it occurs. Consequently, this thesis considers the Government's policy aspiration to achieve a system of mass higher education, against a backdrop of social and economic change. Trow (cited in Parry, 2003, p.1) denoted the move from an elite, to a mass, system of higher education as taking place when student enrolments reached the 15 to 20 per cent level. British higher education achieved this transition between 1988 and 1993, when the participation rate for young people doubled from 15 to 30 per cent (Parry, 2003).

The nomenclature associated with these types of institutions is problematic, and the 'troubling of the terms' is discussed by Bathmaker (2007), in relation to shaping institutional identities in the 'new' higher education. I use the term dual-sector, to refer to universities with significant amounts of further education (FE)

provision, and mixed economy, to refer to FE colleges with significant amounts of higher education (HE) provision. However, these are contested terms, because, an institution is legally defined as belonging to only one sector, even though provision may be funded from a range of sources. Therefore the descriptor of dual-sector is not strictly accurate.

In its consultation on the policy for higher education delivered in FECs (HEFCE 2006/48), the HEFCE recognised that this type of provision performed two important functions, those of providing a major source of recruits to undergraduate education and of providing a local setting for the delivery of higher education, particularly programmes of higher level skills, related to employers' needs. The institutional and funding barriers of the HE/FE interface were referred to, together with the need for strategic policy development of directly and indirectly funded provision by colleges, stressing the priority for clear strategy, relationship to other local and regional HE provision and the development of existing partnerships and strengths. Interestingly this consultation, which was published almost two years after the institutional merger of this case study, refers to a range of franchise and consortia collaborative arrangements between HE and FE, but does not cite institutional merger as a possible model.

The rationale for the creation of the specific dual-sector institution, which constitutes the main site of this case-study, was predicated upon improving internal progression from further to higher education. The extent to which

improved progression was achieved will be examined, through a review of institutional data. The attitude, of staff, to the merger will be explored by interviews with academic-managers, within the institution, as their approach to facilitating a unified organisation and seamless progression opportunities for students, is significant to the achievement of institutional mission. The student experience of learning and progression within the merged institution will also be explored by interviews with students who have progressed internally.

The case-study of a fully-merged institution, as the main site of investigation, provides one example of a dual-sector institution, which is complemented by reference to three other dual-sector or mixed-economy institutions, to provide a comparative element to the research and give a wider perspective than that which could be gained from single site data. Pseudonyms have been used for all the institutions and individuals involved and the merits of this approach, which is intended to preserve anonymity, are discussed in the methodology (Chapter 2). The reason for selecting Southtown University, as the primary case, is that it claims to be a university which has an equal commitment to higher and further education, with a unified legal identity, and is a self-styled 'dual-sector' institution. The other comparative examples are institutions combining significant amounts of both HE and FE provision, each with distinct, and different, attributes, but sharing the defining characteristic of being a dual-sector or mixed - economy institution.

This research has an applicability beyond a review of a particular institutional merger, because it is about the effectiveness of policy implementation. The achievement of a system of mass higher education, and the aspiration to develop towards an almost universal system, pose questions about the purpose and operation of the types of institution within which higher education is delivered. As greater numbers participate in higher education, more study for HE qualifications in further education colleges and increasingly, universities offer qualifications below Level 4. This permeability of the boundaries between the higher and further education sectors gives rise to dual-sector institutions and the role that they can play in government policies to widen participation in, and improve access to, higher education. This development of a new type of institution in post-compulsory education informed the main research question and its subsidiaries.

Whilst recognising that dual-sector institutions are a minority of the post-compulsory educational provision in England, their role is significant, as they represent a possible means of achieving espoused policy aspirations by making higher education more available, and in doing so, challenge perceptions of it, suggesting a re-interpretation of the meaning of the term 'university'. Parry and Thompson (2002) refer to the need to overcome the weak knowledge and evidence base concerning the interface of further and higher education in order to shape sustainable policy and it is the intention of this research to contribute to this knowledge and evidence base.

The main focus is the extent to which a merged institution can remove impediments to participation in higher education, overcoming the 'barriers' cited by Gorard (2006). The four themes of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures provide an organising structure to the narratives of organisational transition and student progression, which constitute the main findings of the case-study. The notion of permeability (March and Simon, 1958; Perrow, 1986), or blurring (Hernes, 2004) of boundaries situates the research within the recognition of new forms of power, what Beck (2005) refers to as the cosmopolitan epoch, in which the state, global civil society and capital, all interact in new ways at a national and international level. The exploration of the permeability of boundaries looks at the creation of a new type of university, more appropriate to the diffuse nature of this cosmopolitan vision, than to the more absolute positions of modernism or the neo-liberal faith in the market. The concept of boundaries is taken from the field of organisational studies, where Hernes provides a typology for categorising multi-faceted boundaries, consisting of physical boundaries which are represented by material partitioning and the regulations and rules within an institution (e.g. buildings, assessment regulations, recruitment policies etc); social boundaries reflected in group or organisational identity; and cognitive boundaries relating to ideas, understandings and beliefs that tend to guide organised actions and activities. Hernes also distinguishes the properties of boundaries as ordering devices, distinction effects and threshold effects.

The research will also draw upon the work of Barnett (2000) in examining the concept of a university in an age of supercomplexity. Barnett poses the view that the sheer complexity of national systems of higher education militate against a unifying story in the diversity resulting from mass higher education, and that this can undermine the appropriateness of the terminology in relation to its etymological roots (the universal). Barnett (2003) goes on to pose the question – ‘Is the university possible?’ when faced with an epistemological undermining concerning the concepts of knowledge, truth and reason, key to the idea of the liberal university, together with the sociological undermining caused by the reduction in autonomy, as it becomes interconnected with national and global society. Preston (2001) presents a societal traditional narrative of the university, outlining the continuities and discontinuities of change, categorised into three types of change, the social, the conceptual and the ideological, resonating with the undermining factors cited by Barnett. Preston (2001, p.113), in discussing the university of managerialism, states that contemporary society;

has been seriously altered by the instantiation of managerialism as an ideology.

He defines managerialism as the strategic approach to achieve goals through processes, manifesting itself in the language of quality and audit.

The types of change and undermining factors, cited by Barnett and Preston, are reflected in the language used in policy documents and by interviewees, to describe their learning experiences and their professional and institutional

identity. The significance of descriptive language became, therefore, an organising theme for emergent data, as it determined attitudes to institutional identity and the difference between the organisational cultures pertaining to the further and higher education sectors. To a large extent, the dominant culture, in each sector, is influenced by the prevailing scrutiny requirements of different external bodies, which adopt differing approaches and possess different powers of ensuring compliance. This again is the language of quality and audit, symptomatic of managerialism, and the role of new managerialism in the public sector, in relation to further education, has been documented by Randle and Brady (1997). In this study, the institutional histories, and the individual experiences of academic staff also play an important role in their perceptions of identity and allegiance to particular cultures and their informing ideologies. In analysing the impact of differing organisational cultures, when trying to create a unified organisation, the work of Clarke and Newman (1997), Randle and Brady (1997) and Shain and Gleeson (1999), will be used in applying theories of new managerialism to the merged institution.

The research was undertaken at a time when the main site of the case study, Southtown University, was in a state of organisational transition, following the merger of a post-1992 university and a further education college, in 2004. Preston (2001) categorises types of change as 'social' (the lived experience of action), 'conceptual' (the way in which life is perceived and analysed) and 'ideological' (resulting from an overarching symbiosis of approach). These three

categories will be used to inform the analytical framework when examining the types of change resulting from the institutional merger of Southtown University. The analytical framework for the research will also draw upon the field of organisational studies and the work of Hernes (2004) using the typology for conceptualising the multifaceted nature of organisational boundaries, which is particularly appropriate to the blurred, permeable and diffuse boundaries created within an organisation combining two distinct and differentiated sectors. Central to this research is the concept of duality, inherent within a merged institution combining further and higher education. I contend that this dualism is deep-rooted and that the aspiration of seamless progression, within a unified organisation, encountered dilemmas of duality that caused unintended consequences.

The following chapter provides an explanation and analysis of the development of the higher and further education sectors, concluding with an analysis of the policy setting which shaped the distinctiveness of their respective histories.

Chapter 1

The contextual setting: how does “higher” differ from “further”?

This narrative of duality is essential to an understanding of the case study setting and the theoretical orientation of this research. It also explores perceptions of “higher” and “further” as a background to the four organising themes for the collection and analysis of data.

Higher education is associated with the idea of a university, and further education is traditionally associated with vocational training. In this chapter, these perceptions will be explored, together with the policy drivers and the influencing social and political contexts. Western universities and vocational training both have their origins in the medieval period, when the traditional seats of learning were established to educate the ancient professions of Church, Law and Medicine and the guilds were established to regulate the training and practice of crafts. It is necessary therefore, to briefly consider how these institutions have responded to the changing expectations and needs of society over time, as a prelude to understanding the current state of play and the pressures faced by contemporary educational institutions and why there is a binary divide in the English system of post-compulsory education, not necessarily extant in other national systems.

What is a University?

What do we mean by the term university and is the delivery of higher education aspiring to association with an institution of this type? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1973) defines a university as;

The whole body of teachers and students pursuing at a particular place, the higher branches of learning; such persons associated together as a society or corporate body, having the power of conferring degrees and other privileges and forming an institution for the promotion of higher branches of learning; the colleges, buildings, etc. belonging to such a body.

This definition is taken from the third edition, written before the expansion of higher education from an elite, to a mass, system. However, it does encapsulate some fundamental concepts regarding the perception of what it means to be a university, its function and sense of place, which are still relevant, although sometimes contested. In this section, I shall outline the development of the university system and explore *the idea of a university*, acknowledging that Humboldt and Newman, in particular, have written on this subject in the 19th Century (Preston, 2001).

The development of the university system is divided into three periods by Preston (2001). These are the Medieval, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In England, Oxford and Cambridge were established as the first universities, in the 12th Century, to train the clerics and administrators who served the royal and papal interests. These formed an elite group, preserving this elitism by the use of

an elite language (Latin). At this time, the purpose of the university was to create a community of masters and students, with its own customs, privileges and corporate organisation. The conferring of a degree was a licence to teach, sanctioned by the Church, and the curriculum consisted of the seven liberal arts, together with the three philosophies:

Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic (which included the study of Latin and logic), Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Metaphysical Philosophy
(Mallett, 1968, p.8)

This traditional curriculum and the connection with the Church retained its influence until the theocracy of the medieval period was replaced by the growing power of the state and the Humanistic philosophy of the Renaissance. The accompanying religious reformation and technological advances of the printing press and scientific discovery ushered in an era where the role of the individual, with a personal conscience and the expectation of the pursuit of wealth, through commerce, changed the complexion of the universities. Further changes occurred with the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment creating a more secular establishment. Preston cites these three periods as examples of societal discontinuities, conforming to the criteria of ideological change.

Oxford and Cambridge remained the only universities in England, until the establishment of the University of London in 1836 and the University of Durham in 1837. The ideas of the Enlightenment had, however, been influential in private

organisations and the various dissenting academies. Revolutions, in France and America, promoted a progressive democratic ideology, highlighting the importance of science and political economy in the curriculum, together with the notion of educating the population to fulfill the role of citizens and actively contribute to civil and commercial life (Porter, 2000).

The gradual shift from a primary economic system, based upon agriculture, to a secondary one, based upon manufacturing, followed by a tertiary system, based upon the provision of services (Petty's law, cited in Preston, 2001) created the need for an expanded system of university and technical education, which was met in two ways. The Universities of London and Durham were both founded in the 1830s, but with very different purposes. Durham was intended to be a northern replica of Oxbridge, whereas London was established to provide a higher education for students outside the established Church of England. This dissenting mission was significant in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy, especially in relation to emerging scientific knowledge. From the outset, the founding college of the University of London (University) did not discriminate on religious, social or sexual grounds. University College "the godless institution in Gower Street" (Briggs, 1991, p.11) was founded in 1826, followed by King's College in 1829. From the start, students and graduates of the London Colleges were not required to sign the thirty nine Articles of Faith, which bound Oxbridge scholars to the established Church. In addition, the different type of curriculum at

London University attracted many ex - Oxbridge scholars, who could not maintain their faith in the light of scientific knowledge published in the late 19th Century.

With this expansion of the university system, a literature espousing the function and purpose of such institutions emerged. In the 1870s Cardinal Newman published a series of discourses, *The Idea of a University*, in which the view is expressed that the primary purpose of a university is the dissemination of universal knowledge, through teaching, in an elite institution. This expression of the essence of the university was heavily influenced by Newman's own experience at Oxford and emphasises the integrity of the physical environment of cloister and quadrangle, to this essence (Rothblatt, 1997).

The more specialised and mechanistic system of the German Enlightenment universities, founded by Humboldt, was to be seen at London, where the medical school, and associated research, became paramount, and in the founding of the Victorian civic universities in England, where the curriculum frequently reflected local industrial sponsorship (Macfarlane, 2005).

The expansion of the university system in England between 1900 and 1939 occurred by what Lowe (2002) referred to as accretion, by the upgrading of the university colleges, creating the 'red brick' universities, and resulting in 50,000 full-time students by 1939. The government funding of higher education in the United Kingdom began in 1889 with an annual Treasury grant to the universities

and university colleges, as a precursor to the University Grants Committee (UGC), which was created in 1919. In 1946 the UGC acquired a planning role, in addition to its funding remit, financing the building of the campus universities in the 1960's, which, with their halls of residence and pastoral function, aspired to the collegiate Oxbridge model and its high associated costs.

This post war expansion, whilst facilitating the move from a system of higher education functioning principally to support and reproduce a social and professional elite, to one enlarged by the application of meritocratic principles (Miliband, 1992) still retained an elite system, with less than the 15 to 20 per cent participation level, regarded by Trow (1974) as denoting the transition to a mass system of higher education. This system was admired internationally, as a 'Golden Age' of free access, high standards and low drop out rates. However, Miliband (1992) considered this to be a complacent and static view, protecting higher education from adjusting to the exigencies of economic and social change, by perpetuating a system based upon division and selection, rather than promoting participation and achievement.

The emergence of vocational and professional higher education - the rise of the polytechnics

The need for highly-skilled technicians and professionals led to an increased demand for higher education qualifications, following the Second World War,

resulting in an expansion and upgrading of existing institutions and the foundation of new institutions. It also encouraged technical colleges to offer qualifications through the external examination systems of universities, but funded by the local education authorities (LEAs). This unplanned expansion created the original binary system of higher education, with two competing and differing versions of higher education available. This was recognised by the government in The *White Paper on Technical Education* (1956) which identified some technical colleges for designation as Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATS) and established the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) with powers to award diplomas in these institutions. The award of higher education qualifications was therefore extended beyond the sole preserve of the universities. The White Paper also set day-release targets for students, of 650,000 by 1959, not met, however, until 1966 (Bratchell, cited in Green and Lucas, 1999, p.17).

The first attempt to co-ordinate the development of a system of higher education in Britain is frequently attributed to the Robbins Report (Lowe, 2002) which resulted in a strategy that expanded the number of higher education places available to appropriately qualified eighteen-year-olds, by proliferating the types of institution able to offer degrees and diplomas and by creating the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), replacing the NCTA. In its response to the Robbins Report, and promoting the 'white heat of technology' the Labour government converted several of the new CATs to technological universities (e.g.

Bath, Bradford, Loughborough). This concurrent binary system was consolidated in 1965 by an announcement from Anthony Crossland, the Minister for Education, that future expansion of higher education would be achieved through the designation of existing technical colleges as polytechnics, to be funded by the LEAs, and in 1966 a further White Paper announced 30 polytechnics to commence in the autumn of 1970. The distinguishing aspect of the polytechnics is that they had a regional, rather than national remit, and that they forged links with local industries to promote a more vocational and technological approach to higher education. Interestingly, the early student applications to the polytechnics showed that demand for the available places in Science and Engineering was under-subscribed, but that the demand for places in Arts and Social Sciences exceeded availability by almost 8,000 (Times Higher Education Supplement, 1971, cited in Aldrich, 2002, p.84), thus replicating the situation of the expanded university sector.

The polytechnics, funded by the LEAs, remained as a distinct component of the higher education system until 1988, when the ERA transferred funding responsibility to a new body, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act disbanded the PCFC and the CNAAs, and re-designated the polytechnics as universities. The implications of this legislation will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter; however, it is significant to the issues of institutional identity and organisational

culture that the polytechnics developed a secure identity, different but equal to the university sector, with which they were merged.

The ethos of self-improvement typified by the voluntary origins of the post-compulsory sector, and the separation of skills from knowledge, was absorbed by the organisational culture of many institutions which became colleges and eventually, universities. This tended to follow Cripps' argument, that the removal of higher status vocational occupations (the new professions, such as engineering and surveying) from the practical tasks, elevated professional vocational education to the higher education sector, whilst leaving technical vocational education in the further education sector. This binary division, with associated connotations of status, was reinforced by the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*.

The move from an elite to a mass system of higher education

The crossing of the threshold from an elite, to a mass system of higher education occurred in England between 1988 and 1993, when overall student numbers grew by nearly one half (Parry, 2003). This transition was made without the accompanying changes to structural and institutional systems, usually cited as preconditions for achieving growth, and was a result of public behaviour, rather than policy directives. Importantly, it was not accompanied by attitudinal change or public perception regarding the diversity necessarily inherent within a mass, as

opposed to an elite, system of higher education. Consequently, the idea of a university retained an outdated concept of what a higher education institution had become in reality.

The structural and funding systems to support the increasing diversity of higher education were developed following the move to a mass system, significantly in the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*. These structural and funding changes, perpetuating a binary system with two consecutive component parts, will be examined in the final section of this chapter.

The elusive *idea of a university* is explored in this thesis, as a basis for evaluating the rationale for merging systems of further and higher education, in a single institution. The extent to which a dual institution conforms to the current idea of a university will be considered. Silver (2007) writes about tradition and higher education, describing the ways in which universities have had to adapt and transform themselves, in order to survive and respond to changing circumstances. In doing so, the newer universities of the 1960s and the post - 1992 universities (the former polytechnics), have adopted the symbols, structures, vocabularies and missions of the 'traditional' universities, supporting Rothblatt's (1997) assertion that it is the essence of the institution that is the significant factor in the perception of itself. Indeed Southtown University's value propositions begin with 'We are a university'. Is this stating the obvious or making a claim to the traditions associated with the term?

In this brief overview of the development of the higher education system in England, I would contend that universities have always reflected and responded to changing social and political needs, in terms of their purpose, curriculum and pedagogy. The public perception of the idea of a university, and its golden age, is possibly mythical. The creation of the new universities and the de-regulation of the term in 2007, enabling institutions without a research function to be awarded university status, are only part of this continuum of change. Dual-sector institutions and the resultant blurring of sectoral boundaries, form one aspect of the move to a mass system of higher education. This is a symptom of what Barnett (2000) refers to as a 'supercomplex world', in which a surfeit of data must be handled, not only within a complex, but given, frame of reference, but in terms of multiple frames of understanding and self-identity.

At the start of the 21st Century there is a diverse higher education sector, to which new universities are added each year, and in which a range of very different institutions place themselves in terms of their mission, identity and market. This diversity not only reflects the teaching/research dichotomy, but whether the institution is inclusive or elite, academic or vocational, regional, national or international and the extent to which it can attract third stream income. This sector placement is relevant to the product offered and the nature of its marketing. The purpose of a higher education institution, wherever it is situated within a diverse sector, has a focus upon the provision of higher level

skills and knowledge, informed by research, and a remit which extends beyond its immediate locality. It also has ownership of its curriculum through its awarding powers. This is essentially different from the purpose of a further education college, whose focus is the local provision of inclusive educational opportunities, which are frequently second chance and vocational, and have to respond quickly to short-term priorities of the funding body; the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The FE curriculum is determined by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and accredited by the awarding bodies. Hence there is no autonomy, on the part of the FE institution, when positioning itself in the market and this dependency on public funding, whether received directly from a central government agency, or via a local authority, has always been a feature of its responsiveness to local education and training needs.

This essential difference corresponds to the dualism inherent within the sequential binary system of post compulsory education, created by the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*, which maintained separate and distinct further and higher education sectors.

Having charted the development of the higher education sector and considered the concept of a university, both of which are well documented, I shall now outline the development of the further education system. In contrast, Green and Lucas (1999) refer to this as a relatively hidden history.

The other side of the tracks: The development of Further Education

The further education sector in England has a diverse history, described by Green and Lucas (1999) as fragmented, *ad hoc* and marginalised provision, based upon a voluntary tradition. It comprises technical, vocational, adult and community education and training. Like the university sector, it originated in the medieval era, when the craft guilds controlled vocational training and practice, through an apprenticeship system. The City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI), which was founded in 1879, based upon the City of London Livery Companies, dates from this period and is still a significant awarding body, of vocational qualifications. Apprenticeships were the dominant form of technical training, until the 19th Century, when the self-improvement associations of the labour and co-operative movements, such as the Mechanics' Institutes and Workers' Educational Association (WEA) became active.

These organisations represented an essentially voluntarist movement, supported by individual subscriptions, philanthropic aid and a small amount of state funding. The prevailing ethos was one of self-improvement, which valued useful knowledge and developed literacy, together with cultural and political awareness, in the working-class. Some organisations fostered a more radical, socialist approach to political engagement, whilst the Mechanics' Institutes (founded in 1821) became associated with the aspiring middle-classes, separating general,

scientific and technical education from practical craft instruction (Simon, cited in Green and Lucas, 1999, p.11).

The increased demand for skilled labour, caused by the industrial revolution, could not be met by the existing voluntary provision, resulting in the establishment of a Department of Science and Art, under the Board of Trade, in 1853, to stimulate and co-ordinate efforts in technical education. The first schools of art and design were supported by this department; however, there was little advance in the provision of science education, possibly because the intention was to support existing local, voluntary systems. This difficulty in providing technical education was echoed in 1944, when the *Education Act* failed to introduce significant numbers of technical schools, in the tri-partite system of secondary education.

A more systematic approach to the public provision of further education developed throughout the late 19th Century, with the establishment of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) as an examination board in 1856, followed by the CGLI in 1879, and the 1889 *Technical Instruction Act*, which financed the creation of some technical colleges and polytechnics, providing the foundation of the later institutions. In 1900, following concerns that the low level of educational attainment was a consequence of divided responsibilities at a national and local level, the Board of Education was established, providing the first single central education authority for England and Wales (Bailey, 2002). The curriculum

provided qualifications in technology, awarded by the Board, in the form of national and higher national certificates and diplomas in subjects such as Building, Chemistry and Mechanical Engineering. However, according to Bailey (2002) the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s meant that the Board's role became one of ensuring that LEA spending remained within Treasury allocations, rather than developing a distinctive national programme of locally delivered vocational training.

Further education did not acquire statutory status until the *Education Act* of 1944, since when it has developed from a limited and vocationally specific part of the national education system, to a sector now delivering the majority of provision for the 16-19 age group, and adults in continuing education, as well as providing 9.4 per cent of all the higher education in England by 1999 (DFEE departmental reports, cited in Parry and Thompson, 2002, p.79).

The 1944 *Education Act* introduced a statutory responsibility for local education authorities (LEAs) to provide for young people, not in full-time education, to attend a college for one day per week and to increase the available opportunities for adult education. In 1944 the existing colleges reflected a variable regional picture of provision, and were well placed to benefit from this new statutory requirement and the related capital building programme. This physical expansion was accompanied by a growth in student numbers, expanding from 1.5 million in 1946 to 4 million in 1975, whilst the number of full-time teaching staff increased

from 5,000 to over 76,000 (Cantor & Roberts, 1979). The nature of further education at this time was very much that of the Technical College, providing vocational training on a day-release basis for young people in employment and a range of adult evening provision, including recreational, which was not accredited. The traditional vocational awarding bodies of CGLI and RSA accredited many of the qualifications offered by colleges, and throughout this period the range and diversity of courses offered expanded to include full-time vocational training and academic education, especially O and A level subjects not usually offered in schools.

Colleges were responsible to, and funded by, the LEAs and a system of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was established to exercise a regional curriculum planning and development function. It could be argued therefore that a local and national infrastructure was being put in place to facilitate the development of a coherent system of post-compulsory education in the UK for the first time.

However, Bailey (2002) argues that the clear and prestigious role outlined for the major technical institutions, which became the CATs following the 1956 White Paper, was not mirrored for colleges lower down the further education ladder.

The expansion of student numbers in further education during the 1950's and 1960's was caused partly by the post-war baby boom, and by a growing awareness, at the policy level, that economic growth was linked to further and higher education. The growth in student numbers was halted by the demographic

downturn in the 1970's, seeing a reduction to 3.5 million by 1980, with however, a rise in staff to 80,000 (Cantor & Roberts, 1979).

The economic prosperity of the post-war years, influenced by reconstruction, high public expenditure and a Keynesian economic approach, also ended in the 1970's because of complex global factors, ranging from the oil crisis to rampant inflation and the stringent conditions imposed on UK economic policy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) when making loans. This situation reflected the consequences of a shift from Fordist to post-Fordist systems of production. Harvey (1989) states that in the West, society is dependant upon production for profit as the basic organising principle of economic life and that this regime of accumulation, and its associated modes of social and political regulation, has undergone changes since the 1973 recession, towards a more flexible regime of accumulation. This regime has a concomitant need for a multi-skilled and flexible workforce, able to cope with the demands of diversification and innovation necessary for a global market operating at an increasing rate of change.

Whilst this is an analysis applied at a later date, it is one which can be seen in James Callaghan's 1976 speech at Ruskin College, in which he criticised the education system for not providing young people with the skills and attributes needed by industry, to be economically competitive. This criticism led to a wave of policy initiatives aimed at vocationalising the system of education and training, attempting to give parity of esteem to vocational and academic qualifications, and

instigating the development of core (later key) skills. All subsequent educational policy has been prefaced by this economic determinant, which has influenced debate about the structure and curriculum of all sectors of the education system.

In further education colleges, the impact of these initiatives was a broadening of the curriculum in the traditional vocational subject areas of business, technology, built environment and leisure & hospitality, with courses such as Ordinary National Diplomas (ONDs) becoming widely accepted by industry and also acting as effective progression routes to higher education, frequently in the form of a Higher National Diploma (HND), also offered by the FE colleges.

A significant structural development during this period was the creation of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in 1974, under the auspices of the Department for Employment; thus separating the benefit function of the Department, from the job-seeking, training and wider workforce functions, and providing the foundations for the current Education and Skills agenda.

The election of a Conservative government in 1979 ushered in a wave of radical reforms of the public sector, in line with the New Right ideology of marketisation, which brought the principles and terminology of the market to the provision of the public services; repositioning students as customers and teachers as managers or facilitators.

Historically, the further education sector has been notable for an ill-defined role, in contrast to the school and HE sectors. This lack of a distinct mission is characterised by the range and diversity of the curriculum and the complex funding arrangements from different sources. The coherent infrastructure, which appeared to be established after the 1944 Act, was inhibited by a confusing funding system through the LEA advanced and non-advanced 'pools' and compounded by the introduction of bids to the MSC for vocational provision in 1984 (Cripps, 2002). Any semblance of coherence was dismantled in 1993 with incorporation, when further education institutions became independent and competing, resulting in a territorially devolved system, with colleges responding to local markets. An attempt to introduce some collaboration between post-compulsory providers and generally raise standards of provision and provide equity of funding, was made in 2000 with the creation of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), to be responsible for funding all post-16 provision, replacing the FEFC, the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and the LEA responsibility for school sixth forms. The aim was to establish equitable rates of funding across the sector, using the FE system which rewards retention and achievement, rather than recruitment. Allied to these structural changes, the curriculum changes of the *Curriculum 2000* initiative and the subsequent proposals of the Tomlinson Working Group were aimed at creating greater coherence and progression opportunities for the 14 plus age group, which would be dependent on local collaborative planning and the use of resources.

The current further education sector displays a diversity which duplicates and overlaps the provision of other sectors (compulsory and higher education), owing something to the heritage of involvement of the embryonic professional associations, prior to 1944. The expansion and change of function since 1944, has occurred with relatively little regulation of curriculum and structure.

Contrasting particularly with the compulsory sector and encouraging a dynamic and responsive culture, used by governments to implement policies of social justice and economic development (DfES *Success for All* 2002). *Success for All* recognises the achievements of the sector in promoting diversity and inclusion; acknowledging that further education is vital to the economic performance of the country and to the achievement of the expansion targets for higher education, especially in the provision of foundation degrees.

Prior to the publication of *Success for All*, a raft of policy papers published in the late 1990s, focused upon the themes of widening participation and raising educational attainment. These included *Learning Works: Widening Participation* (FEFC 1997), *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE 1998), *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE 1999), and *Extending Opportunities and Raising Standards 14 – 19* (DfES 2002). These documents reflect the concerns regarding social exclusion and non-engagement with educational achievement, linking them with the human capital views which promoted the synergy between the educational attainments of a nation and its economic success.

As a policy statement, *Success for All* is very much about lifelong learning, a concept which Hodgson and Spours (1999) describe as not only the organising theme of New Labour's education and training agenda, but also the major policy response to wider national and international economic and social changes. It is a long-term approach, emerging from the globalisation analysis and the rationale that learning is important throughout the lifespan, not only for economic competitiveness, but also for social cohesion, democracy and personal fulfillment. If a national system is to provide opportunities for learning throughout a lifetime, it could be argued that the boundaries between sectors should be permeable and the role of the further education sector, placed between compulsory schooling and higher education, is a conduit for progression. According to Hodgson and Spours (1999), the general concepts of widening participation and social exclusion have become a means of interpreting all aspects of policy on post-16 education and training. The contributing factors to social exclusion are wide-ranging and complex. However, educational policies attempting to promote social inclusion and economic growth, promote widening participation in, and improving access to, higher education, as an aspiration and performance target.

One indicator of social exclusion, at the national level, is the poor performance of the UK in international comparisons of achievement at age 16; with over 40 per cent of young people failing to achieve 5 GCSEs at grade A* - C (Tomlinson 2005). The issue of failure at age 16 and the underlying disengagement of many

young people at age 14, is significant in relation to the reform of the 14 – 19 curriculum, and the policy aspirations to expand higher education, for without improvements in achievement within this age range, the supply of students appropriately qualified for higher education will not be forthcoming (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). It is in this context, that the opportunities available to a merged, dual-sector, institution to influence its own curriculum in order to promote progression, post-16, present a possible policy innovation. However, in order to promote seamless student progression, a dual-sector institution needs to confront the barriers and tensions created by the dualism and distinctiveness of the education sectors on either side of the binary divide.

The policy setting: Markets, Managerialism and Mission

The policy setting in which dual-sector relationships are formed, contains a plethora of legislation and policy documents, but little that could be regarded as a coherent strategy for either separate or unified sectors of further and higher education in England. The boundaries of the current system have been established by the 1988 *Education Reform Act*, the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act* and the 2000 *Learning and Skills Act*. Prior to 1988, the structural architecture of higher education consisted of the universities, in receipt of direct government funding, and the polytechnics and colleges under LEA control. The 1988 Act removed the latter from LEA control and established the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) for the 29 polytechnics and the 28

colleges that met the criteria of 'substantial size' i.e. with 350 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) higher education students and with more than 55 per cent of their activity in higher education. A different body, the Universities Funding Council (UFC), replacing the University Grants Commission, was established to fund the universities. The colleges with a residual amount of higher education remained under LEA control, with two separate streams of funding. Prescribed HE for all first degree, postgraduate and full-time HND and equivalent courses; together with in-service teacher training leading to a recognised qualification, such as a Certificate in Education, which received funding from the PCFC. Non-prescribed HE, mainly the part-time HE programmes, was funded by the local authority through the rate support grant (RSG) and was no longer guided by a central planning agency. The award of qualifications within the sphere of the PCFC - funded institutions tended to remain with the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) or the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC). According to Stubbs (cited in Parry, 2005, p.119), the removal of HE from the local authority system made the mission of FE more prominent and distinct. However, Lucas (1999) argues that the difficulty in defining FE as a national sector, prior to incorporation in the 1992 Act, was that it remained obscured by political localism. Prior to 1992, FE colleges had begun to change in two major ways. There had been a shift from a predominantly part-time, day-release role to a more diverse role, in response to the rise in youth and adult unemployment caused by de-industrialisation and the economic recession of the 1970s. Colleges also started offering a range of higher level courses, as a

consequence of expanding HE, and expanded their non-advanced academic courses, in the form of A levels, as a response to the difficulties being experienced by schools in maintaining viable sixth forms (Lucas, 1999).

The impetus of the 1988 Act, in separating the funding of higher and further education, was continued by the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*. This legislation was a significant reform instrument for both sectors. It removed FE colleges from local authority control (becoming incorporated in September 1993) with their own funding body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). At the same time, it established the polytechnics as universities, with their own degree awarding powers, and created a unified funding body for higher education, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), together with a common quality assurance framework. The concurrent binary divide was, therefore, removed from the higher education system. However, a sequential binary divide within the post-compulsory sector was maintained, with the further education sector being removed from the restrictions of LEA control, enabling it to compete in the ensuing further education marketplace (McGinty and Fish, 1993). This structural separation of further and higher education created a dualism, which is at the heart of this thesis.

The underlying precepts for the incorporation of colleges, those of financial autonomy and improved efficiency, had been established in the 1988 ERA, by enabling the local management of colleges, with delegated budgets, although still

under the auspices of the LEA. The political climate of the early 1990s was influenced by the desire of a centralising government to curb the power and influence of local authorities. Education was also caught up in the marketisation of the public services and the reform agenda of new managerialism (Clarke and Newman, 1997), with the consequent drive to improve service delivery and cost-effectiveness and introduce performance targets, in a move from professional to managerial systems of organisation. The policy climate was also influenced by two significant strategic documents. The first was the *White Paper Education and Training for the 21st Century* (DES, 1991), which for the first time, placed FE at the centre of achieving higher skills and qualifications (Green, 1995). The second was a report by the Audit Commission *Unfinished Business* (1993), which investigated the performance of 16-19 year olds in schools and colleges. The findings reported poor retention and success rates on A level and vocational courses, together with wide variations in costs per student, between institutions, with no discernible relationship between costs and higher achievement. Typically, 30-40 per cent of 16-19 year old students did not complete their qualifications, at a cost of £500 million.

Further education, as defined by the 1992 Act, consisted of the FE colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist colleges. It did not include the wider aspects of post compulsory education and training, which had to wait until the *Learning and Skills Act* of 2000 brought work-based training, adult and community education and school sixth forms into a unified sector (the Learning and Skills sector) with a

common funding body, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a common inspection framework under Ofsted, and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) later incorporated into Ofsted.

The reforms of 1988, 1992 and 2000 reinforced the notion of further and higher education as discrete sectors, with a binary divide in terms of funding, governance and inspection regimes. However, the delivery of higher education was dispersed across the boundaries of FE and HE in a myriad of collaborative arrangements, ranging from formal partnership to franchising and validation (Parry and Thompson, 2002). The public justification offered for maintaining a separation between higher education and the newly-created Learning and Skills sector was, that higher education's contribution to skills and research requirements gave it a national and international remit. It was claimed that to include an element of HE in the remit of the LSC would be to make it so broad that it would be difficult to manage (DfEE 1999:42).

When considering the separate and bounded arrangements for administering FE and HE, it is significant to note the extent of provision occurring across the divide, as an illustration of the possible permeability of the boundaries. Following the 1988 ERA, at least 92 colleges had PCFC funded courses and about 300 colleges offered non-prescribed HE courses, constituting 119,000 students, the majority of whom were part-time enrolments on sub-degree courses. Of these 119,000 students, 20 per cent were funded by the PCFC (Parry, 2003).

According to the DES (1989), the colleges played an important part in 'widening opportunities for students'. On assuming funding responsibilities from their predecessors in 1993, the HEFCE and the FEFC funded approximately 146,000 HE students in the college sector, a not inconsiderable mass of education taking place across sectoral boundaries.

The provision of higher education, outside of the universities, tended to take place in further education settings through a range of collaborative or partnership arrangements (Parry *et al* 2006), which had usually evolved because of local circumstances and may not have been subject to any strategic planning or policy implementation. Parry and Thompson (2002) describe the period of 1987 – 1997 as one of *low policy* for the development of higher education in further education settings, where the activity had been hidden from the documented history of higher education, because it had been eclipsed during the 1980s by the rise of the polytechnics and other large HE providers. They contend that, during this period, the provision of sub-degree education in the colleges had been differentiated by funding, terminology and legislation, in ways that have obscured and confused its identity, whilst increasing its complexity. However, Parry and Thompson describe the period following the publication of the Dearing Report in 1997, until the creation of the LSC in 2001, as one of *high policy*. During this time a special mission was given to the colleges by Dearing, as one of many policy objectives assigned to further education: that of being the site of expanded HE provision aimed at students who do not traditionally progress to higher education

and who seek a local, part-time offer (NCIHE, 1997). To enable the colleges to deliver this particular role, it was recommended that responsibility for funding all provision defined as higher education, be transferred to the HE funding bodies. This was implemented from the academic year 1999 -2000, to include sub-degree provision, such as HNDs and HNCs. It also included foundation degrees, when launched the following year.

At the policy level, it would appear that there is no clear strategic thinking concerning the division of post-compulsory education into further and higher education. HE was removed from local authority control in 1988, making the mission of FE more distinct, and the notion of educational sectors was reinforced by legal definition in the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*. In 2000, the *Learning and Skills Act* established a sector based upon a funding boundary. The semantics are significant in terms of policy implementation, with compliance requirements which can be legally enforced within a legally defined institution i.e. an FE college, but only enforced through the coercive powers of funding and inspection, in a sector defined by its funding agency (the LSC). Colleges within the LSC sector continued to lack a coherent operational vision, recognised in *Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges* published by the DfES in 2005. It was claimed that the further education sector in England lacked a shared sense of purpose, reflecting its historical development and its response to a plethora of changing policy initiatives. The report's author (Foster) stated that the range of potential roles facing colleges far exceeded the

available funding, and that it was this mismatch between function and funding that was at the heart of the dilemma, contributing to the perception of further education as 'the neglected middle child' (Foster, 2005).

Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES, 2006)

emphasised the need for a highly skilled workforce, to compete in a global economy, and asserted the vocational mission of FE colleges. Subsequently, the *Education and Training Act (2006)* allowed colleges to apply for Foundation Degree awarding powers. This initiative was driven by the lobbying of the large mixed-economy colleges in the 157 Group, who argued that they could be more responsive to employer demand in meeting skills deficits than the universities. This could be regarded as a significant transgression of the existing boundaries between the further and higher education sectors. In 2007 the creation of two new government departments the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) with responsibility for further and higher education, and the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS) with responsibility for compulsory education, represented a separation of functional responsibility which could auger a closer alignment of FE and HE, whilst distinguishing them from the schools sector? This separation has been maintained in the creation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) in 2009, to replace DIUS.

Significant to recent policy in relation to expanding higher education outside the universities, is the HEFC review of higher education in further education colleges.

This was published, for consultation with relevant stakeholders, in November 2006 (HEFCE Policy Consultation Document 2006/48). The scale of provision was quantified as over 104,000 students on HEFCE funded programmes in 287 colleges, of whom 52 per cent are part-time, including 22 per cent studying for degrees, 10 per cent studying for foundation degrees and 44 per cent studying for HNDs and HNCs. This presents a significant picture of the curriculum choices made by students undertaking HE in an FE college, with the majority opting for sub-degree qualifications and the HND and HNC remaining resilient, in face of the alternative two-year qualification of the foundation degree. The view of future development is seen as having the following differentiating characteristics from mainstream provision in HEIs (p.10):

- a. a focus on higher level skills and employer engagement
- b. primary focus on the needs of local and regional communities
- c. attracting learners seeking progression opportunities from their FE programmes, or provision not otherwise available locally
- d. a focus on dynamic, flexible, short-cycle provision, delivered in a variety of modes

- e. there should be a general expectation that all HE students should benefit from a high quality learning experience, supported by scholarship

The need for colleges to develop a strategic policy commitment for the development and delivery of their higher education was emphasised, to prevent the short-term and opportunistic provision identified in some instances.

In summary, the policy context of my research is situated illustrates that boundaries between further and higher education have been established and maintained by legislation, since 1988, when the move to a mass system of higher education was occurring. These boundaries exist in respect of funding, governance and compliance systems. However, a substantial amount of activity takes place across sectoral boundaries, with implications for institutional and staff identity and the learning experience of students. In spite of the recommendations of Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) and Foster (2006) concerning the distinctive mission of further education colleges, both as the site of expanding higher education provision at sub-degree level and as the means of training a highly skilled vocational workforce, colleges are still coping with an attenuated range of functions which cross the boundaries of further and higher education at one end of the spectrum and the boundaries of compulsory and post-compulsory education at the other.

This account of the development of both the HE and FE sectors, and the related policy context, illustrates the extremely broad provision now captured within a specific dual-sector institution (Southtown University). The complexity created by this multiplicity of purpose intimates the range of dilemmas and unintended consequences encountered, when trying to form a coherent and unified organisational structure.

At the time of the merger which features in this research Southtown University was a post-1992 vocational university and Riverside College and School of Arts & Design was a large mixed-economy FE college. In January 2004 these institutions formally merged, taking the name of Southtown University. Consequently Riverside College and School of Arts & Design ceased to exist as a legal entity, with its estate and assets transferring to the ownership of the new institution (Southtown University). Each institution, at the time of merger in 2004, was projecting an identity both rooted in its past tradition of vocational skills (albeit at different levels) and aspiring to grow its higher education provision. In each case the institutional identity and its place in the respective sectors could be considered as insecure. Although a university since 1992, Southtown displayed signs of fragmentation, rather than unity, clinging to the identity of various sub-brands, such as College of Music, School of Law. This was supposedly for marketing and reputational reasons, but had elements of subversion in enabling academic staff to opt out of institutional procedures. It is also significant that Southtown was designated a polytechnic only one year prior to re-designation as

a university. Unlike many well established former polytechnics, with clear identities and pride in their distinctive mission, Southtown was still in the process of consolidating its identity from numerous mergers, when faced with the challenge of establishing itself as a new university. Hence the value proposition “we are a university” became a mantra of self-conviction.

In the case of Riverside College and School of Arts & Design, the institution had changed during the 1990s from a Technical College, to a College of Technology, to its designation at merger, illustrating its evolving self-perception and desire to establish a different identity in the local community, where bus drivers and residents continued to refer to “the Tech”. The insecure identities of both institutions pose a number of challenges, which include different missions, cultures, and responses to different policy levers, which will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

The policy context in which both institutions have developed since 1992 is significant to the formation and reconfiguration of their identities. These institutional identities influence the professional identities of academic staff, and the differing sense of place at the separate campuses, impacts upon the student identities and experience. This chapter has articulated the distinctive and differentiated development of the higher and further education sectors in England, giving rise to boundaries between the two. These boundaries influence

differing identities in staff and students, contributing to distinct organisational cultures and inhibiting seamless transition between the sectors.

Chapter 2: The process and methodology of the research

In designing and undertaking this research, I have used an evaluative case - study (Patton, 1987) as the main instrument to investigate the consequences of an institutional merger combining further and higher education in a single institution (Southtown University). In using this approach, the methodology acknowledges the concept of field (Bourdieu, 1998) as a means of conceptualising the relations and interactions within a specific learning site. Bourdieu defines field as a particular social space, involving a configuration of relations between positions. Thus the merged institution can be considered as operating across two social spaces, constituting two overlapping fields, those of further and higher education. Bathmaker (2007) positions these within the wider field of power, where the possession of forms of cultural, social and economic capital are significant and can have differing values in the wider field, from those attributed in the particular social space. The relations and interactions between students, academic staff and the institution have been investigated and analysed in accordance with the themes of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures, determined by a review of relevant literatures, to inform the contextual setting. Emergent data were organised in accordance with themes suggested by the descriptive language of the interviewees. This interpretive approach situates the research within the theoretical perspective of hermeneutics, enabling account to be taken of the intentions and histories of authors and the relationship with the interpreter (Crotty, 1998). The relationship

between interview questions and organising themes is illustrated in Table 2 on p.64

The contextual setting provides a crucial backdrop to inform a reading of the thesis. As an approach to research, this case-study is a critical, reflective account of organisational merger. Consequently, the organisational history of the main case is fundamental to an understanding of the complexities of the merged institution and the organisational cultures prevailing. An extensive analysis of documentation relating to the history of both pre-merger institutions and the publicly available information from quality audits was conducted, comprising the rationale for the institutional merger and the most recent external inspection reports from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). In presenting a case-study as the main research method, I recognise that the researcher controls the parameters, both of the determination of the case and its boundaries, together with the approach to investigation (Bassey, 2000). Consequently there is the potential to conceal, as well as reveal. I have, therefore, attempted to be transparent and objective in the description of the case and in the presentation and analysis of the findings.

In order to provide a comparative dimension to the research, I make limited reference to three other mixed-economy institutions, which formed part of a larger research project, in which I participated. Brief descriptions of these institutions are included in Chapter 3.

Research aim and research questions

My aim was to undertake an evaluative case-study of an institutional merger between a university and a further education college, creating a self-styled dual-sector institution, equally committed to the provision of further and higher education. The rationale for this merger was predicated upon improving student progression from FE to HE and I have collected and analysed data in an attempt to answer the overarching question:

What were the implications of the merger of further and higher education, within a single institution, for the promotion of access to, and widening of participation in, higher education?

Together with the subsidiary questions:

1. What were the student experiences of learning and progression in the dual-sector institution?
2. What were the implications of the dual nature of the institution upon student progression?

3. What impact does dualism have upon academic and institutional identity?
4. What are the implications for the future development of policy and practice in dual-sector institutions?

These questions provided the framework for data collection, outlined below, and the emergent themes are discussed in relation to the relevant literatures, drawing conclusions for future policy implementation and the development of practice.

Duration of the study and the different dimensions of the research

This study was undertaken over a two year period, commencing in June 2006. There were a number of different dimensions to my research, which operated in parallel with two funded research projects, in which I also participated.

Central to my research question are the purposes and perceptions of higher and further education in England, and how these functions are undertaken in different types of institution. Implicit within this question, is the notion of boundaries, within a binary system, and the extent to which this creates a dualism, when a combination of higher and further education is offered by a single institution.

There are many different types of institution, which deliver both further and higher education, and these mixed economies have arisen for a range of reasons and

operate in a multiplicity of ways, hence the historical development of both higher and further education constitutes a significant component of this research.

This contextual setting establishes the concept of dualism as a fundamental strand of the thesis. This is in common with my participation in two other research projects, enabling the research instruments and data collection used in these to contribute to my research. This is compatible with the research capacity building elements of these projects, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the HEFCE, and these different components constitute the three dimensions of the study:

Dimension 1

Independent primary and secondary research; consisting of the literature review and document analysis to provide the contextual setting, the document analysis necessary to write the case study description of Southtown University in Chapter 3, and the presentation and analysis of data.

Dimension 2

This consisted of my contribution to the FurtherHigher Project, funded by the ESRC, in which I participated in the fieldwork team, as a research associate. This involved the design of research instruments (interview schedules), the collection of data, through student interviews and document analysis, the identification of emergent themes and the analysis of qualitative data. I conducted twenty three

interviews, with nine students, over a one-year period, from June 2006 – July 2007. During this time a fellow researcher was also interviewing three students at Southtown, on three occasions, and these data are also included in the student stories in Chapter 5. Following the interviews, data were coded and themed and were available to all researchers within the team. These data were complemented by the availability, to the Project, of national data sets regarding student achievement and progression, from the LSC and the HEFCE, enabling the institutional case studies to be set in a national context.

Dimension 3

The third dimension of this research was facilitated by my participation in the Managing Duality Project, funded by the HEFCE, which was a three-phase research project within the Centre for Research in Tertiary Education at Southtown University. My contribution was to Phase Two, a study of the role of manager-academics within the merged institution. As a research associate, I contributed to the design of the interview schedules, conducted fourteen interviews, presented and analysed data, and co-authored a paper presented at the Higher Education Academy (HEA) conference in July 2007 and, in a revised form, at the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) conference in December 2007.

The research undertaken for the above projects has contributed to this thesis. However, it is a separate body of work, designed as a discrete investigation of a different, although related, research question.

The main research question and sub-questions, suggested a framework for the collection and analysis of data. This analysis used an interpretive approach, appropriate to qualitative research. However, this was supplemented by the use of quantitative data regarding student progression, to provide an element of triangulation and strengthen the robustness of the findings. The analysis and conclusions are set within the theoretical framework and focus upon the implications for future policy in post compulsory education and training.

Pseudonyms have been used for all institutions and students participating in this study, to preserve confidentiality, and in the case of academic staff, only designations have been used. The aspect of confidentiality is discussed further in the ethical considerations, which conclude this chapter.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through interviews with students and academic-managers at the main case-study setting (the interview schedules are included in the appendices). The criteria for the selection of student cohorts, for interview, were the availability of a related progression route, within Southtown University and that no relationship existed with the interviewer.

The cohorts included a range of subjects; comprising music technology, photography and three dimensional design, together with a range of qualifications (National Diplomas (NDs), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Foundation Degrees (FdAs)). This range of qualification type was intended to provide breadth within the sample, and participating students were all volunteers and selected randomly from two different campuses. The academic-managers were selected to provide a cross-section of different designations from each faculty, and from all three sites of the University. They also participated on a voluntary basis and represented staff from the former FE college and the pre-merger university.

Secondary data, collected by the research associates at the other institutions involved in the FurtherHigher Project, and by two other research associates of the Managing Duality Project, were also available for analysis, as were the national data sets of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Document analysis of national policy documents and institutional policy documents, was also undertaken.

Primary data collection methods

The majority of primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with students and academic-managers at Southtown University. Semi-structured interviews were used, in both cases, to ensure consistency of the questions asked, whilst enabling prompting and discussion in relation to the responses.

This approach obtained a richer narrative of experiences and views, than possible with the rigid structure of a questionnaire. All interviews were scheduled for one hour and permission to digitally record interviews was obtained. Transcriptions were produced, for analysis, using pseudonyms, in the case of students, and generic job titles, in the case of academic-managers. When using illustrative quotations, in the presentation of findings, I have attributed these to the student pseudonyms rather than use coding, because I wanted the narrative of the individual learning journey to emerge and felt that the different student identities would have more impact for the reader, if associated with a name.

The student sample was selected from those who progressed from Level 3 to Level 4 qualifications (ND to BA), and from Level 5 to Level 6 qualifications (HND and FdA, to BA third year). It was planned to interview three students from two ND cohorts, and three students from one HND cohort and one FdA cohort, in three stages, providing a total of thirty six interviews for analysis. However, student drop-out and withdrawal from the research resulted in a total of thirty two interviews. The first stage was at the point of progression, to explore the reasons why internal progression was chosen, the second stage was at the end of the first semester, following progression, to explore initial perceptions of the learning experience, and the third stage was towards the end of the second semester in the academic year following progression, to explore perceptions over a period of time and provide some longitudinal data. This sample size provided sufficient evidence for an interpretive analysis of data.

Interviews with a range of middle manager- academics were conducted between April and June 2007, to explore perceptions of their role as academic managers in a dual institution, and the influence of this on student progression. A total of thirty eight interviews took place, from a sample size of one hundred and sixteen, fourteen of which were undertaken by me. The remaining twenty four being conducted by two other researchers who were part of the Managing Duality project team. All interviews were recorded digitally, prior to transcription. In the case of each of the two interviewee populations, similar numbers of interviews were conducted (thirty six and thirty eight). However, a different approach to each sample resulted in three interviews with each of the twelve students, to provide a linear narrative, over time, as opposed to one interview which each academic-manager, to provide a snapshot at a point in time.

The interview schedules used for staff and student interviews are contained in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. The questions were intended as prompts to elicit qualitative responses for interpretative analysis, and do not, therefore, map directly to the sub-set of research questions.

Secondary data collection methods

Document analysis of the institutional policy for the merger of the HE and FE institutions, together with the mission and management structure of the newly

formed institution, constituted the main type of secondary data. My participation in the FurtherHigher Project enabled access to national data sets regarding student participation, namely the Higher Education Student Account (HESA) and the Individual Learner Record (ILR) which provided valuable secondary data for comparative purposes. However, according to Gorard and Smith (2006), the research surrounding widening participation includes much that is deficient because of analytical errors, insufficiently robust data and obfuscation, leading to the reporting of unwarranted causation. Hence the need to guard against complete acceptance of nationally produced statistics, without interrogation of the data for anomalies and misrepresentation. Such anomalies were more apparent in the ILR data, because it tracks learning aims, rather than individual student achievement, as in the HESA return. Another complication when dealing with institutional data, for comparative purposes, is that each institution must submit data to a national student record system; however, different management information systems are purchased by institutions and in the case of dual-sector institutions, there are frequently different systems within the institution for FE and HE. Consequently, a data cleaning process was undertaken by the project team, before using details to substantiate conclusions, but circumspection is still necessary when referring to national data in this area.

The approach to the collection of data was determined by the research question, and the sub-questions which arose from it, together with related data, outlined in Table 1:

Table 1: Research questions and relevant data

Research questions	Relevant data
<p><i>Q1 What is the student experience of learning and progression in a dual-sector institution?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews
<p><i>Q2. What were the implications of the dual nature of the institution upon student progression?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews • Institutional data
<p><i>Q3. What impact does dualism have upon academic and institutional identity?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with staff • Institutional policy documents
<p><i>Q4. What are the implications for the future development of policy and practice in dual-sector institutions?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and student interviews • Government policy documents (Education and Training Bill 2006, the Leitch Review of Skills 2006, World Class Skills DfES 2007 HEFCE Consultation document on HE in FE 2006)

Presentation and analysis of data

The research question, and the four subsidiary questions, provided a framework for the interviews conducted with students and staff at Southtown University. The literature review had identified the themes of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures, which informed the content of the research instruments. What emerged very strongly was a range of student identities, not necessarily conforming to traditional images of widening participation students. Staff identities were heavily influenced by their career history and institutional loyalties. The issue of sectoral boundaries did not feature explicitly in responses, but appeared to be a significant factor underpinning operations. The notion of transition, as applied to students and the organisation, featured very strongly. The emergent data supported the four major themes, validating them as a coding framework for analysis. The distribution of question - focus, in relation to the themes, is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The relationship between themes and interview questions

	Boundaries	Identities	Transitions	Organisational Cultures
Student interviews : focus of questions	<p>Impact of merged institution</p> <p>Space and place</p> <p>Significance of location</p> <p>Application procedures – UCAS?</p> <p>Financial incentives and advice</p> <p>Preparation for progression</p>	<p>Family background</p> <p>School experience</p> <p>Educational attainment</p> <p>Career aspirations</p> <p>Other activities</p>	<p>How were choices made?</p> <p>Influencing factors</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Learning experience FE/HE</p> <p>Support available – who helped?</p> <p>Preparation for progression</p> <p>What next?</p>	<p>Impact of merged institution</p> <p>Space and place</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Learning experience FE/HE</p> <p>Preparation for progression</p>
Academic-manager interviews: focus of questions	<p>Own institutional history</p> <p>Opportunities & challenges of dualism</p> <p>Internal & external factors</p> <p>Benefits for students of a merged institution</p>	<p>Role – responsibilities & relationships, communications, institutional expectations and practice</p>	<p>Suggestions for improvement</p> <p>Systems</p> <p>Support from colleagues</p> <p>Training and development</p>	<p>Own institutional experience, pre and post merger</p> <p>Benefits for students of a merged institution</p> <p>Role – responsibilities & relationships, communications, institutional expectations and practice</p> <p>Suggestions for improvement – systems, support from colleagues, training and development</p>

The qualitative primary data, produced from these interviews is presented in Chapters 4 and 5; structured around the themes of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures. Within these themes, the following questions emerged for discussion:

Boundaries

- How do students encounter, experience and give meaning to moving between the boundaries of FE and HE?
- Are these categories salient and significant for students?
- If FE and HE are salient and significant categories for students, how do they bear upon learning, identity and being?

Identities

- How do students' prior educational experiences and family background impact upon their choices?
- What are the effects of external factors, such as jobs and home circumstances, on the learning experience?
- Are academic staff identities different in FE and HE?

Transitions

- What is the narrative of the students' transition from FE to HE, within a single institution?
- What is the experience of an institution in transition?

Organisational cultures

- What are the differences between organisational cultures in FE and HE?
- To what extent are any differences influenced by forms of funding and governance?
- How do differences impact upon academic identities and student transitions?

My reason for selecting a case-study approach is that it enabled a multi-layered exploration of a number of complex and inter-related issues, of a significant case, the critical analysis of which could have an impact for future policy-making in the field of post compulsory education and training in England. A case study is a form of evaluation, the purpose of which, according to Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (1985) is not to prove, but to improve. Evaluation is therefore presented as a form of applied social research, the primary purpose of which is not to discover

new knowledge, but to study the effectiveness with which existing knowledge is used to inform and guide practical action (Clarke, 1999). The desired objective of this research was to examine the way in which the implementation of policies to increase access to higher education and widen participation, could influence the permeability of boundaries between further and higher education, and the impact this permeability, or seamlessness, had on student progression and systems of management and governance within a merged institution. This merged institution formed the main site of investigation (the case), but comparisons were made with other types of mixed economy institutions, to enable a wider, and more robust, evaluation of the implementation of government policy objectives.

There is a distinction between evaluation and research made by Patton (1986), which was appropriate to my choice of research strategy, the case study. He regards the primary purpose of evaluation as the provision of information to decision makers regarding future policy, whereas research tends to place a greater emphasis on generalisability, causality and credibility. According to Lamnek (2005) the case study is a type of research approach situated between data collection methods and methodologic paradigms. In this sense, Southtown University constitutes an organisational paradigm, which is an exemplar or prototype of a dual-sector institution, and a study of the case will illustrate how the merger was managed, with what consequences for the main predicated objective, that of improving student progression, and whether it could be a model for future FE/HE delivery. Its selection, as a case, concurs with Stake's

description of the case as a specific, complex, functioning thing, with a bounded identity.

The selection of the case study, as an appropriate research strategy, is further justified by Yin (2003), who provides a technical definition for the case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

This definition emphasises the pertinence of contextual conditions to the phenomenon being studied. Yin goes on to state that in real-life situations, context and phenomenon are not always distinguishable. Hence an extended technical definition, which cites the case study as being able to cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points. As a result, it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

In applying Yin's definition to this thesis, the merger of Southtown University and Riverside College, constitutes the phenomenon in its real-life context, with the relationship (boundary) between the decision for the merger and the policy context in which it occurred, not being clearly evident. Multiple sources and types

of evidence have been used to address the need for convergence and triangulation, enabling the theoretical propositions outlined in Tables 1 and 2, to guide the data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research I have adhered to the code of ethics of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and, because some data collection was undertaken as part of a funded project, the Research Ethics Framework of the ESRC.

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000) regard the nature of practice-based social science research, such as that in education, to be complex and subtle, because the subject matter and methods can have a significant effect upon the participants. Consequently, the issue of informed consent by the participants is crucial. Diemer and Crandall (1978) identify four elements of informed consent: -

- Competence – the participants are capable of making the decision
- Voluntarism – ensure that participants are free to choose
- Full information – regarding the collection and publication of data
- Comprehension – the implications and possible consequences of participation are understood

This case study has observed these four elements in undertaking the inquiry. The participants, institutions, staff and students, were all capable of making the decision whether, or not, to participate in the research, having been informed of the purpose and outputs of each research project, to which they were contributing, and advised that the data would also be used in my doctoral research. The implications and possible consequences of participation centered upon the issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

The two most significant ethical considerations which emerged during the research process were, firstly, that of anonymity and the preserving of confidentiality, for both the institutions and individuals participating; and secondly, that of conducting inside research within my own institution, and the potential for conflicting roles and interests that this can cause. With regard to anonymity, I have considered the view taken by each of the funded research projects, in which I participated. Here, the differing approach to the issue of confidentiality, at the institutional level, taken by these two projects is significant. The ESRC funded FurtherHigher Project assured each of the four participating institutions of confidentiality, when publishing the research findings. This was regarded as crucial, because of the possibly contentious and political nature of the conclusions, and essential in obtaining the co-operation of senior management in these institutions. This was achieved by using pseudonyms for each institution, and their different sites. However, because of the particularity of these institutions, it could be argued that the pseudonyms provide only a thin veil of

anonymity, and an informed audience will be able to identify the specific institutions. The HEFCE funded Managing Duality project adopted a different approach, feeling that as only one UK institution was included in the research, and because its recent history of merger rendered it easily identifiable, the decision was made to name all the institutions participating in this internationally comparative research.

This presented an ethical dilemma, when considering how to present my own research findings, using data obtained as part of two different investigations. I decided that I needed to preserve the confidentiality of the main case study institution and those others participating in the ESRC funded project, even though the main case study institution has been disclosed in the HEFCE funded research project. In order to do this, I have used a different set of pseudonyms for all institutions and their campuses, so that links cannot be easily made with institutions featuring in other published research. It could be argued that this decision to preserve the anonymity of the case study site is one that will fail with an informed audience and could possibly weaken the research findings. However, I feel that there is a significant difference between publicly declaring the identity of an institution and the ability of a knowledgeable audience to deduce that identity. The strategy for protecting confidentiality was agreed by the FurtherHigher project directors and all participating institutions were assured of confidentiality. Therefore, I consider myself ethically bound by this agreement to

protect institutional identity, even though readers conversant with the field might feel able to penetrate the cloak of anonymity.

In all cases, the confidentiality of individuals has been preserved, through the use of pseudonyms, in the case of students, and designations, in the case of staff.

The second ethical consideration, that of conducting inside research in my own institution raises the issue of the possible conflicts occurring between my roles as a research associate, an academic-manager, and a lecturer. This was resolved by not interviewing any students or staff in my own faculty, or with whom I had a working relationship, thereby preserving an element of distance and impartiality. The role of an inside researcher also raises the issue of operating within appropriate boundaries when collecting data to ensure objectivity, and not abusing confidences gained in another context. When anecdotal evidence has been used, the source has not been stated, to preserve confidentiality, and it was of a lower order when informing conclusions.

Chapter 3: The case study site: Southtown University

This chapter provides a detailed description of the case-study site, by drawing upon a range of sources to conduct an historical and multi-level analysis of the two institutions which formed the merged university, together with the rationale for merger. Southtown University is the main setting of this research, and represents the pseudonym of the institution pre and post-merger. Prior to the merger, the university had two campuses (City and Midtown), and the College consisted of two sites in the town of Riverside, at Queens Road and Albert Road. The following documents have been reviewed:

- The proposal for the merger of Riverside College and Southtown University. Joint document (2003)
- Ofsted and QAA reports on Riverside College and Southtown University (2003 and 2005)
- Minutes of the University's Academic Board (2004 – 2007)
- University Strategic Plan (2004)
- Appointment Pack for the new Vice – Chancellor (2006)

In January 2004, the merger created the first (self-proclaimed), dual-sector institution in England. The background of both institutions, prior to merger, is significant to an understanding of both the educational setting, and organisational context, in which data were collected.

Institutional History

Southtown University had a long history of mergers, prior to acquiring university status in 1992, as a result of the *Further and Higher Education Act*. Unlike many of the newly created universities, it did not have an established identity as a polytechnic, having only been designated as such in 1991. The institution, in 1992, consisted of former Colleges of Higher Education and a College of Music, and in 1995 a subsequent merger occurred with a College of Nursing and Midwifery. The main campus, in an urban setting on the edge of a metropolis (City), dates from 1860, when it was founded as a school, and there are three other buildings, within a five mile radius, comprising both purpose- built teaching accommodation and leased office buildings. There is also another campus in a town fifteen miles to the west (Midtown), which was a former College of Higher Education, housed in purpose-built accommodation, dating from the 1960s.

The curriculum offer, prior to merger, consisted of: business, law , finance and accountancy, computing, tourism and hospitality, music, visual arts and media, nursing and midwifery, psychology, counselling and complementary medicine. The University was organised in three faculties, the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, the Faculty of Professional Studies and a College of Music and Media. It employed 1,150 full-time equivalent staff and in 2002/2003 its turnover was £63 million, with an asset base of £39 million. Funding was received from the HEFCE, the LSC and the National Health Service (NHS) for courses in nursing

and 'professions allied to medicine', and the ratio of part-time to full-time students was 2:1. Student numbers, at the time of merger with Riverside College were stated as headcounts, rather than full-time equivalents (FTEs), as follows:

	Year 2002/03
Further education students	6,638
Higher education students	15,650

Riverside is located forty miles west of Southtown and Riverside College was opened in 1955, as a Technical College, with a purpose-built campus in Queens Road, in the town centre. This included specialist accommodation for vocational training in engineering, the built environment and art and design. By the 1980s, the College had acquired a school campus, on the outskirts of the town (Albert Road) and had become a general further education college, offering a wide range of academic and vocational programmes for young people and adults. Throughout the 1990s, the College expanded its higher education provision, particularly through the merger, in 1997, with a College of Art and Design. At the time of merger, the college included a number of outreach centres in leased premises, mainly for the provision of Learndirect training.

In 2004, Riverside College employed 569 full-time equivalent staff, with a turnover of £26 million and an asset base of £37 million. Since incorporation in 1993, it had maintained its financial status as Category A. The College was

organised in three faculties and one school, the Faculty of Education and Care, the Faculty of Business and Service Industries, the Faculty of Technology and the School of Arts & Design. Funding was received from the LSC for further education and from the HEFCE for higher education, both directly and through franchise arrangements with a number of universities (including Southtown). There was also an element of prescribed higher education, funded by the LSC, for professional adult qualifications, such as teacher training and accountancy. Of the student population, approximately 26 per cent were full-time and 16 per cent were higher education students. Student numbers, at the time of merger were stated as headcounts, rather than full-time equivalents (FTEs), as follows:

	Year 2002/03
Further education students	13,401
Higher education students	1,233

Rationale for the merger

The proposal for merger was made by the two institutions in February 2003, following separate and joint discussions and consultations with a range of stakeholders, prior to submission for formal approval by the funding bodies (HEFCE and LSC) and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

The proposal stated that:

it is unique in that it will create for the first time a regional vocational university working strongly across the interface of further and higher education. A primary aim of the merger is to facilitate increased progression of learners from further into higher education programmes (P9).

It also stated that the merged University would have sufficient activity at both further and higher education levels, to provide 'cradle to grave' services for its regional communities.

One of the main drivers for the merger was the identification by Riverside College that it needed a single partner institution, with a complementary mission, to meet the growing demands of widening participation. Southtown University was regarded as the most appropriate institution for this purpose and a Structural Options Review by external consultants, commissioned by the local LSC, confirmed the complementary nature of the two institutions, recommending full merger as the best available option for improving progression from further to higher education. Why the College needed a single partner to meet the growing demands of widening participation, is not specified in this document, nor the demands quantified. It is, therefore, open to the interpretation that the College needed more HE student numbers, to expand its HE provision, and that relationships with existing university partners could not provide this. Southtown University had an under-used allocation of student numbers, which could be shared in a merged institution as opposed to franchised in a collaborative arrangement. It is also interesting to note that the partnership with Southtown

University was not of long standing, whereas older and more extensive partnerships existed with other universities. Although the proposal document provided a stated mission, vision and objectives for the merged organisation (outlined below), it was not made public why these objectives had been determined, or how they would be achieved. With the benefit of hindsight, writing five years after the merger, they appear to be an ill-conceived wish list, with no systematic attempt to monitor their achievement at an institutional level.

The Mission

Joint statement for the proposed merged institution:

To create a vocational university of quality serving all members of the community throughout their lives and careers, meeting their changing needs and supporting the developing regional economy (P11).

The Vision

It is intended that the new university will provide comprehensive post-16 education for the people of the region. It will be based upon a commitment to lifelong learning provided within a framework of credit accumulation and transfer that breaks down the barriers between vocational and academic, full-time and part-time and further and higher education. It will be responsive to the needs of individuals, employers and communities. It will enable individuals to progress to the highest levels of achievement at their own pace and in accordance with their ability to benefit (P11).

Objectives

The proposal document contained ten objectives, which are summarised below, together with milestones and benchmarks relevant to this research:

1. To extend participation in education, learning and training in all areas.
 - a) Within five years to have increased the number of FE learners by 52 per cent
 - b) Within five years to have increased the number of HE learners by 34 per cent

2. To contribute to the raising of student retention and achievement within the region.
 - a) Within two years to improve student retention on FE programmes by 5 per cent and on HE programmes by 10 per cent
 - b) Within two years to improve achievement rates on FE programmes by 8 per cent and on HE programmes by 5 per cent

3. To improve the quality of education and training and further and higher education levels.

4. To develop a comprehensive quality assurance framework.

5. To provide for those institutions that wish to participate a coherent student progression framework through the development of regional 'Associate College' and 'School Compact' initiatives.
 - a) Within one year to engage three institutions in the Associate College framework and ten schools in a compact agreement.
 - b) Within three years to progress at least 500 students in at least five discipline areas through the framework, and at least 150 students through compact arrangements.

6. To provide routes of progression and support for the introduction and further development of regional Centres of Excellence (CoVE) and New Technology Institutions (NTI).

7. To work positively with other regional further and higher education partners in meeting the challenges of raising quality of provision and meeting the Government's objective of widening participation.

8. To develop a multiple entry/exit learning strategy allowing students to enter and progress their studies, utilising Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), blended learning and e-learning.

9. To improve the ability of a single institution to respond to the diverse training needs of regional employers, and thus support the regional economy.

10. To develop a university which can cost-effectively deliver high quality education and training programmes.

a) Within two years of merger, to reduce overheads of the combined institution by 5 per cent.

It is not the intention of this thesis to investigate the extent to which the merger of Riverside College and Southtown University met the objectives stated in the merger proposal, merely to examine the ways in which the primary aim of the merger – ‘to facilitate increased progression of learners from further education into higher education programmes’ - was addressed, through the creation of a unified organisation and the impact which the merger had upon the learning experience of students.

Size and scope of the merged University

At the time of merger, Southtown University was described as having over 45,000 students, employing 1,700 staff and with an annual budget of £110 million. Approximately 39 per cent of its students were full-time; 61 per cent were female; 71 per cent were over 21; 95 per cent were home/EU. 60 per cent

declared 'white', 17 per cent 'black', 14 per cent 'Asian' and 9 per cent other. For the first full year following the merger, income for 2005/6 comprised 31 per cent from HEFCE, 20 per cent from the NHS, 20 per cent from the LSC, 18 per cent from tuition fee income, 1 per cent from research and the remaining 10 per cent was classified as commercial. The student population consisted of 72.7 per cent studying higher education and 27.3 per cent further education, expressed as full-time equivalents (FTEs).

In 2004/5 the University recorded a deficit before tax of £2.2 million. Immediately post-merger, planning had been based on the assumptions that there would be fully funded growth in student numbers and efficiency gains in course provision to offset the costs of integrating the HE and FE operations. It was considered that in due course, the university would benefit from the increased internal progression of FE students (merger document p.11 – 13). However, there were no material increases in funding available for additional students, either in HE or in FE, and the University incurred significant costs in setting up a structure for the combined institution, leading directly to the deficit (Appointment of Vice-Chancellor Information Pack, p.13).

Actions to achieve financial stability in 2005/06 were initiated and the five year financial forecasts show that by July 2006 the University was moving to a surplus. However, a substantial deficit was still in place when the new Vice-

Chancellor took up post in July 2007, which was eliminated by cost reductions during the academic year 2007/08.

It was noted at the Academic Board on 29 March 2006, that academic proposals within the Strategic Plan would need to be revised and that robust planning would be necessary to respond to changes in funding. The Board of Governors agreed, therefore, that it was not possible for the University to progress with a flat income stream as that would necessitate annual cost cutting and that the University would have to be ambitious in terms of its growth and increase in income (AB minutes, item 5).

Review by external agencies

Prior, and subsequent to the merger, the constituent parts of the organisation were subject to review and inspection by external agencies, namely the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). These agencies each have a different function and remit, reflected in the process and outcomes of their scrutiny. The QAA conducts academic reviews of higher education institutions, the purpose of which is to ensure that institutional processes are sufficiently robust to instill public confidence in the award of qualifications and that a process of quality improvement, based upon self-evaluation, is promoted. Ofsted, which has responsibility for organisations offering education and training funded by the

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the LSC, undertakes institutional inspections, to ensure compliance, and grades are awarded for different aspects of institutional provision. The outcomes of a QAA review are expressed as one of three options, confidence, limited confidence , or no confidence; whereas the outcomes of an Ofsted inspection are expressed as one of five grades for each aspect of the inspection, with grade one being outstanding and grade five being unsatisfactory.

The following information is based upon published reports from the specified agencies and internal documents.

Southtown University and the QAA

In 1997, following adverse press comment on the examination practices, the Board of Governors asked the QAA to undertake a 'special review' into academic quality and standards. The report published in November 1998 identified 'some significant management failures' and recommended that the University draw up an action plan to address the fact that standards 'were and are under threat' and proposed a full institutional review in 2002 (QAA report of the Institutional Review March 2003).

The University's Self Evaluation Document (SED) for this review noted that all senior post -holders had been replaced by a completely new management team

along with the re - organisation of provision and a new academic structure and quality system. It also noted that a merger was planned with Riverside College. The then current Vice-Chancellor had announced his planned retirement and the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor was announced shortly before the review. The 2002 review resulted in a judgment of 'broad confidence'.

In November 2005, a QAA Institutional Audit was undertaken which also resulted in a judgment of 'broad confidence'. As part of its recommendations for action, the team felt it would be 'desirable' for the University to:

expedite the integration of the Riverside Campus into the University's structures to secure the early establishment of the requisite culture and ethos of all students involved in programmes leading to higher education awards of the University.

The discipline audit trails (DATs) in art and design included nine HNDs and BAs at Riverside (204 FTEs) and five provided by a Community College, as part of a collaborative arrangement.

The audit found a lack of evidence of clear links between local and University teaching, learning and assessment strategies, reinforcing the team's advice that the University elaborate the emergent University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and move to early and universal implementation across the University (p.27). Riverside students identified a lack of dedicated space, both teaching and social, for HE, as did staff. The report noted:

The University has responded by creating disciplinary zones in which FE and HE students are co-located but in such a way that the separate and collective needs of both groups can be recognised and met. (p.28). It was also noted that students reported a view that:
the administrative support systems at Riverside were not sufficiently responsive to the differing nature and maturity of the FE and HE students (p.28).

The report concluded:

From scrutiny of documents and discussion with staff at Riverside and at university level, the audit team was clear that the University was aware of the necessity of fostering of an HE culture at Riverside and that some action had been taken. In response to the identification through its own internal procedures of the need for action to inculcate an HE culture at the Riverside Campus, the University appointed a Head of Art and Design with a specific remit to provide HE leadership. The team noted action already taken by the University but would urge it to move to early implementation in full of its plans to establish an appropriate experience for its HE students on its Riverside Campus (p.28).

In its response to the audit report it was noted that:

The University's 2006 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) includes the faculty strategies. Its priority areas include: sharing models of good practice across further and higher education; enhancing the quality of student assessment and feedback; developing a framework of continuous professional development for teaching and learner support staff. The strategy incorporates the recommendation for an institutional framework for personal development planning. The schedule for implementation will be in line with the associated action plans.

The two recommendations referring to assessment and feedback have been incorporated into the LTAS, and include a University-wide action learning project to research assessment practice in both further and higher education, including collaborative provision.

The development of an integrated higher education culture following a merger between a University and a large college of further education is not quickly accomplished. It is the theme of the University's 2006 Annual Teaching Conference. We have put in place necessary structural and personnel changes (including the designation of Technology as a faculty). To facilitate integration we have established a Progression Support Team, to work with academic groups to effect the further changes necessary to achieve the targets established in the Merger Action Plan. Those targets include: continuity of the student experience across the boundary of further and higher education; development of curriculum models which characterise systematic progression to graduateness, including a review of level 3 provision to see where concepts of higher education might be extended; rationalisation of the curriculum offer to provide a level 4 foundation of subject-based core concepts and skills, with increasing specialisation as the student progresses, and awards defined at exit rather than at entry; a more supportive entry into higher education first year experience with an emphasis on continuity of learning and regular formative assessment; and the provision of work based learning and the accreditation of prior experience and learning to students with non-traditional entry qualifications. (p.47, LTAS)

Riverside College and Ofsted

Riverside College was inspected by Ofsted in November 2003. The quality of provision was found to be unsatisfactory in: science and mathematics, construction, ICT, hairdressing and beauty therapy. Work based learning, which is applicable to hairdressing, hospitality, sports, leisure and tourism, and visual and performing arts and media, was also found to be unsatisfactory.

The re - inspection in November 2005 noted that Riverside had merged with Southtown University and that 'The responsibility for leadership and

management of FE provision at the former Riverside College now rests with Southtown University.’ (Re - inspection Report p.2)

The outcomes were:

Curriculum Area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3
Construction	4	3
ICT	4	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4	3
Hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism	4	3
Visual and performing arts and media	4	3
Work-based learning	4	3

The unsatisfactory Ofsted report and the subsequent re-inspection, led to an action plan and improvement strategy which included significantly more remission from teaching being allocated to staff with curriculum management

responsibilities, and the setting up of a central team to support improvement of retention and achievement, including designated Specialist Personal Tutors and a student mentor scheme.

Healthcare provision

In 2005, a major review of the University's healthcare programmes was carried out. The Department of Health in partnership with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Health Professions Council and the Strategic Health Authorities had contracted with QAA to carry out reviews of all NHS funded healthcare programmes in England during 2003-06. The review reported 'confidence'.

The revised quality management system

In December 2004 a new unified structure for quality management, clarifying responsibilities for FE and HE quality, and placing both within the remit of the Quality Audit Office, was outlined to Academic Board and the Director of FE was given the responsibility for leading an FE quality support network. The Chair informed members that the Board of Governors were aware of the cultural differences between FE and HE and that it was essential to harmonise variations (Minute 12.2 AB 15 December 2004).

Structure of the merged organisation

The responsibility for the governance and management of Southtown University is divided between the Board of Governors, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Academic Board (Appointment of Vice-Chancellor Information Pack, p.15).

A new structure for the merged organisation was adopted by the Academic Board in September 2004. This consisted of three faculties and a fourth area, Technology, which was not initially a faculty, because of its small amount of HE provision, but which became one in September 2006. In addition the 14-19 Academy and the Graduate School were created. It was decided to separate the responsibilities for:

developing a coherent set of curriculum and qualification offerings that attract high levels of demand' and 'bolstering our staff development, general levels of scholarship and our reputation within subject areas' (p.18 Strategic Plan). 'Directors of studies for curriculum clusters will lead on curriculum and qualification development, and will have roles crossing subject areas. Heads of subject area will have responsibilities for staff and subject development and will have roles extending from taught postgraduate work through undergraduate work to further education (p.19 Strategic Plan).

The Sixth Form Academy and the Graduate School lie outside this formal structure, but 'cross-working would be encouraged' (p.19).

The university did not originally identify Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs), instead this function was incorporated in the Dean of Faculty role. The Director of Further Education was made PVC FE in 2006. Both the 14-19 Academy and the Faculty of Technology have a Head.

The middle management roles are those of Head of Subject and Director of Studies. The respective role summaries are:

Head of Subject (HOS)

To provide effective academic leadership in the defined academic area and to develop and manage staff within the academic group.

Director of Studies (DOS)

To ensure the continuing appeal, quality, standards and efficiency of the Faculty's (FE/Undergraduate/Postgraduate) course portfolio in the context of the Faculty's academic and strategic plan.

Within Faculties, there are Directors of Study with specific curricular responsibilities in HE and Directors of Study with responsibilities for FE, working with the PVC FE through the FE network.

When the new structure was adopted it had been agreed that the structure should be flexible to allow the faculties to move forward in a way that would suit the needs of each faculty and that only HoS and DoS would be defined.

However, by the end of 2005:

at FE level there was a commonality of need which suggested that whilst individual specification was unnecessary, identification of particular roles was required. It was therefore proposed to define the next level, that of Curriculum Leader. This role equates most closely with the Curriculum Manager role at the former Riverside College and Programme Leader role at the former Southtown University, the new role should bring together these two roles and identify generic areas of responsibility. (AB 6 July 2005, item 8)

At Riverside College and School of Arts and Design, Curriculum Managers had responsibility for both staff and resources, as well as the curriculum offer in specified areas of learning, with Programme Leaders taking responsibility for individual courses. While at Southtown University, Programme Leaders had responsibility for suites of programmes. This reflected the difference between the funding and quality regimes and, specifically, the fact that in the case of FE qualifications and awards were controlled by external bodies. It was proposed that, despite these differences, significant areas of generic operation could be identified and a new role defined encompassing:

- course and curriculum development, offer and delivery
- strategic and business planning
- performance measurement
- quality enhancement
- operational management
- acting as a development role for academic leadership within the subject area.

(Paper, '*On Academic Leadership and Structure*', presented to Academic Board 6.7.05)

The roles and responsibilities of Curriculum Leaders would be a blend of delegated roles and responsibilities from both Directors of Study and Heads of Subject and would include resource and staff management. The main duties

were set out separately for FE and HE to reflect the differences in the sectoral regimes. However, by the end of the 2007/08 academic year, the term Curriculum Leader is used only in relation to FE staff, and has not been applied to the HE role.

In July 2005 Academic Board and the Board of Governors (Academic Board 6 July 2005 and Joint Board/Academic Board away day 12 July 2005) considered a paper '*On Further Education, Academic Structure and Governance*', which identified a possible lack of integration of further and higher education, as a potential risk to the University. During 2004-5, a Further Education Network had been established to support the work of the faculties and subject groups in their further education operations and it was proposed to 'modify the academic structure to fully embed the operational experiences gained to date' (6 July 2005, item 9). This would involve the creation of a Further Education Academy (later titled Further Education College), which would incorporate the Network and include the 14-19 Academy and would mirror the operations and design of the Graduate School.

The main areas of operation for the Further Education Academy were to be:

- Planning and monitoring links with the Learning and Skills Council
- Staff Development

- Curriculum Development in line with national and regional priorities
- Quality Improvement and the student experience for further education programmes.

While the 14-19 Academy would operate within the Further Education Academy, staff and programmes would be brought into the operation of subject groups and faculties where possible. Proposals for provision developed in the Academy and discussed within the FE Network would proceed to the Academic Planning Committee (APC) with the support of the relevant subject group through the appropriate Faculty Board; cross subject programmes however, would be handled at the FE Academy Board before proceeding to the APC (with the opportunity for prior comment by Faculty Boards). Regardless of approval route, operational arrangements for 14-19 programmes would be handled by the appropriate Curriculum Leader in collaboration with the Head of the Academy and the relevant HoS and DoS. So, for instance, A levels and GCSEs could be offered as part of a coherent provision of subjects as well as on a 'pick and mix' basis consistent with *Curriculum 2000* initiatives.

Prior to merger, in order to address the responsibility of the Southtown University Board of Governors for FE, the Board had established a separate Further Education Board, as a joint committee of Academic Board and the Board of Governors. After the merger this Further Education Board continued, with a remit covering all aspects of FE provision, including the FE aspects of the strategic

plan and the three year development plan. Its purpose and remit was agreed in April 2005. However, with the extension of FE provision (to approximately 30 per cent) created by the merger, it was subsequently proposed in July 2005, that the remit of the Board of Governors was amended to strengthen the role of the Board to reflect FE as an integral part of the Board's responsibilities with regard to educational character, mission, financial performance and conditions of work for the staff (AB 6 July 2005, item 9). The FE Academy Board would be equivalent to a Faculty Board, reporting to the Governors via Academic Board, with two Governors becoming co-opted members and its was changed to Further Education College in September 2005.

This information, obtained from an analysis of internal documents, presents a picture of a complex institution, in the process of transition. It has a long history of differing and evolving identities in three geographical locations, with funding being received from three sources (the HEFCE, the LSC and the NHS). As a self styled dual-sector organisation, it is positioned across the binary divide of the two sectors of post-compulsory education, established by the 1992 Act, and has, therefore, to operate within the boundaries of separate funding, governance and inspection regimes. It is apparent from this historical and multi-level analysis of the two components of the merger, that the resulting organisation is large, geographically dispersed and contains diverse staff and student groups. It also needs to address external inspection failings in its further education provision. This complexity of the case study site, illustrates the significance of the themes of

boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures as informing constructs for interpretive analysis.

As previously stated, it is not the intention of this thesis to critique the success of the institutional merger which created the dual-sector institution. However, it would appear that the good practice identified by the HEFCE in *Mergers in the higher education sector: A guide to good practice* (2004) was not adhered to. This guide refers to the importance of building a structured business case, to support the rationale for merger, and writing a detailed business plan for the achievement of objectives and identification of risks. The importance of developing an outline estates strategy is emphasised, as the related infrastructure costs are frequently the largest cost of any merger, together with the need to identify potential increased levels of activity, resulting in short term increases in costs, rather than savings. It is significant to the conclusions of this research, that there is no record of a detailed business plan and risk analysis in the merger proposal.

The comparative dimension

As previously stated, the availability of data from three other research sites, allows a comparative dimension to this case study. The four institutions participating in the FurtherHigher Project were selected as exemplars of the broad distinctions within FE/HE duality and thus enable comparisons and

distinctions to be drawn, which will enhance the conclusions of this thesis. The nature of each institution, at the time of enquiry, is therefore significant, providing the following typology:

- A. A university merged with a former FE college, providing FE and HE, subject to a mission change at the time of merger.

- B. An HE college, in transit from being a specialist FE provider, and by developing franchised HE provision, has recently applied for, and been given degree awarding powers and university college status.

- C. An FE college, offering predominantly FE provision, with selective extension into HE.

- D. An FE college offering separate FE and HE provision, currently restructuring into distinct FE and HE corporate identities.

This typology categorises the organisations as subject to mission change (A and B), or developing their products (C and D). In the case of C, this is through product innovation, in a franchise relationship; and in the case of D, it is through organisational differentiation, with a franchise relationship for HE provision operated through a company wholly owned by the validating universities.

The case study site for this research belongs to type A. The two institutions decided upon full merger as the most appropriate option of duality, to meet their need for mission change, making the merged institution distinct from the other three types. These retained their positioning in either the further or higher sectors, and in the case of type D, formally uncoupled the further and higher functions, creating separate institutions.

In summary, Southtown University's pursuit of mission change sought to achieve growth in both further and higher education student numbers, to widen participation in education, to develop its regional provision to industry and the community, and reduce costs. This was an ambitious agenda, regarded as feasible by the relevant funding bodies, supporting the merger; despite the significant financial problems experienced by the university and the quality problems, identified by external inspection, of the college. The institution recognised the challenges and complexities, particularly the difficulty of creating an integrated organisational culture incorporating both further and higher education, acknowledged in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The differences between the two cultures are illustrated in the following binary:

Cultural differences between higher and further education

Higher Education	Further education
Collegiate ethos	Managerial ethos
Flat management structure	Hierarchical management structure
Proactive approach to the external environment	Reactive approach to the external environment
Tendency towards a liberal curriculum	Tendency towards an instrumental curriculum
Empowering approach to learning	Prescriptive approach to learning

These differences in organisational cultures contributed to the duality which persisted within the merged institution and the task of integration was not aided by the financial health of the university, at the time of merger, nor the quality problems faced by the college. Each of these issues had the potential to cause anxieties for staff, and the complex management structure adopted by the merged institution created ambiguities and ambivalences in the key academic-management roles of Head of Subject and Director of Studies. The perceived overlap of function between these roles did not provide clarity of decision-making and line-management responsibility. These tensions, caused by the duality inherent in the merged institution, will be explored in the next two chapters by an analysis of staff perspectives and student experiences within the merged Southtown University.

Chapter 4

Staff perspectives: an exploration of academic identities

In exploring the academic identities of staff in the merged institution, it is necessary to emphasise the difficulties and dilemmas inherent within a dual-sector institution with an aspiration to create a seamless transition from further to higher education.

The previous chapter has identified some of the operational problems faced by the merged institution, concluding that some potential risks were identified, but that a strategy for addressing them was not implemented systematically. This indicates a naivety of approach, not recognising the ways in which dualism could impact upon staff experiences, in opposition to the aspirations of the merger. In this chapter I present the findings of my research from the interviews with academic – managers, directly involved with the operation of management systems aspiring to create a unified organisation. Their perceptions are therefore, very relevant to the main and subsidiary research questions. The presentation of findings is arranged around the themes of identities, boundaries, transitions and organisational cultures, identified in Chapter 2. Extracts from interviews are presented as part of an interpretive account of the lived experience of being an academic-manager within the dual-sector institution, and as a response to the

tensions of duality and organisational change caused by the transition of the merger.

The notion of internal boundaries, caused by sector dualism, the divergence of organisational cultures, and the impact this has on self-perceptions of identity, are explored. Illustrative quotations are used to enhance this descriptive summary.

At the time of interview, there were forty Heads of Subject (HoS) and Directors of Study (DoS) and a further seventy six Programme and Curriculum Leaders (PL and CL) within the institution, with a number of individuals working in more than one of these roles. It was decided to interview a large proportion of the HoS/DoS population, twenty six of the possible forty, as these posts are crucial to the operation of the university. However, a lesser proportion of the PL/CL population was interviewed, twelve of the possible seventy six, to prevent a possible skewed viewpoint, as their role has less responsibility and because they are in post at Riverside only. The interviewees are identified by an individual code, which consists of their interviewee number (1 – 38) accompanied by an identifier of their campus (C for City, R for Riverside and M for Midtown).

There is a strong focus in the literature on management in higher education that contrasts 'collegial' with 'managerialist' conceptions of management in higher education. This has resulted, in part, from a perception that the managerial

practices of the business sector have been imported into higher education without account of the public service traditions of the university sector. This phenomenon is often referred to as 'new managerialism' (Clarke and Newman, 1997). However, the market-driven assumptions of new managerialism are even more firmly embedded within further education than in higher education institutions (Randle and Brady, 1997).

The collegial/managerial dichotomy tends to overlook the fact that most academic - managers in higher education regard themselves primarily as academics rather than managers, a nuance conveyed by the phrase 'manager-academics' (Deem *et al*, 2001). In this study, however, it would not be safe to assume that Heads of Subject and Directors of Study who were employees of the former further education college will share the same set of academic values as manager-academics from the former university. Arguably the incorporation of further education colleges in 1993 led to an even stronger emphasis on a new managerialist approach with an increased emphasis on performativity and the efficient use of resources in the further education sector (Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Clarke and Newman, 1997; Randle and Brady, 1997). This, together with the manifestation of consumer charters and service level agreements, as mechanisms for accountability, created a new breed of college middle manager. Curriculum Managers of the former Riverside College were recruited from a teaching background but their role was strongly related to a new lexicon that emphasised managerial rather than academic values. This legacy is apparent in

the views expressed in the interviews, the presentation of which is organised in accordance with the four themes of the research.

Identities

The newly created posts of Head of Subject (HoS) and Director of Studies (DoS), within faculties, were intended to operate within a matrix management structure which enabled further and higher education provision at all campuses to be incorporated in a unified system. In practice, some discretion regarding the remit of these roles, was used at faculty level. As a result there are manager-academics with responsibilities exclusively in relation to further education who openly acknowledged their lack of understanding of higher education systems. Likewise manager-academics with only higher education roles, expressed little knowledge about how further education works. Some interviewees stated that most members of their team had never visited campuses of the university other than the one at which they were based. Time constraints were identified by manager-academics from different faculties as a key factor why they are unable to further develop their understanding about practices in the 'other' sector. A DoS based at the Riverside campus commented:

'...lots of staff at Riverside don't have a great understanding of higher education so people sort of draw back because they are not sure how they relate and that's from both sides'.

DoS (3R)

Some manager-academics are in a more informed position compared to others because their backgrounds have incorporated working in both further and higher education. Interestingly, these manager-academics are now found predominantly in a higher education role. By contrast, manager-academics from further education appear to have very limited higher education experience. However, evidence suggests that manager-academics are willing to increase their cross-sector understanding and would like the senior management of the institution to facilitate opportunities, to encourage open discussion and dialogue between them.

There is a lack of understanding of systems and practices between manager-academics across further and higher education. It was suggested by some interviewees that they are keen to learn more about further and higher education elements, so that they can better understand how things can be improved. This kind of exchange may enable staff to share good practice between the two sectors. Training in aspects of strategic and operational differences between further and higher education may prove to be useful in overcoming communication barriers within the institution. Some respondents have recommended the use of communication technology, such as media conferencing, to make better use of the time currently spent commuting between the sites, and to streamline meetings where possible.

Developing more clarity with respect to job roles and boundaries at middle management level would also be welcomed. Most managers had common concerns around the current matrix structure of the institution, with Heads of Subject and Directors of Study having potentially over-lapping responsibilities. This perception causes confusion, because Heads of Subject and Directors of Study do not necessarily understand the boundaries between their responsibilities.

'As DoS, there is a role description, not a job description, the thinking being that one would only do it for a certain length of time and move on, or somebody else would do the job'.

DoS (12C)

While manager-academics expressed ideas regarding their own development, they also shared views on how lecturers might be enabled to respond better to working in a dual-sector environment. One interviewee commented that further education staff should be encouraged to be more outward looking. This was regarded, to some extent, as a legacy problem, because the former Riverside College had a tendency to appoint from within. One manager-academic spoke of how she had actively promoted visits to other colleges, both nationally and internationally, to develop a more outward looking culture.

'There are some people in further education who are not academically qualified in the way a university would expect them to be and I think they now feel slightly inferior and it's my job to encourage them to go for higher qualifications. They know that but I think they resent it a little bit'.

HoS (5R)

Currently, manager-academics are managing lecturers on three types of contracts: a further education contract for staff teaching only FE; a higher education contract for staff teaching more than 275 hours HE annually and a hybrid contract for those who are teaching a mix of FE and HE. Some staff from the former Riverside College are pursuing postgraduate qualifications to enable them to teach in higher education. Academic staff based predominantly in further education, see opportunities for career progression arising from the merger. However, further education teaching is not viewed in the same positive light among higher education staff. Concerns also emerged regarding the University's identity at both a local and regional level.

'I think there is locally confusion about Riverside College, what everyone would view it as and assuming its new identity....I am not sure whether it's really understood.....how we market ourselves and how we promote what we do and make it understood is quite critical....'

DoS (8R)

According to the interviewees, part of the identity problem of the institution appears to be the perception (although not necessarily the reality) that '*we only do FE at Riverside*'. Interviewees stated that it was important to expand higher education provision at Riverside in order to counter this perception. The reality, pre-merger, was that the curriculum provision at Riverside was described as including 30 per cent higher education provision and this level has diminished, rather than increased, since the merger. Many manager-academics based at Riverside expressed the view that the campus needs to '*protect what it's got*', as a lost market is very difficult to recoup.

Transitions: promoting progression

The stated rationale for the merger in 2004 was one of providing a comprehensive post-secondary institution, promoting seamless progression from basic skills to postgraduate education, and establishing Southtown University as a university for the region, committed to widening participation. Staff interviewed were aware of the 'official' rationale, but did not always subscribe to the vision.

'I think we just see Riverside as a completely negative impact on what we were doing and we didn't need to join with them.'

DoS (14C)

'I think we should have made a different strategic alliance I just don't think we should have gone to Riverside, geographically speaking'.

DoS (15M)

'I cannot see any logical strategic decisions or reasons why you would have actually done it '.

HoS (2R)

An example was given of deteriorating student progression at Riverside since the merger, in relation to the HND in Business, where significant numbers of students had formerly progressed to a third year degree top-up, validated by another university. The possible reasons for reduced numbers of students progressing to the BA, since transferring to the Southtown validated programme, were considered to be the preference to study at another local university and the curriculum fit between Levels 5 and 6, of a specifically designed progression route. However, professional programmes, related to career advancement, have maintained high progression rates, in the region of 70 per cent moving from Level 3 (further education) to Level 4 (higher education).

While many interviewees were often negative about the reasons underpinning the merger, some felt that there might be a more effective way for the new merged organisation to achieve its goal of improving student progression between further and higher education. Pressure to improve the internal student

progression rate is sometimes perceived as a 'burden' for manager-academics. However, most of our informants suggested progression can work, if, as one interviewee remarked, '*students have something to which to aspire*'. The question is, therefore: is it better to separate, or dissolve, the boundaries if we want to raise student progression rates? Most of the interviewees favoured maintaining boundaries rather than dissolving them as a means of improving student progression.

The reasons given to support this view were based upon the need for students to be aware of, and appreciate, the differences when moving to an HE environment. This could be in a physical sense, such as the separation of buildings, between further and higher education. A programme leader and curriculum manager with previous working experience in both sectors made the following statement:

'I think if we want progression to work, and that seems to be one of the major issues we have, is getting the students to aspire and the only way to get them to aspire is to give them something to aspire to... Where it works the most successfully, and again this is from talking to staff at other institutions, is where the FE and the HE is separated out on the campus so there's an HE building that you aspire to go to when you progress into HE...'

PL (6R)

Part of this 'aspiration' refers to the social as well as the academic elements of the student experience in higher education. A view was expressed that the

presence of learners as young as fourteen within the university meant that a student bar was inappropriate at the Riverside campus. However, the lack of such a social facility was given as an example of how the integration of further and higher education can adversely affect the kind of student experience normally expected in going to university.

'One of the things you expect to be able to do when you are eighteen is have a drink and one of the things about going to university is the social life, so if you can't have on campus social life it does sort of damage that experience...'

PL (6R)

The importance of creating separate social space for higher education students was stressed by another interviewee although they stated that they had been accused of *'apartheid'* for doing so.

Interviewees also stressed the differences in the needs of further and higher education students. These differences, it was argued, have implications for managing physical resources. One HoS contended that it would be better to have separate buildings for further and higher education at Riverside campus.

'I was an external examiner for an institute that was predominantly an FE college. They had separate buildings, separate common rooms, tutorial systems- they gave something to their FE students to aspire to'.

HoS (12C)

Others also expressed the notion of separating, rather than integrating, further and higher education in relation to students, staff and resources. One interviewee expressed this vision in terms of a *'federal structure'*.

'I can't see any real synergy, because you could have come up with a much better federal structure that actually encouraged progression, if progression is what you are about'.

HoS (4C)

It was felt that it was important to acknowledge that there are differences in the philosophies and external factors that govern further and higher education in the UK and that one should not attempt to produce a *'hybrid'* version. Most manager-academics argued that further and higher education are significantly different and that it is important to acknowledge these differences openly. This divergence should shape the way that senior management respond to the challenge of duality. Managing further and higher education separately, but in parallel, would

enable the adoption of best practices from the two systems, where possible. One interviewee summed up this view by stating:

'We don't need a pink version of red and white'

PL (9R)

This quotation neatly summarises the views of interviewees who argued that separating further from higher education and keeping the sectoral boundaries clearly defined, in terms of the learning and physical environment, was the most realistic way of managing the dual - sector mission of the institution and improving student progression.

However, not all academic-managers felt that the answer lay in giving further and higher education separate buildings, but instead, by offering a different, more supportive experience to its students:

'I don't see to a certain extent a massive problem with them in the same buildings but what I do think is that you want to give them a different experience and how you do that is more critical'

HoS and CL (24R)

'The perception is that an HE student does quite well here if they're a weak student, because we tend to have small groups, we don't have lectures of 200, we tend to give them a lot of personal support'

CL (6R)

Another interviewee also felt that the diverse nature of the modern student population meant that they were less concerned about whether they had separate facilities.

'I think students in some ways are different now, the origins are different. In a way they're not so concerned about that [being mixed with FE or HE students], you could say well by birth if you like and by upbringing they're a bit more egalitarian, certainly the student body here is ethnically and cosmopolitically [sic.] very diverse. I think it also comes with a sort of open mind, a certain sort of egalitarian state of mind...'

PL (25M)

Some younger members of staff expressed the view that in a mass higher education system it is no longer accurate to speak of a separate 'academic' culture, only to be found in higher education. While this may exist in a few elite

universities this was not, they felt, an accurate representation of a modern, post-1992 university such as Southtown.

'I don't worry about kind of an FE culture somehow infecting the HE culture. I mean to me the way higher education modules are written should always be taking account of the fact that students also need to be building transferable skills, employability skills.... And I don't think a lot of universities in the country now specialise in those things [i.e. more academic] unless we go to Oxford and Cambridge and a few others possibly still have that luxury if you like of saying [sic.] 'we run courses which are specifically academic courses' and they're done for kind of the love of the subject and the love of learning and there's no vocation attached to it at all'.

HoS (26C)

Interviewees highlighting the prevalence of the vocational curriculum at Southtown were more sanguine about the possibilities for integration of further and higher education and did not see a dichotomy between the types of learning experiences to which students might be exposed.

Boundaries

Southtown University is one of many multi-site and multi-campus universities in the UK. However, the interviewees expressed the view that the geographical distance between the campuses adds to a perception that the university is divided between higher education on the City campus and further education on the Riverside campus. The sense of division between further and higher education at the institution was often represented in terms of the different campuses even though this perception runs counter to the fact that both pre-merger organisations had substantial elements of both further and higher education.

This geographic separation is regarded as one of the major factors that hinders effective communication between staff at all levels. The location of Human Resources and the University's central administration in City has also created barriers to effective communication.

'We are not able to get as swift responses as we did when we were Riverside College.....HR in City is not as responsive as when it was all based locally. It was easy to make decisions here. We had a local budget here and not worry about keeping colleagues in City, in the loop'.

DoS (8R)

Staff expressed some concern that the physical distance between campuses has an adverse impact on the availability of sufficient student learning resources although there is an acknowledgement that online provision is part of the solution to this challenge:

'of course this has implications for things like Library facilities. At Riverside I'm not sure what the Library stock is, but can it support HE courses? It would be an interesting question'

PL (16C)

'there's a perception that the library is very much an FE library [at Riverside campus] and it's not as fulsome. I don't get the same feeling that it's understood that you can get books from the other campuses, which is quite easy to do and I don't get the perception that the same importance is attached to the electronic resources. So it's a different experience'

CL (6R)

However, the physical presence of a library can be seen from a different point of view. It has a symbolic value for the student experience and the construction of student identity. The significance of creating an appropriate environment, fit for purpose, for different student expectations and differing approaches to teaching

and learning between further and higher education, was one of the main emergent themes and comments indicate it to be a source of tension.

Organisational Cultures

The organisational history of both former institutions had included a number of mergers, prior to 2004. Interviewees with long-service histories frequently referred to this institutional heritage. There was a strong sense of the need to retain their identities, in relation to function and discipline, whilst trying to operate within a unified corporate structure, resulting in the existence of sub-brands within the corporate structure.

There was little support among interviewees for the most recent merger which was perceived by many as an unwelcome change:

'Mergers are disruptive, change is disruptive and people are resistant to change and find that difficult As an organisation evolves People crave stability. The merger with the university did represent in many peoples' minds the idea of some kind of takeover. There were a lot of bonuses for individuals, but I think it's probably set up more barriers in terms of how FE and HE work together'.

DoS (8R)

The interviewees focused on what they perceived to be the 'cultural' differences between further and higher education. These differences were explained in relation to a range of factors. Some manager-academics were uncomfortable with the idea of combining further and higher education, on the basis that a university has different educational aims to that of a further education college.

'in the normally accepted sense of the word, a university is a post 18 institution, which actually has a focus on scholarship, and that scholarship manifests itself in a variety of different ways, and its really about creating an environment in which that takes place. An FE institution, by its very nature, is about skills'.

HoS (30C)

Others also expressed the view that the mixed composition of the student body can cast doubt on the legitimacy of the new institution as a 'university' and its academic identity as a 'community of scholars':

'The threats are that your university may not be a university for very long because how do you decide what is a university and what isn't a university? And it's an issue where if you have more FE students than HE students then you run the risk of the university not being a university....'

[Also], I mean some people would say 'well a good definition of a university is a community of scholars'do some of the people you get in FE colleges - not all - but is it within that sense a community of scholars?...'

HoS and PL (32C)

In terms of the student experience it was argued that different 'cultures' exist between the sectors. A HoS who has worked at Southtown for twenty five years argued that placing further and higher education under one roof creates difficulties for students:

'[It] creates a problem that you've got HE students mixing with FE students, the cultures are different, the ethos is different - do degree level students want to be mixing with sixteen year olds who are behaving like twelve year olds?'

HoS (21C)

While a number of interviewees explored the notion of cultural differences in terms of educational values and attitudes, others were more pragmatic pointing out that while further education needed to meet the accreditation requirements of external awarding bodies, in relation to the curriculum, higher education has

ownership of the curriculum through university validation processes. They further identified the existence of separate funding and quality assessment bodies which relate principally, or exclusively, to one sector or the other, constituting boundaries within the merged institution.

According to the interviewees, the more regulated environment of further education has led to a management style that contrasts with that in higher education. A PL expressed the view that the way people approach work in further and higher education is different. This influences the styles of management and lines of communication. She stated:

'People in FE are more structured, organised, better time managers but less entrepreneurial, less creative, less able to deal with uncertainty'.

PL (10R)

This statement links with the views of other interviewees, one of whom contrasted the 'target' culture of further education with the 'more relaxed environment' of higher education:

'FE is a much more regulated environment, there is Ofsted inspection regime.....you are much more closely monitoredits about targets, attainments, goals, those sorts of things whereas HE is a more relaxed

environment and the presence of research culture makes it different as well.

HoS (2R)

Another Director of Studies who had prior experience of working in further education stated

'...FE management was very top-down and plainly it was bullying, it was essentially they'd offer staff incentives to work harder but then also there was always a stick behind to beat them with if they didn't meet targets...but now I think there are more enlightened colleges that seem to have enlightened policies towards staff development'.

DoS (38M)

The various awarding bodies and quality assurance systems in further education, also augment staff workloads, so that staff must meet the demands of '*many masters*' as a result.

'further education is so different to higher education, further education is so bureaucratic with regard to you're having to serve many masters and you're constantly having to jump through so many hoops to serve so many

different people that it's so different. I think I've said it all really. It's trying to just break down those barriers'

CL (11R)

These views support the tendency for academic-managers from the former FE College to adopt a more managerialist approach to their role. It is based upon a pragmatic response to meet the external scrutiny and compliance regimes of the funding body (the LSC) and the inspection body (Ofsted). It is also a reflection of the prevailing management style in further education, which encourages responsiveness and a speedy reaction to policy changes and employer needs. This is in contrast to an approach of self-critical scrutiny required by the inspection body for higher education (the QAA) and the rigorous validation processes necessary when developing a university award. Indeed, the need for responsiveness was cited as a justification of allowing FE Colleges to apply for foundation degree awarding powers in the *Education and Training Act* (2006), in response to lobbying from the 157 Group. A pressure group of colleges, which takes its name from paragraph 157 of the Foster report, which urged large, successful colleges to take a greater role in advocating themselves and the contribution they make.

The staff perspectives emerging from these interviews can be summarised in respect of the four unifying themes of this research, as follows:

Identities

A picture is presented of threatened identities, with academic managers on each side of the binary divide feeling that the other side does not fully understand the other sector. This may have some credence, as FE staff tend not to have experience of working in HE settings and they expressed frustration at the slow pace of decision making in the university, when they felt the pressure to respond quickly to external agencies. However, HE staff sometimes had previous experience of working in FE and considered that this gave them a broader perspective than their more insular FE colleagues. This threatened identity extended to the institution, which was considered by some interviewees, to be in danger of losing its university status, if diluted by large amounts of further education.

Transitions

The successful transition to higher education, to be achieved through increased internal progression, was the main stated aim of the merger. However, the picture emerging from academic managers was that they could see no logical reason for this particular merger, largely because of geography and the distance between City and Riverside campuses, and that mergers can cause disruption,

with negative consequences. The issue of achieving increased internal progression was regarded as problematic, on two counts. Firstly that the accommodation and sense of place should offer something tangible and different for students to aspire to, when making the transition to HE. This could take the form of separate facilities and social space, including a students' bar for the over-18s. Secondly, some staff felt that progression from sub-degree study to level 6 top-up was the result of a carefully articulated and locally available curriculum, which had been dismantled at Riverside, to some extent, following the merger. However, there was an opposing view to the desire for separate HE and FE space, which was perceived by the interviewees as more egalitarian. This cited the more supportive approach to teaching and learning (of FE) as being more significant to progression choices than physical environment.

Boundaries

The geographic separation between the Southtown campuses is perceived as a communication barrier, by the staff interviewed. They claimed that it inhibited opportunities for liaison between subject teams and between academic departments and the central support services, such as Human Resources and Finance. All senior faculty management and the directorate are based at City campus, so with the exception of FE related meetings, all take place there, with the associated time costs being borne by Riverside staff. The location of senior staff at City was seen as contributing to the isolation felt by HE staff and students

at Riverside, as the decisions regarding the use of teaching accommodation and support services are taken by FE management, who are unaware of HE needs.

Organisational cultures

A summary of the interview data would support the tabulated cultural differences between higher and further education, outlined in Chapter 3. Academic – managers appear to agree that the ethos in HE is more collegial than the managerial ethos prevalent in FE, and that there is a need for a reactive approach to external drivers, as FE lacks the autonomy of HE in relation to the curriculum and quality assurance systems. Each side of the binary boundary supports its approach as fit for purpose, in relation to differentiated environments. However, these perceived differences have the potential for tension, within a single institution, perpetuating a sense of duality within the merged institution.

A complex picture of an organisation in the process of transition emerges from the staff perspectives. It is apparent that the merger has caused an element of fear and trauma amongst the academic staff, which has tended to cause them to emphasise the differences between further and higher education, rather than seek common ground. The former university staff clearly feel that their professional and institutional identity is jeopardised by the duality of the organisation, whereas the former college staff feel that there is not full recognition of their higher education experience and local success, resulting in

the decline of the Riverside HE offer, because of forcing it to fit the University model.

It is also apparent that the new organisational structure, following the merger, has not been effective in coping with the complexities, size and distinctions within the merged institution and that the loyalty to various sub-brands, originating in the history of previous mergers, remains strong and possibly divisive.

It is also noticeable that the staff responses focus more upon their perceptions of their own roles and institution identities, rather than the student experiences. This is possibly a symptom of the organisational insecurity and questioning of identity, caused by the merger.

Chapter 5

The student experience: an exploration of learning journeys

The chapter presents the students' narratives of their learning journey from further to higher education: exploring the nature and background of their learning programmes, together with their prior experiences of learning and attainment, family background, desired futures, and factors influencing the choice of learning pathway. It provides an interpretive analysis of their experience as students in a dual-sector institution. The data is organised around the themes of identities, transitions and boundaries.

Identities: the learning programmes and the students

The information is the result of a series of three interviews, conducted with four student cohorts, during the academic year following their internal progression to a higher level qualification, at Southtown University. This provides a longitudinal view of the students' learning experiences within the merged institution and where illustrative quotations have been used they are presented with a number in brackets, to indicate at which interview the comments were made. The four cohorts were:

- FdA Music Technology, progressing to BA in Music Technology: Level 5/6 (at City campus)

- HND Music Technology, progressing to BA in Music Technology: Level 5/6 (at Riverside campus)
- National Diploma in Three Dimensional Design, progressing to BA in Three Dimensional Studies: Level 3/4 (at Riverside campus)
- National Diploma in Photography, progressing to BA in Photography: Level 3/4 (at Riverside campus)

The initial intention was to interview three students from each cohort, constituting a total of thirty six interviews with a population of twelve students. However, one student (Nigel) declined to participate in the research, following the first interview, and two further students (Johnny and Phil) withdrew from their studies following the second interview. Consequently a total of thirty two interviews were conducted. The first interviews took place at the point of transition, to monitor first impressions, the second interviews took place towards the end of the first semester and the third tranche of interviews was conducted at the end of the academic year, following progression. For the student cohort who had progressed internally from a Level 5 programme, this represented the completion of their qualification, whereas for the students progressing from a Level 3 programme, two years of further study remain. With the exception of the cohort progressing from the FdA Music Technology, which is based at the City campus of the University, all students were studying at the Riverside (Queens Road) campus, pre and post progression.

Background to the learning programmes

The BA in Music Technology is a large and well-established programme at Southtown (City), within the Faculty of the Arts. It started in 1992/3 as a Diploma in Higher Education with entry requirements of one A Level. However, the submission of a portfolio, accompanied by an interview, provided an alternative entry route, used by many applicants. The Diploma was replaced by a degree in 2000.

The FdA at City is an evening course, with teaching on three nights per week. It is regarded as a full-time course; however, progression to the top-up year is only available by transferring to the day time provision. Although described as 'work-based learning' in the prospectus, very few students have relevant work experience.

There was music technology provision at Riverside prior to the merger. It was originally an HND, accredited by Edexcel, and was subsequently franchised from Southtown. This arrangement initially continued after the merger, with the BA in Music Technology being offered for the first time in September 2006.

HNDs in Photography and Three Dimensional Design had existed at Riverside, prior to the merger, as a progression route from the ND in Photography and Multimedia and the ND in Three Dimensional Design. However, in 2005/06 it

was decided to replace the top-up route with 3 year degree programmes. The HND provision had been part of the School of Art and Design (SAD) which merged with Riverside College in 1997, a merger which created financial pressures because SAD had been favourably funded by the LEA, prior to incorporation in 1993, and had not met the convergence targets of the FEFC funding methodology. Subsequent to the 1997 merger, the School of Art operated as a faculty within Riverside College, offering Edexcel HNDs and Foundation programmes, plus degrees validated by a University. Following the merger with Southtown University in 2004, all HE programmes were migrated there. The students on the BA programmes have nine hours of teaching per week, plus support for learning through the Learning and Skills Development Scheme (LSDS).

Photography had traditionally been offered at Southtown (City), so the existing BA replaced the Riverside HND. However, there was no three Dimensional Design offer at City, so the BA is offered at Riverside only.

The students (Level 5 to Level 6)

Mark, Johnny and Patrick studied the FdA at City campus, and Nathan, Roger and Nigel studied the HND at Riverside campus. They all progressed to the BA at the same time, but continued to study at their respective campuses.

The students from each cohort have a range of different backgrounds and experiences. All the students were male, which is typical of this subject. Two of the FdA students interviewed were in their late twenties, and one was thirty eight. One was British Caribbean, one British Indian and one white British. Mark and Johnny are married and Patrick was buying a house at the time of the first interview. All have previous experience of working and, in some cases, are continuing to do so. Mark and Johnny have always lived relatively locally, but Patrick is from the Isle of Wight. Only one of the students (Patrick) is from a family where parents have experienced HE. His father has two degrees and is a managing director, his mother is a teacher. His two brothers also studied for degrees, following A levels. In the case of Mark, whose parents did not experience HE, his brother obtained a degree as a mature student, as did his wife.

Patrick left school at seventeen, with seven GCSEs, having withdrawn from an A level programme. He subsequently studied part-time, for a HNC in Business and Marketing. He worked in finance and administration, choosing a job in a record company, because he was interested in music.

Mark left school at seventeen, with four GCE O levels. He obtained a BTEC National Diploma and worked for a local authority from 1988 to 1996, when he accepted voluntary redundancy and set up a recording studio. Since 1999 he has worked in schools and colleges as an IT technician.

Johnny left school at sixteen, and is unsure about his GCSE achievements, but they were mostly below grade C. He obtained a GNVQ in Information Technology and has worked in jobs which have been financially rewarding, but unfulfilling.

All of the HND students were male and white British, their dates of birth ranging from 1976 (Nigel) to 1982 and 1984. All three are single and live locally, Nathan and Roger live at home, with parents, whilst Nigel lives independently. Nathan and Roger have always lived locally, in small towns near Riverside, but Riverside is not their nearest college. Nigel moved to Riverside town in 2003. He had been successful at school and moved away to university then to work but became ill and had to give up work. He is from West Yorkshire and his brother is in that area, but his parents now live locally to Riverside.

Nathan comes from a family where his father has a degree and his mother went to university. His father is now retired, but working on a lottery-funded project and his mother works part-time in a library. His sister has a first class honours degree from Oxford. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this, *'I think I have probably made an effort to not involve my family much in my choices as they generally get in the way of my success'*. (1)

Roger's parents do not have HE experience. His father completed an apprenticeship in engineering and still works as an engineer. His mother studied

part-time at college, whilst working as a secretary for a law firm, but gave up work when she had children; she now works in a supermarket. His younger brother has completed A levels, and is applying to university, after a gap year.

Nigel's parents are both retired teachers, having completed their qualifications at Teacher Training College.

Nathan obtained nine GCSEs at grade C, or above, at a boys' school in his home town. He didn't enjoy it *'which I put down to my having a condition called hyper mobility, which I found out about towards my last years at school'* (1). He continued to AS studies there, but withdrew in December 2000. He then moved to Riverside College, enrolling on a National Diploma (ND) in Music Production. *'I had heard that college was a lot more relaxed than school'* (1), but soon left and worked part-time for about two years. He re-enrolled on the ND in 2002 and completed it successfully in 2004, when he progressed to the Higher National Diploma (HND) in Music Technology at Riverside (which had then merged with Southtown).

Roger obtained six GCSEs at grade C, or above, at his local school, and because there was no sixth form, he progressed to the local college, where he obtained an Advanced GNVQ (with Distinction) and an A level in Geography. After a year out went to a more distant university, to do a degree in Business, living in hall, which he regarded as a bad decision:

'Looking back at it, it was a really bad decision because the way I went about choosing the University just going through the book and yes, that one will do, and I didn't research it, I didn't go down to the University to see what it felt like for me, and whether I'd be happy here. So I think I was more under pressure just to choose the University and choose the subject, rather than do something I wanted to do. I don't think it was my parents or anything like that, I think it's more me telling myself I need to actually do this because it's what everyone else does, they go to University and I was just like right, I have to choose a University (1)'.

He dropped out in February of the first year (2001/02) and returned home, where he shared a room with his brother, as he had previously. He worked for a bank until September 2002, when he enrolled for the ND in Music Production at Riverside College, progressing to the HND in 2004.

Nigel left comprehensive school at eighteen, with ten GCSEs at grade C, or above, and four A levels. He progressed to a Russell Group university in the Midlands, obtaining a BSc in Psychology in 1998. He became interested in forensic psychology, and following a period of voluntary work in an NHS secure unit, he studied successfully, full-time, for an MSc in Forensic Psychology, and worked as an Assistant Psychologist. However, after an illness, he decided to pursue his interest in music and music production, moving to Riverside to enroll on the HND in 2004.

The students (Level 3 to Level 4)

Photography and Multimedia

The three students interviewed from the ND in Photography and Multimedia, Anthony, Ben and Davinder, were from a range of family backgrounds. All three live at home, with parents, and the financial consequences of being able to continue to live at home, were significant in deciding to remain at Riverside. All are in their early twenties, two are white British and one is British Indian.

All went to local schools (including an independent) and two of them obtained A levels, before embarking on the ND. The third student completed a Foundation Programme in Art & Design. All three could possibly have enrolled on the HND, a Level 4 programme, rather than the ND, but all were advised to begin with the technical basics of the ND because they were entering a specialised area of art & design. They now appear to feel that this was the best route for them.

These three students have formed a tight support group, and the opportunity to continue studying with an established peer group was significant in their decision to progress to the BA at Riverside.

Anthony's parents did not experience HE, but his father studied while working, sponsored by his employer, and is now a managing director. His mother started a

family early and, according to Anthony, *'did not see the potential in education'* (1). She now works as an Administrative Assistant in a school. His parents are now separated and Anthony and his younger siblings, who are doing A levels, live with her.

Ben's parents have both been educated to postgraduate level: his father has a PhD and is a Scientist, and his mother has an MSc in Psychology and works for the Public Guardianship Office. His elder sister has a first class honours degree from a Russell Group University and his younger brother is currently doing A levels and applying to study Medicine. His parents are separated and Ben lives with his mother.

Davinder's parents have no experience of HE. She lives at home, but was reluctant to discuss her home circumstances. Her mother suffers from a long-term illness and she indicated that her father works, so that there is a heavy reliance upon her to provide support in the household, which was a very significant factor in her decision to remain at Southtown (Riverside) for her HE studies.

Anthony completed a GNVQ Advanced at a school 6th Form, followed by a Foundation Programme at a prestigious London institution, before a three year gap period, prior to starting the ND Photography..... *' I think it was a lack of confidence in many respects. I was one of the younger ones on the group; most*

people there actually were mature students returning to education. So I dropped out and took a two to three year gap working full time both at home and abroad' (1).

Ben attended a local independent school and completed A levels in the 6th Form, but felt that only very academically able pupils were offered support. He moved to the ND in Photography without a gap period..... *'Originally I wanted to do Design, maybe possibly Architecture or something like that. I did a placement at a Landscape Architecture firm for a week and then after doing that I kind of realised it wasn't what I wanted to do. And I've always been into Photography so I finally just took a risk, I looked round at a couple of places and then just decided to come here'* (1).

Davinder attended a local girls' comprehensive school and completed A levels in the 6th Form, before moving to a ND in Media at what was then Riverside College. She dropped out of this, finding it a very negative and disorganised experience, before embarking on the ND in Photography.

One student (Anthony) had significant employment, prior to the ND, and another (Davinder) continues to work part-time, for a substantial number of hours, for Pizza Hut, as a manager, having undergone in-house training. All three also combine some commercial photographic activity with their studies, and see this as a good way of building a portfolio career, which is a stated aspiration.

Three - Dimensional Design

Of the three students who were interviewed (Jane, Phil and Sarah) all were of 'traditional' age for progression to HE, born between 1986 and 1988. However, all had made a conscious choice to move from school, and in the case of two of them, had done a course at Riverside prior to entry to the ND. In Jane's case she started A levels and then moved across to an alternative Level 3 programme, while Phil did a Level 2 programme (GNVQ Intermediate in Art and Design).

Jane was well qualified with GCSEs and could have stayed at her school (in Riverside) for A levels but she wanted to do Psychology which wasn't on offer and additionally, *'I just wanted to get away from that and get into a college'* (1).

Phil was at a school (near to Riverside) and did poorly in his GCSEs. A vocational course was not available there and he didn't like the school and was bored. He wanted to do the ND in Fine Art but could not get in with his grades so he did the GNVQ where he became friends with another student, and both decided to progress to the 3D, partly because his father works in design. His family, coincidentally, moved to Riverside, but he would have come there anyway.

Sarah went to a girls' school (ten miles from Riverside) and could have stayed on into the sixth form but, while she enjoyed school, she wanted a change:

'... I wanted to get out, I wanted to break free, I was so different to all my friends and it was so refreshing to come here and find those different people as well' (1).

The parents of these three students were significant influences in terms of helping the students make their choice of programme. In Jane's case, her sister had recently gone to a university away from home but dropped out of her course. Her mother had done a teacher training degree in the Phillipines (though has not been able to get work as a teacher here) and *'I think my Dad went to university as well' (1)*; both parents were supportive of her going on to higher education and influential in her choice of course but were also probably influential in her decision to stay at home which was prompted by financial considerations and by the need to avoid distraction from her studies. Parental occupations were sometimes directly influential – Jane's father, who was trained as an engineer, does some designing, and Phil's works in design.

Sarah is the first in her family to go to university but her parents are very supportive. Phil is also the first in the family but this seems to have little impact on his extended family who does not discuss it: *'They're not really interested, don't really chat about that sort of stuff' (1).*

All the students live at the parental home. For Jane, who initially enrolled for an A level programme, Riverside was a local choice and she knew several people who had attended, including her sister and her mother who did FE evening classes there. However, she didn't like the A level course and decided to change during the first year, basing her choice largely on the prospectus and the advice of her parents, supported by information from customer services. Her personal tutor on the A level programme had been counselling her to stay on the A level programme:

'I went to a few careers people. I went to one careers adviser just to see... because when I looked at the prospectus and there were all these different kinds of Art courses and I didn't know which one would suit me. And I had a word with my Mum and Dad and then they were like 'well why don't you go and find out a bit more' so I came here and I spoke to a careers person and I said 'well I like doing this and I like doing that, these are the courses I'm thinking about doing, but can you help me decide which ones would probably suit me more' so they helped me down at the careers, customer services. And then I went back home, had a word with my Mum and Dad and they said to me 'yeah that sounds fine' so....' (1)

Sarah found the decision regarding a post-school choice difficult

'I found it really hard to pick. My Mum sort of said... she put her foot down and she said 'look this is what you've got to do, you've got to do it now, fill it in now, that's going to be it' sort of thing, she kind of really pushed me and I'm glad she did because I was in a mess..... I went everywhere to try and find out what to do. And my brother came here and my Mum said 'oh we'll just go down' and they had an Open Day or something. And at first I was looking to do Drama and they said 'oh yeah, come down and you can sing a song and do an audition' and I thought 'oh my God I can't do that'. And then we were looking and it said 'the 3D design course' and it had a list of everything it included and my Mum said it's such a broad sort of thing let's have a meeting with the tutor. And he and my Mum sat there talking for ages and I didn't really have any input, I was just kind of like 'don't want to do this'. And it was a big jump for me and I'm so glad I did it, but it was really hard' (1).

For Phil when progressing to the ND he thinks he probably had more help from his Mum, and Sean (fellow student) than from his tutor or Customer Services.

For the younger students being away from home was something which figured in their expectations and decisions about transition.

Transitions: Moving up (Level 5 to Level 6)

The progression from level 5 to level 6 represents the transition from sub-degree, to degree, study. The mission of Southtown University, as a merged institution,

aspired to ease this transition process by offering seamless progression. This aspiration is now examined by reviewing the experiences of the six students.

The FdA is a full-time course, but it appears that none of the students applied through UCAS, although Mark had investigated it. Upon completion of the FdA, all three students progressed internally to the BA. The mechanism was an internal application form, but it was not always smooth. Mark was particularly annoyed by the process as he was not sent a form and had to take the initiative to get one and then experienced difficulties in enrolling.

It wasn't clear to either Johnny or Patrick that the top-up year was during the day and for Patrick, as he was not able maintain his current full-time job, this created significant financial problems, having just taken on the commitment of a mortgage.

All three students are mature and continued to live to live in their own homes, locally, whilst studying. Johnny is self-employed, developing his own music production company. However, Mark and Patrick, who were working full-time when on the FdA, work part-time work on the third year of the BA, because of the need to attend in the daytime.

While he enjoyed the course thoroughly, Mark was critical of some of the teaching. He felt some of the staff were not very experienced and that the FdA was treated as a poor relation in comparison to the BA.

'I mean there were times when you would turn up to one particular lecturer's class. ... you knew when you come along you were just wasting petrol and he'd be like 'well guys I know you can do it, read the module study guide and if you've got any questions e-mail me or come and see me' and that was pretty much it. It was evident that he hadn't prepared for himself so he was trying to work it out whilst presenting it, and people just thought 'I'd rather go to a studio and do some work on another area'. I got a first out of his because I knew what I needed to do, but others who didn't know, they lost out' (2).

Patrick also had criticisms:

'I found a difference in how good the tutors were and how much is involved in the work. I think in the first year, because there was like so many people in the classes - and a lot of people really didn't want to be there - you didn't get as much interaction with the tutor sort of thing. But in the second year when people had left, you got a lot more time with the tutor and you got to learn a lot more'. (2).

Crucial to all the students was the fact that it was in the evening. This suited Mark and Patrick particularly, because they could work full-time. However, it did have an impact on their self-perception of student identity:

'No... I'm not really a student, I don't come in that much, I pretty much work all the time anyway so, I don't consider myself to be a student. I just happen to be doing a degree' (2). Patrick

The use of studios is essential on the course, yet all three of the students completing the FdA this year said university facilities were not readily available in the evening and that they were expected to come in during the day to book equipment and then again to pick it up. As a consequence, Mark bought his own studio, Johnny already had his own and Patrick was able to make an arrangement in the second year.

One student expressed the following views about the learning experience on the BA.

Johnny:

'It's more intense workload wise, there's more theory involved in it now than there has been over the last two years. All I want to do is make music and maths and science are coming into it, obviously they play a big part in

music production and how you break handles, you know signals and things like that, so there's a lot more theory this year.' (2).

At the Riverside campus, all three students on the HND applied through UCAS, to progress to the third year of the BA. Although this was an internal application, they were interviewed by the Admissions Tutor, who was also the Programme Leader for the HND. Roger was advised, incorrectly, that he would have to pay tuition fees of £2,700 for the top-up year.

Nathan is working part-time in a shop and in an Arts Centre at weekends, in total, about twenty hours per week (at Interview 2). By Interview 3, he had given up one of the jobs, to free up some time at weekends, so that he could get some sound experience, which led to a small amount of relevant work. He has continued to live at home, which is a short train journey from Riverside, a decision which he states that he has increasingly regretted during the third year, although it has financial benefits, *'it is becoming increasingly problematic personally* (3)'. Nathan's views of the learning experience on the BA were not positive, *'the course I am on currently is not well organised or practised'* and that *'I've kind of lacked a real kind of university experience coming here.'* *'I find that studying an HND/BA at Riverside campus a setback to start with. I find that the tutors generally lack the professionalism I would expect from a university that was not part of a college teaching lower level courses. My experience suggests that the tutors who teach only HND/BA are generally more professional and*

competent (although I think there is only one or two who only teach HND/BA), while the tutors that teach First Diploma, National Diploma, etc. seem to confuse the relationship between us and them, to the relationship between lower level students and themselves. In particular, I think certain tutors adopt a lazy attitude in their teaching style based on the thinking that the students will be lazy anyway and so there is no point in them making an effort – when the students they are thinking of are students of a younger age and are studying lower level education' (3).

Roger worked at a supermarket for two evenings per week and on Fridays and Sundays (about 22 hours per week) at the start of the third year. However, by Interview 3, he had dropped some of the weekend work and taken two weeks holiday from the evening work, to concentrate on assignments. He has not enjoyed the third year, he '*just wants to get the degree*' (3). He does not regard Riverside as '*Uni*', but wanted to stay locally for financial reasons, so that he could continue to live at home. He expressed his thoughts about progressing to the BA, as:

'I think a lot more will be asked in terms of detail, in terms of sort of like theory in terms of writing in terms of how you structure your piece of work and I think they'll be a lot more strict in terms of like how your grammar is and in terms of just how you display your work and presentation as well. I think it's going to be a bit more focused on that' (1).

Both Nathan and Roger also felt that the move to the BA expected them to work more independently, because they were only taught on two days each week, instead of three, and had, therefore, to rely much more on self-motivation and discipline, rather than peer and tutor support. Nathan (at Interview 3) continued to be unhappy with the programme, he attended somewhat sporadically and found the low contact hours required self-motivation which he lacked.

They felt it was a more isolated learning experience *'It's almost like there's less pressure to do the work, and I like that bit of pressure to keep me going'* (3). Roger also felt that the campus facilities were not adequate to support this type of independent study:

'I seem to spend all my time researching. It's a shame though because the library.... I mean my research is generally done at home and it's quiet, like I find it hard to really do any computer based research here because the mix at this campus is quite diverse and there's only like a couple of places where you can really get on a computer and get on-line and do any research, and those places are generally quite noisy other than the library and the library is quite limited in its computer access' (3).

'there's quite a lot of younger students as well mixed with older students and I find that that tends to be... well for me... I would have preferred to have been somewhere where I was surrounded by people my own age

doing sort of similar things. And also I've found that the library here isn't as good as it might be, I think all our books... most of our books that are any use to us are all in City so.... so I don't really spend very much time in the library although we do have the option to bring books from City. I suppose... I don't know, it just seems like extra work, you know' (3).

Roger did not feel he had crossed any sort of boundary in moving from the HND to BA.

Nigel did not wish to participate in Interviews 2 and 3, but did continue on the BA.

Nathan, at Interview 1, expressed the view that *'I don't know what the future will look like. I generally don't look much further than now, but I am trying to improve myself every day and do what I can to further my prospects'* (1). By Interview 3, he planned to do well in the BA and find work experience, possibly taking on extra-curricular activities at the gym, of which he is currently a member, and possibly embarking on a degree in Health and Fitness related studies, whilst practicing music as a hobby. However, he would not wish to undertake any further studies at Riverside, because of the lack of organisation perceived on the BA, and because of his aspiration to move away from home.

Roger does not feel sufficiently confident to apply for jobs in music studios, but thinks he is ready for employment generally, because of his increased confidence and organisational skills. *'I think I'm at the point now when I'd like to*

get out of education, get a job, get some money and move out' (3). He also wants to regain a social life after the intensive work of the final semester. However, he is pleased with his work on his major project and with being encouraged to explore creative work.

Johnny was considering progressing to an MA as *'the degree has opened my mind'* (2), but subsequently withdrew from the programme, without an explanation.

Mark would like to progress to an MA, and possibly a PhD. He is also considering a teacher training qualification, as he would like to teach in a college or university. Meanwhile he will continue in his present local authority employment.

Patrick is considering progression to an MA, but not in Music, because *"the way the industry is at the moment, there's no point"* (3). Instead, he is thinking about an MSc in Computer Science, because of better employment prospects.

'I'm realistic in that it's probably only going to be a hobby because I don't actually think there's that many jobs and you have to be really, really good at it to make a sustainable career out of it. So I'm not unrealistic in that I'm going to walk into a great job or something' (3).

For all the students, parents have been influential in their choices, both negatively and positively. Johnny's parents opposed him doing Music, when he left school:

'yes and no. I mean like I've always wanted to do music more or less since I can remember but my parents were like "no, you're not going to do music, you don't want to go down that route" so that's probably why I pushed to IT rather than music' (1)

but became supportive when he started the degree, as a mature student.

Nathan, deliberately, does not involve his parents in decisions (see above comments) but did state that they had influenced him regarding his decision to not take out a student loan.

Roger has been influenced by a range of people: his parents, who were disappointed when he dropped out of university previously, and are now happy that he is completing a degree; his peer group, many of whom progressed from the ND, and his tutor, who encouraged him to regard the BA top-up as:

' it gives you more opportunity and to be more employable I think when you've got higher education courses on your CV. So the main reason is thinking about the future and my employability' (1).

Nigel stated, in Interview 1, that his parents had always been very supportive of his studies and career change.

In Mark's case, he was inspired to study by the example of his wife - *'Oh yeah. She pushed me out of the door to do it, you know'*(1): brother and friends, who had completed studies successfully, and by a manager at the college where he worked, who encouraged him to apply for the FdA and wrote a reference for him. Mark's decision to apply was influenced by the encouragement of his wife and the example of friends. For him too being local was important: originally he applied to Riverside but had to transfer to City which was not convenient:

'My wife, she's been a great example to me, but whilst she was studying I had made a decision that once I had finished my BTEC I was not going to open another book and do any more studying, three years ago, two of my friends who are, much younger than me, but I helped and guided through their learning to play instruments and stuff and setting up this studio, they just finished their MAs and they were saying to me "Mark, why don't you just consider it". And I went on-line and I saw this fantastic course and I just couldn't believe that a course could have been designed in such a way that suited me down to the T. And I went to the interview with 'A' I think it was at the time and everything went fine, he said "yeah you're in" and at the last minute he called me and said there wasn't enough interest (at Riverside) and so they had to drop it' (1).

Mark was also supported by his then manager, in his decision to apply for the FdA:

'At that time when I made the application I was working for a local college doing IT there and the manager, he was very happy for me because he knew my stance on going back into studying, and he was like 'well if you want to go for it I'll support you all the way' wrote me a fantastic reference and, you know, he couldn't do enough for me. Of course I had to leave that job because the hours didn't suit for my studying.' (1).

Patrick has been encouraged by his father to progress to an MA in computing, as this is his area of work, and he feels that employment and salary prospects will be better than in music. He has also offered to support him financially in this.

Transitions: Moving up (Level 3 to Level 4)

All six students applied for the BA through UCAS, although they were internal applicants and not applying to any other institutions.

Ben -

'However I am already feeling that potentially if anything, having the two years experience here at Riverside has given me an advantage to some extent, because I know the format and therefore I'm already working

potentially at a faster pace that could enable me to remove distractions of moving into a new environment' (1).

Davinder –

'I would have been here for two years and two of my other friends who were on the National Diploma with me as well they were also planning on staying as well, and as we worked very well together, we'd always helped each other out and so it was nice to know that actually we were staying together here. And I think that influenced me to actually carry it on to the BA at this institute, rather than going somewhere else, to stay here and do that knowing that I know the lecturers here, they know how I work, they know my abilities, rather than having to move somewhere else and try and settle in and do the BA at the same time, I don't think that would have worked with me very well' (1).

This infrastructure of local family and working life influenced the choice to remain at Riverside, for further studies.

All three students stated that they were advised to start with the ND, and appear to have been informed about the issues of studying with a majority of school-leavers. At this stage they felt that they were embarking on a four-year programme of study, with progression to the HND at Riverside.

Davinder -

'Because I'd been here doing the National Diploma I'd seen the Higher National Diploma, I'd seen their work, I'd seen how they were all getting on with the type of stuff they were producing.' (1).

The students did not regard the change to a BA as particularly significant, in either a positive or negative way. Initially there was a slight concern about another year of study.

All thought that the UCAS application procedure was a superficial exercise, as places had been offered to them. Notification of the need to apply through UCAS was received late, very close to the deadline.

Davinder -

'I didn't see why we had to go through UCAS. Obviously everybody did because it was a degree. It was a bit annoying actually the fact that because I was already here I think and that I wanted to stay here, I kind of knew that I would get in ...' (1).

The issue of two or three years' study was not significant to the students.

Ben –

'To some extent. I would have done it anyway even if it was like a two-year HND and a one year top up but... I dunno I guess it makes it sound more professional if it's a 3 year BA' (1).

Anthony –

'From the very beginning the intention was to move on to a two- year HND at the time. Now obviously what happened in the second year of ND was we were at a very late stage warned it had become officially now a three-year BA and that did throw me slightly because that would obviously mean I would be here for a total of five years. However, within a very short period of time of receiving that information I was quite happy to extend that, as five years in the whole scheme of things is actually only a very short period of time and that, you know, I was quite happy to go with that. step' (1).

In progressing from the ND to the BA, rather than the HND, the students felt that they were less likely to get *'more of the same'* (1), especially in the first months of delivery. Instead, they consider that they have moved to a more theoretical approach. This is particularly articulated by the student who had previously done a Foundation Programme at a prestigious London institution, who appears more

aware of the differences between a conceptual understanding and the mastery of skills, which is reflected in the difference between the BA and HND.

The lack of hands-on experience of photography, is a criticism of some the students:

Davinder –

‘... for the BA course, for the whole of the first semester, there isn’t any photography involved even though it’s a photography course’(2).

The students expressed some concerns about sharing facilities with FE students, because of the state in which they leave the studios. However, they also recognised that they too were FE students recently, and appear to resent what they feel are disparaging remarks from some lecturers, about FE students.

Students feel that they are on the receiving end of some staff confusion regarding course administration and content, as a result of the BA being managed from City and criticisms of the availability of library books and the time taken for inter-library loans, were made.

All three students indicated that the progression to the BA involved much more theoretical study, compared to the practical nature of the ND.

Davinder -

'it's very, very theory based'. "it's mainly essays and stuff like that and so it just involves a lot of theory. I'm reading loads of articles and then writing, rather than taking pictures' (2).

Students' reactions to the increased level of theory varied, according to their previous educational experience. Ben, who had obtained A levels, felt confident with this type of work, as A level study had given him the '*fundamentals*' (2), but Davinder was finding it very difficult to adjust to a different way of working

'it's not what I expected and there's no preparation for it – it's kind of slap bang in your face' 'it's making me think, well do I want to do this or not'. 'there's not much practical photography actually in it and it's quite hard to believe I'm actually on a photography course at the moment' (2).

Anthony reflected upon the first year degree experience –

'I think a lot of the people that are finding it incredibly difficult, and I myself am one of these people, are people that have experience from the ND' (2)

citing the need for time management, because of the self-directed nature of the BA, as the major reason for this.

There was some vagueness regarding the awareness of financial support available.

Anthony –

'Erm... if I remember correctly a very small amount was given to everybody... the figure escapes me, I think it was £100 a year reduction on my fee, however due to most of the circumstances which I'm coming from I don't believe I've had anything more than that taken off (1).'

Davinder –

'Well I got a letter to say I would be getting some but I haven't heard from them and I actually need to chase it up. But I think I do get... two grand or something, I think that's what the letter said, but I'm just waiting to hear, because I think I have to sign something and then send it back to them' (1).

All three students continued to work part-time, after progression to the BA, in two cases undertaking a significant workload. Anthony works in a retail camera shop for three days per week and Davinder works for approximately thirty hours per week, as a support manager at a branch of Pizza Hut, fifteen miles from her home, in Riverside. She drives to work and has been employed there for five years, having undertaken in-house management training. Ben has started a

media company, with a friend from the ND, specialising in website design, graphics and photography.

Reflecting upon their post transition experiences, all three students detected a change in the course organisation, with the change from HND to BA, feeling that Riverside staff were not always as familiar with assignment marking and grading criteria, as the City staff who also now contributed to the programme. Also, they did not yet have a cohort identity at Riverside, because it was the first year of BA delivery there. For Davinder and Anthony, the transition to degree level work had absorbed their energies, with concentration on successful completion of the first year becoming the main factor; for Ben, the transition appears to have been less personally challenging – *'I would say that I was more serious about my subject because I've committed more time to it'* (2).

All three students applied for the BA through UCAS, although they were internal applicants and not applying to any other institutions.

Jane decided to remain at Southtown (Riverside) because of concerns about leaving home:

'I thought about going to other places but I know what I'm like, I'm too much of a party person. I know if I go into another university and live in halls. I saw what my sister's like at university and I thought "I want to do

my work as well as I can” do you know what I mean, even here on the ND ‘A’ and ‘B’ go to me But I know at least with here I’ve got mum on my back as well’ (1).

Phil saw no reason to go elsewhere:

‘It’s just that the main reason I didn’t really want to go away as well was because I can do the course here, this is the perfect course for what I want to do, so I thought I could either go to... I looked at a couple of others, , but I would have had to have moved, and because I only live two minutes up the road it seemed silly moving away to do something I can do here and then I’ve got to pay for all my accommodation for three years. And so that’s really why I thought I’d stay here’ (1).

For Sarah the decision was haphazard – driven by a failure to get to grips with the UCAS process and essentially defaulting to the course at Southtown when she had not made an application (for fashion) and the tutors encouraged her to progress to the 3D BA.

The students progressing internally knew each other but the mutual influence was probably less significant than it was for the students (all mature) who progressed from the ND Photography to the BA.

Jane –

'we were all friends. I mean like with the ND our whole group bonded, nobody actually knew each other before they started and then by the end of it everyone was just friends with everyone. But I knew that I was going to stay on. Sean was not too sure if he was going to stay on or not and Sarah... I thought she was going to another university and I was shocked when I came back and found out that she was still here. And then Phil just came back and I thought he was going out to work. So it was like our own decisions (1).

Sarah emphasised how close the whole ND cohort was – the four who progressed internally were not a particular subset. One of her closest friends had progressed to the Graphics HND.

Phil was not intending to progress to HE, as he was intending to get an apprenticeship, and only made up his mind in the summer after he found he was not enjoying his job which wasn't paying well *and 'I just thought it was a bit of a crappy deal really, and so, I thought I'd rather go in at a higher level' (1).*

Jane was interviewed, for the BA, as if she were an external applicant; four students were interviewed together and then individually, two internal and two external. Phil's experience seemed more informal as he had a meeting with the PL and brought in some work he had done for his final major project; he was interviewed on his own.

In the case of both sample cohorts progressing from National Diplomas, the expectation of a progression route was originally an HND rather than a BA. For Jane this was a little confusing, not, it appears, because she saw the HND as an end in itself, but rather that she saw the third year as a qualitatively different experience:

'I knew that it was higher education, I knew I'd got another three years left ... when I first was getting into it and filling out all the forms and that. I was getting confused about the title because I always knew it as an HND. And then I thought BA, but I thought that's when you're here for the third year, and I didn't want to get confused, I was writing both on the forms. But I mean it wasn't until I came here and then we asked 'B' again and he goes 'no you are doing a BA, you are doing the first year of the BA'. And we were all like 'OK' (1).

For Phil it didn't make any difference:

'I think I'd been told but I wasn't really overly fussed by what sort of thing... if you going to do something you might as well do the whole thing' (1).

Sarah expressed similar views.

Most of the students worked part-time during both the ND and the BA. Although Southtown has a very generous bursary system, the students seemed unaware of its specifics. Jane said she was getting about £150 in a grant but didn't mention a bursary and Phil thought that '*apparently we are getting like £500 after Christmas*' (1). Sarah left the financial arrangements to her parents

'I'm so un-technical and UCAS just scared me so much and the pay sort of thing, I completely left it up to my parents because I didn't have a clue. I had the forms and I said 'right, there you go, you can kind of do that for me'. And because my dad had just started his business we didn't have much of an income at all and so I got a bursary and mine was paid for me, so they filled out all the forms and stuff, I didn't have any input really' (1).

Phil:

'Yeah. I thought it was going to be a lot harder than it actually is. I thought I was going to be... I dunno, I suppose as well I do more work now than I did in the HND but I thought... because I suppose I probably built myself up to think it's going to be really hard work I've probably just got so used to doing it now I'm alright. But I don't find it as hard as I thought it was going to be. It's just nice....'

'In a sense you could get confused you're still at school on a National Diploma or in a sixth form but now it's definitely serious and mainly that's due to we're given a brief and it's up to us to go and do it, whereas we'd be hand-fed it before' (2).

Phil withdrew from the BA in the summer term, to take up employment as an apprentice designer.

Sarah and Jane both feel that the BA is expecting them to think more critically about their work and work more independently, which they enjoy because they feel that they can *'push the boundaries'* (3) with their design work.

The two students have enjoyed the year, but feel that the pace is slower than on the ND, with more time to complete work and they regard the tutors as very supportive. Sarah – *'they're always trying to motivate us to do the best we can, and they're always there for us'* (3). *'A allows me to be so outrageous and stuff'* (3). In spite of this positive experience, Sarah is considering changing to a Fashion degree and is currently applying for courses in London, which was her first choice of subject last year, but she missed the UCAS deadline for application, so progressed internally to 3D Design instead. Her wish to transfer is also prompted by the desire to live in London, but she feels that she will probably not be successful in her applications and will remain at Southtown, but probably

include some short courses in Fashion. Sarah also works for a design company, part-time, which provides her with commercial experience in graphic design.

Anthony is still considering progression to teacher training, when he completes the BA, but *'there has been a degree of distraction. I haven't put too much thought into it because I've been so concerned with my own work slipping'* (3). He would ultimately like to be a graphic designer in America or Australia, combining this with teaching.

Ben is thinking about setting up his own company, if possible, dealing with image generation or photo shot graphics and working freelance.

Davinder still wants to see her career in photography, but feels that *'now the course is kind of going downhill, I'm going downhill with it and I don't want that to happen, because when I actually do it, I love doing it'* (3). She feels that her future career is dependent upon the course, which she hopes to finish. She has started her own business, doing photography for friends, and hopes to combine this with her current part-time job, to provide some financial security.

All three students cited support and encouragement from their families, and pride in studying for a degree. Anthony cited a female friend in Australia, whom he had met whilst travelling, who had been influential in his decision to return to study.

They also emphasised how important the peer support was from each other, as they moved on to the first year of the BA.

However, Ben expressed the following view, feeling that his family might not regard his choice as properly academic:

'I'd like to think my tutors were proud of me from what I achieved from the National Diploma and they're pleased that I'm staying here and continuing, so they can kind of see how I've developed. Family, I would like to think they're proud of me as well. They might think it's kind of a get-out degree, not as academic as they might think' (3).

Sarah would like to be working for Vogue in ten years' time and Jane has only vague ideas about progressing to another course. She has reservations about debt, but cannot yet see herself in a job.

Sarah knew she wanted to leave school but not what she wanted to do or where to go. Her brother had done Music at Riverside and Sarah's mother took her to the College. She felt that her father was influential in her decision making

'definitely my Dad, because my Mum's just like happy so long as I'm happy with it then she'll be happy with it as well (1)'.

Sarah also cited her ND tutors, as being supportive of her decision to progress to the BA, but not of her desire to transfer to a Fashion course elsewhere.

Phil's father was a significant influence in his decision to take up the offer on an apprenticeship, as he is a 3D designer for exhibitions. Phil cited his friend (Sean) with whom he had studied on the GNVQ and the ND, and with whom he progressed to the BA, as an influence on his decision, and it may have been Sean's deferral from the BA to DJ in Greece, that prompted Phil's withdrawal from the programme. Jane's father was supportive in her change from A levels to design.

Summary of student interviews

The picture emerging from the student interviews can be summarised in respect of the organising themes, as follows:

Identities

The student stories present a diverse picture of young people with a range of backgrounds, prior educational experiences and reasons for selecting their current learning programme. However, a connecting thread in their narratives is one of circuitous routes to higher education, or a lack of direction, with a range of experiences interrupting the smooth progression from school to sixth form or

college, followed by university. The dominant factor emerging from the student interviews is that they are all following their individual learning trajectories and for these students, the availability of a local offer of higher education is very important, because it enables them to continue to live at home. For the younger students, this is influenced by the avoidance of student debt, or, more covertly expressed, the desire to support a lone parent. For the mature students, it allowed them to continue their employment and not disrupt partner employment.

Transitions

The transition experiences did not appear to be seamless. In all except the case of the City FdA students, who progressed to the BA in Music Technology, an application through UCAS was necessary, even if it involved the surreal situation of a Programme Leader writing a reference to himself, as an Admissions Tutor. In addition to the imposition of the external UCAS procedures for internal progression, it does not appear that advice was given regarding the generous financial support available at Southtown, from September 2006, when 'top-up' fees were introduced and tuition fees were set at £2,700, in contrast to £3000 at most other universities, and a bursary of £1000 was available to all students in receipt of a Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG). All students interviewed were vague about the financial support which might be available to them, or the rate of tuition fee that would apply, as the HND and FdA students would not incur the higher fee level for their third year.

The learning experiences described by the students, post transition, were challenging in a number of ways, at both Level 4 and Level 6. The students who had progressed to Level 4, which was in most cases, their first encounter with higher education, felt that a much greater level of self-motivation and discipline was required, than on their pre-transition programme at Southtown, and that the approach to learning was much more theoretical, with a higher level of research skills required than previously. This degree of learner autonomy was sometimes perceived as isolating, which tended to be regarded negatively by the first year degree students, but seen as having developed the strength of independence, by a third year student. One of the photography students felt that the shift from teaching practical skills, to theoretical understanding, had 'de-skilled' her, something which she found very de-motivating; however, two of the 3D students enjoyed being encouraged to 'push the boundaries'. The third year degree students also felt that the move from the FdA and HND, to the BA, required higher level research skills and a greater level of self-directed learning to cope with the teachers' expectations and the university regulations regarding assessment.

The general impression given by the students interviewed was that their learner experience, post progression, was one for which they were not prepared and which they struggled to get to grips with. This was particularly communicated by the first year degree students, and may have contributed to the withdrawal and

the desire to transfer to another subject. It appeared that the institution had not taken the opportunity afforded, by internal progression, to prepare the students for the transition and to manage their expectations accordingly.

Boundaries

The attitude to boundaries is interesting, because there is sometimes an assumption that students will be intimidated by the more academic and elite atmosphere of university, when progressing from college. However, the emergent view from the interviews is that students value the different sense of space and place, regarding this as a hard-won privilege and mark of adulthood, and would appreciate different social and learning facilities, within a dual-sector institution.

Organisational cultures

The issue of organisational cultures did not feature explicitly in the student interviews, in contrast to those of academic – managers, where the differences in cultures between further and higher education were frequently cited. However, some of the comments regarding their progression experiences are influenced by the different cultures existing within the dual-sector institution.

In conclusion, the findings regarding the student experience indicate that the curriculum offer enabled students to pursue their aspirations, but that a tension emerges, particularly in relation to the progression experience from Level 3 to Level 4. At which point, the support inherent within the pedagogic approaches of further education, is abruptly replaced by an expectation of learner-autonomy. This dilemma, of how to ensure that the needy and supported student, in further education, becomes the confident and self-directed student of higher education, also surfaced in the staff perspectives. This, together with other dilemmas of duality, will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Dilemmas of duality

The data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 provides an interpretive account of staff and student experiences of a dual-sector institution. In drawing any conclusions from this, it is necessary to return to the research questions and consider the data in its historical and policy context. The main research question - *What were the implications of the merger of further and higher education, within a single institution, for the promotion of access to, and widening of participation in, higher education?* - implies a set of assumptions, which inform the four themes of this research – boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures. Implicit within these assumptions, is the perception that the boundaries between the further and higher education sectors can cause barriers to progression.

Therefore the removal of these boundaries will aid a seamless transition to higher education. This perception is predicated on the view that seamlessness can be created more easily within a unified, 'dual' organisation, than between two separate organisations in a collaborative, or partnership, arrangement, and that merger will create organisational unity and a common institutional identity.

Merger is only one approach within a typology of dual-sector organisations.

There is however, a presumption that these organisations will promote widening participation by facilitating the transition to higher education through the provision of alternative qualification routes, second chance learning opportunities, and an increased variety and geographical spread of provision. This presumption is

based upon a view of the 'typical' student likely to be found in dual-sector institutions, as opposed to more traditional HE establishments.

The 'non-traditional' student cited by Dearing (1997), for whom the 'distinctive mission' of further education colleges was to provide sub-degree level higher education, is likely to be older, at the point of progression from Level 3 to Level 4, will study locally and will frequently combine work and family responsibilities with study (Duke, 2005).

These implicit assumptions can be seen in the rationale for the merger between Southtown University and Riverside College. However, in order to answer the research question, it is necessary to interrogate the assumptions and consider why the perceptions arose. This will be done by relating the four themes of boundaries, identities, transitions and organisational cultures to the analysis of the qualitative data in respect of the following sub-set of research questions: -

1. What were the student experiences of learning and progression in the dual-sector institution?
2. What were the implications of the dual nature of the institution upon student progression?

3. What impact does dualism have upon academic and institutional identity, within the institution?

4. What are the implications for the future development of policy and practice in dual-sector institutions?

This analysis will seek to conceptualise the processes which mediate the impact of national policy implementation, upon specific institutions, creating unintended consequences for learners and academic staff, because of the interaction of complex local factors. This conceptualisation of universal policy aspirations in particular instances will use the metaphor of local ecologies, drawing upon the work of Spours *'et al'* (2007).

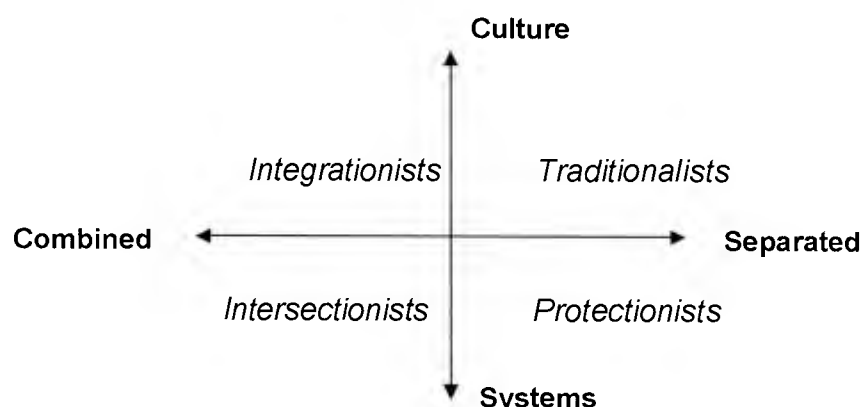
The impact of dualism upon academic and institutional identity

It could be argued that the introduction of the common organisational structure (described in Chapter 3) in September 2004, following the merger in January 2004, was an attempt to bring together the different cultures prevailing in the two organisations, extant at the time of the merger. This would be a very simplistic interpretation, failing to recognise the differences between the new managerial culture of the further education college and the more collegial culture of the university, and the possibility of a continuum of responses from staff, ranging

from the rejection and resistance to the strategic compliance articulated by Shain and Gleeson (1999).

The data obtained from the interviews with manager-academics identified four types of attitude to the duality of the organisation created by the merger. These differing attitudes can be categorised as integrationists, intersectionists, traditionalists and protectionists (Macfarlane, Fillipakou, Halford and Saraswat (2007), see Figure 1 below. This typology may be linked to Clegg and McAuley's analysis of the middle manager-academic in higher education (2005). This identifies four representations of middle management in higher education, linked to dominant discourses about management as; an agent of organisational control; a self-interested agent; a corporate bureaucrat and a transmitter of values. These categories have some pertinence to informing the following four attitudes to duality among manager-academics at Southtown University.

Figure 1: Attitudes to duality



Traditionalists oppose duality based on the belief that higher and further education represent distinct entities, with different educational values, purposes and cultures. Hence, traditionalists oppose the formation of a dual sector institution as a matter of principle on the basis that a university is a very different type of institution to a further education college. Proponents of this view are found in both higher education and further education. This attitude was manifested within the institution by a number of the manager-academics interviewed. It was explicit within the view that a university is about scholarship, whereas a college is about skills training, and that FE management can be bureaucratic and bullying. This could be regarded as elitism on the part of staff from the pre-merged university. However, there was another form of academic snobbery emerging from the staff of the former FE college, who encouraged more able students to progress from further to higher education at another, more traditional university rather than internally. Whilst it could be argued that students should be encouraged to select an institution that best suits their individual progression needs, there was a perception evident in the staff responses that indicated that they viewed their departmental success in terms of the number of students obtaining places at prestigious (external) institutions, rather than meeting the institution's strategic targets for internal progression. Traditionalists could be regarded as offering rejection and resistance as an approach to

organisational change and, to some extent, are disposed to be agents of organisational control.

Protectionists are focused on maintaining the separate and former identity of their constituent part of the merged organisation. They perceive duality in a negative light and can feel threatened by this change: for example, the stated view that the university may not be able to retain its identity as a 'university' if it is diluted, or contaminated by further education provision. Protectionists tend to shelter in the identity of their own subject area or institutional sub-brand, for example, the School of Law or the School of Art and Design. In external relations, protectionists may stress this sub-brand rather than the new identity of the merged institution believing the latter to be negative rather than positive in marketing terms. Protectionists were found in both the HE and FE parts of the merged institution. In particular, the A level and GCSE provision viewed itself as separate from the University, supported by the title of 'Academy'. Some manager-academics from further education also expressed some frustration with the culture of more open debate and slower decision-making that operates in a higher education institution, feeling that it inhibited responsiveness. Protectionists could also be categorised as adopting a rejection and resistance approach to dealing with organisational change, but better fit the descriptor of self-interested agents.

Intersectionists support the aims of duality, as a means of improving student progression but take the pragmatic view that maintaining two separate but strong further and higher education parts of the merged institution is a more effective means of achieving this goal. They argue that the existence of well-established and distinctive external systems relating to funding and quality for further and higher education, with different sets of expectations, militate against structural integration. Intersectionists argue that they can better manage these demands if freed from the expectation to integrate systems and staffing, and maintain the cultural differences which exist between further and higher education; hence the comment that 'we don't need a pink version of red and white'. While some may accept that the boundaries between further and higher education are blurring in terms of the curriculum, they favour a clear separation of physical resources and organisational systems between further and higher education, to create the optimum conditions for an appropriate student experience at each level. Intersectionists have opted for a strategic compliance with the mission of the merged institution and can function as corporate bureaucrats.

Integrationists are the most openly supportive of duality, believing that the merged organisation can successfully integrate the cultures of further and higher education. They regard the maintenance of separate structures as counter to the ideal of a single organisation supporting student progression from further to higher education. They argue that the boundaries between further and higher education have been blurred by widening participation and increased

participation, so that the traditional pedagogic approach of universities is no longer appropriate in a post-1992 institution. They argue that the lecture, with its reliance on self-directed, autonomous learning and subject specialism, should be augmented by more interactive teaching and a system of learner support. This learner-centred approach can be applied equally well to further or higher education, so that the distinction between scholarship and skills, is no longer relevant. They acknowledge, however, that such integration can be challenging and that the pace of integration might be different across faculties and subject areas. Integrationists could, therefore, be regarded as the only category which is compliant with the strategy and mission of the merged institution and could be transmitters of the desired corporate values.

Distribution of attitudes to duality

Attitude	Proportion of interviewee population (as %)
Traditionalist	42
Protectionist	14
Intersectionist	33
Integrationist	11

An analysis of the above figures shows that 66% of the academic-managers interviewed support separated cultures and systems in the dual organisation (the

traditionalists and protectionists) and that 44% support combined cultures and systems (the intersectionists and integrationists). The dominant disposition is, therefore, in opposition to the merger, although there is significant support for duality, but on the basis of a clear and systematic separation between further and higher education, to create a more organisationally efficient and appropriately aspirational learning environment for different types of students. There was little support (11%) among the manager-academics interviewed, supporting the vision of full integration espoused at the strategic level.

The responses from interviewees demonstrate that there is a mismatch between the promotion of a unified organisational structure at the strategic level and attitudes at the operational level of the manager-academic. Here, where support for duality exists, the intersection of further and higher education is favoured as opposed to their organisational integration. It is interesting to note that this latter approach to duality is essentially the same as that preferred by many Australian dual-sector institutions, some of whom had previously pursued a more integrated approach when first created in the early 1990s (Garrod and Macfarlane, 2006).

It should be acknowledged that some elements of these findings relate to broader attitudes to merger, rather than the specific concept of duality. The issue of geography and a lack of understanding and communication between different campuses of the university is an example of this broader issue. A similar set of

concerns might be found at any large, multi-campus university which has recently merged with another institution.

It appears that the most significant issue facing manager-academics in this particular dual-sector institution is one of creating harmony between two different organisational cultures, now pursuing common institutional goals. To encourage this harmony, it will be necessary to promote a meaningful adoption of a shared vision, not currently in existence, and consider how best to continue the management of change process, subsequent to the merger. In relation to the achievement of increased student progression, one of the main objectives of creating a dual-sector institution, an emphatically expressed view of the manager-academics interviewed was that senior management needs to engage with the importance of creating an appropriate environment to facilitate this.

While many of the staff interviewed were often unclear or negative about the reasons underpinning the merger, some felt that there might be a more effective way for the new dual-sector organisation to achieve its goal of improving student progression between further and higher education. Pressure to improve the internal student progression rate from further into higher education is perceived as a 'burden' for manager-academics. However, many interviewees suggested that progression can be achieved, if 'students have something to which to aspire'. It was emphasised that students need to appreciate the differences, both in a physical sense, such as the separation of buildings, between further and higher

education, and in terms of the learning experience, which should offer the privileges of trust that come with encouraging more autonomy in learners as part of raising aspirations.

Manager-academics from the former FE college were keen to stipulate that internal progression was not a new concept and that established and successful routes were in existence in some subject areas, prior to the merger. An example was given in relation to the HND in Business, where significant numbers of students had formerly progressed to a third year degree top-up, validated by another university. However, the rate of progression had reduced since the merger for the following speculated reasons: students preferred the branding of another local university for the award of their degree, and what was described as 'the curriculum fit' between levels 5 and 6 of the customised programme with a carefully designed incremental curriculum.

These attitudes to duality could be regarded as expressions of the different cultural values between further and higher education, outlined in Chapter 3. However, Clegg and McAuley (2005) argue that the collegial/managerialist dichotomy is a simplistic interpretation of the types of management system in higher education, instead proposing four dominant discourses on the concept of middle management (the representations cited on p177), which are pertinent to the attitudes to duality evinced by the academic-managers at Southtown University. Particularly relevant is the middle manager seen as a transmitter of

organisational wisdom, as Clegg and McAuley cite Huy (2001, p.73) who suggests that middle managers can make a significant contribution to radical organisational change, because they are better than senior management at operating across informal networks and attuned to employees' moods and emotional needs, managing the tension between continuity and change. It would appear that this crucial role of the middle managers at Southtown, the newly created Heads of Subject and Directors of Study, in particular, were not utilised fully in implementing the cultural change necessary to achieve the objectives of the merger and a new institutional identity as a dual-sector institution. These staff attitudes to duality, and the tensions and confusions inherent within them, had an impact on the student learning and progression experiences, as analysed subsequently.

The student learning and progression experiences

The sample consisted of four separate student cohorts, emerging as a collection of individuals, rather than exhibiting shared characteristics, so the qualitative evidence does not support any causal relationship between shared characteristics and student choice of a dual-sector institution as their site of study.

The Music Technology students, who had progressed to the BA from the FdA, were all mature, with significant work experience, prior to their current studies.

They came from a range of backgrounds, with different levels of parental and sibling achievement, and different levels of educational attainment (ranging from Level 2 – 5). However, the flexible entry route to the FdA did not make this a barrier to access. The main shared motivations were an interest in the subject, the need to study locally and the availability of evening study, to combine with full-time employment. These aspects were significant to their self-perceptions of identity. They did not see themselves as students, even though all three expressed a desire to progress to MA studies; rather studying was part of a complex picture of career and life aspirations. The move to daytime tuition for the third year caused significant problems for all the students, because of their work and financial commitments. This potential problem was not acknowledged by the university in its preparation for progression, which did not require a UCAS application, but did not, nevertheless, facilitate a seamless progression. Having made the transition to the third year of degree studies, the previous FdA students did not feel fully integrated with the other BA students and in spite of investing two years of study on the supposed work-based qualification of the Foundation degree, did not feel that Music Technology offered any immediate employment prospects.

The Level 4 students formed two distinct categories, those with diverse post-16 educational experiences, prior to their current studies at the time of the first interviews, and those who had followed a fairly linear progression from Level 2 to

Level 3 to Level 4 qualifications. In some cases, a significant amount of experimentation with different types of qualifications and educational programmes had been experienced, as students explored their options and, sometimes, drifted into the easiest next stage of education, conforming to the expectations of family and teachers. This was particularly prevalent on the BA in Photography, where all three students had obtained other Level 3 qualifications prior to enrolling on the National Diploma and progressing to the BA. However, none of the students progressing from the National Diploma to the BA in Three Dimensional Studies had previous Level 3 attainment.

The assumptions that the dual-sector student has not achieved sufficiently at school to progress to higher education and is the first generation of the family to aspire to this, are not applicable in most cases, as some students had obtained A levels and progression to university was, or could have been a possibility, but instead there was a change of direction to a vocational programme. Out of the nine students interviewed, four had parents with HE qualifications, and the majority felt that their parents were supportive and proud of their ultimate achievements. Interestingly, the two students from second generation HE families, with high achieving siblings, expressed some ambiguity about their interpretations of parental views regarding their choice of vocational programmes at Southtown, indicating that they are not seen as 'proper' subjects, and their own feelings implied that they felt they had 'failed' academically and could not

compete with traditional academic success, so were pursuing their own, different paths.

The decision to study locally, so that they could remain at their own, or the parental, home, was a determining factor for all the students, either for financial reasons or because of personal commitments. All the students were working part-time, to varying degrees whilst studying, and this was regarded as a priority. For the students living independently, it was essential to meet their financial commitments, and for the younger students living at home with parents, it was regarded as important to avoid taking out a student loan. Two of the Riverside students, completing the BA in Music Technology, cited this lack of debt as enabling further HE study in a different subject, as a possibility for the future.

The students' awareness of the dual nature of the institution, or the impact of the merger, was not explicitly articulated, even though the merger occurred during their time of study. The fact that, at Riverside, the College became a University, and was re-branded and re-badged accordingly, did not feature in their progression decisions. The possibility of a seamless and easy transition was not mentioned as an expectation, and the responses to questions about the application procedure, financial advice and learning experiences, indicate that the internal progression experience was no more seamless than that of an external progression. However, implicit within the responses was an expression

of dissatisfaction with the sharing of campus facilities (at Riverside) with younger students, and the sense of place and institutional identity that this created, not feeling that they were at 'a proper university'. This was a consequence of dualism, as there is no separation or demarcation of space for higher and further education at Southtown, in spite of the reference to zoning made in the response to the 2005 QAA Institutional Audit. This is more relevant at Riverside, where the higher education students are in the minority and the environment has the appearance of a college, with signs and student management appropriate to the 16 – 19 age group. Although there are younger FE students at City, the environment is a typically HE one, and the students there did not voice any concerns about sharing facilities such as libraries, or the feeling that they were studying in an inadequate or inappropriate environment.

What is striking, when considering the responses of the two categories of interviewees, the students and academic staff, is that the former have much to say about their learning experience, in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, support and the physical environment. Staff, however, tend to focus upon the impact that the merger has had on their perceptions of identity and status, and have little to say about the impact on the student learning experience, other than the need to have separate and different physical space for further and higher students. This view is echoed by the students, who would also like boundaries to demark a different physical space when making the transition to higher education, which separates them from further education students and denotes their new identity.

The students also cite a number of difficulties encountered when making the transition to higher levels of learning, an awareness of which is not reflected in the staff comments, hence the lack of measures to support a successful internal progression and to develop the independence of a secure higher education student. I think that this reflects a level of anxiety regarding the academic managers' experience of transition, following the merger, partly caused by a confused management structure and a lack of awareness, at the operational level, of why the merger had taken place. Faced with this perceived threat to institutional identity and personal status, an introverted and insular attitude emerged amongst many staff.

Comparative findings

As stated in the methodology of this thesis, my participation in the FurtherHigher Project has allowed access to some comparative data from three other institutions combining further and higher education, to varying extents. There is not the scope in this study to present an in-depth element of comparison; however, some factors emerge regarding the other institutions, which are significant to the reading of the main case study setting.

The project identified four models of duality: merger, sector change, strategic alliance and separation, with a variety of rationales underpinning these configurations. Decisions to embrace aspects of duality were only partially

influenced by widening participation strategies, or the scope for internal student progression. Instead, market related factors were influential in corporate decision-making. The two institutions, categorised as belonging to the sector change and strategic alliance models, were keen to exploit the potential for aligning or bridging their further and higher education, by appropriate means. For the newly created university college (a specialist institution), this took the form of creating vocational and academic progression opportunities within the curriculum. In the case of the further education college, an alliance with a local university as a franchise partner provided particular progression routes in specified curriculum areas. The institution that had recently restructured into separate FE and HE corporate identities did not regard internal progression as a strategic objective. Instead, successful progression was frequently seen as moving to another, more prestigious, institution, with staff and students being very aware of the reputational differences which shaped choices of higher education. The FurtherHigher project concluded that the ways in which the English system of post-secondary education combined, connected or separated, was rarely an explicit consideration for government and that there is no developed rationale for a system differentiated by sectors. In practice, the lead role for policy evolution was given to the funding council for higher education, enabling the shaping of policy in another sector. Consequently there are asymmetries in policy approaches and processes for dual-sector education (TLRP Research Briefing No. 40 2008).

These findings contradict the presumption that institutions combining further and higher education seek seamlessness of progression opportunities as a general goal. Instead, they support a view that each sets its strategic priorities in response to local circumstances.

With regard to quantitative evidence of progression, whether taking place internally, or between institutions, both the FurtherHigher Project and my own research identified a significant problem limiting the robustness of the available data. At a national level, the Higher Education Student Account (HESA) return, shows student enrolments as full-time equivalents (FTEs), whereas the Individual Learner Record (ILR), compiled by the LSC, shows the qualification aims, which do not equate with student enrolments, because students frequently enrol for multiple qualifications concurrently. This lack of comparability between data sets is a significant inhibitor of accurate analysis, replicated at an institutional level, making it very difficult to track student progression to higher education and contributing to the inadequate evidence base cited by Gorrard (2006).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding part of my thesis will consider the implications for the future development of policy, in relation to dual-sector institutions, and explore whether full merger is an appropriate model. Other options of sector change, strategic alliance or separation may offer more viable configurations, depending upon the prevailing variations in local circumstances.

The view of the distinctive nature of the higher education provided by colleges, as expressed in the HEFCE consultation (2006) and discussed in Chapter 1, is reflected in several aspects of the strategic plan of the merged Southtown University. There is an emphasis on vocational skills and employer engagement and the needs of the regional community, which align with the mission of HE delivered in FE. However, the merged institution is designated a university, so should be regarded as mainstream HE. This raises, firstly, the issue of identity and perhaps supports the concerns voiced by some academic-managers about maintaining university status when diluted by FE provision. It also reflects the view of some students that it might not be a 'proper' university. Secondly, the issue of geographic spread of provision also features. This is very pertinent to a multi-campus institution, situated over a wide area, and a source of discontent in the student and staff interviews.

Thirdly, what types of duality currently exist? In addition to the fully merged institution of Southtown, the three other types of mixed-economy institution participating in the ESRC FurtherHigher Project illustrate the range of dual types. These are, a HE college, which was formerly a specialist FE provider, and by developing franchised HE provision, has recently been awarded university college status (sector change); a FE college, offering predominantly FE provision, with selective extension into HE and a close partnership with a local university for HE progression (strategic alliance); and a FE college offering separate FE and HE provision, recently restructured into distinct FE and HE corporate identities, with the HE component being a wholly owned subsidiary of two universities in the region (separation). How then do these types differ?

The former HE college recently elevated to university college status has a distinct specialised vocational mission, with established internal progression routes. The FE college sees its main mission as LSC funded provision, with a selective curriculum offer of HE, mainly at sub-degree level, and an effective partnership for progression to the local post-1992 university. The third type of dual, shared many characteristics with the former Riverside College, but opted for a de-merger approach, with the separation of FE and HE at a corporate level.

Geography was significant in this decision, because the site of provision is within a county where no university is situated and capital to support the development of a new campus has been funded by the HEFCE, as part of its regional development agenda. This is a very different situation from Southtown University,

which is situated in a geographical area with almost a surfeit of higher education provision, by traditional and post-1992 universities, creating a competitive environment for student recruitment.

So, having considered the recent policy regarding dual-sector institutions and the types of duality currently existing, the remaining and most significant question is – does the evidence from this research support full institutional merger between further and higher education as a way of achieving government policy aspirations? The rationale for the merger was accepted by the funding bodies for both further and higher education, so it would be reasonable to suppose that its objectives appeared to be in alignment with espoused policy. This rationale, outlined in Chapter 3, stated that a primary aim of merger was to facilitate increased student progression to higher education, but did not stipulate specifically that this would be achieved by internal increases. However, other objectives refer to increased recruitment to both FE and HE, setting high targets of 52 per cent and 34 per cent, within five years, respectively, with references to factors such as multiple entry/exit learning strategies to promote progression. The objectives also include the development of regional Associate College and School Compact initiatives, with a target of achieving 500 students progressing through the Associate College framework and 150 students through the School Compact arrangement, within three years.

It can be seen, therefore, that progression opportunities underpinned the rationale for merger, although no detailed proposals or critical scrutiny of how these aspirations would be achieved, were presented. There were also objectives relating to cost – effective delivery and reduced overheads, so called cost synergies, specifically a 5 per cent reduction to be achieved within two years, which were not predicated upon specified measures. It seems to have been assumed that increased recruitment and progression, at a reduced cost, would be natural consequences of institutional merger. Looking back on the rationale for merger and its objectives, five years later, it appears as a somewhat naïve wish list, not formulated upon any systematic projection of costs.

One of the reasons for the lack of robust data might stem from the lack of comparable data sets, resulting from the two different systems in operation, as the merger document specifies student numbers as headcounts at the college, but as FTEs at the university, providing an inaccurate total base figure, against which to measure variations. In the academic year 2006/07, the overall progression rate, from Level 3 to Level 4 courses, was 3 per cent, against a target of 10 per cent, remaining virtually static since the merger in 2004. However, the picture varies in each faculty. The data available for 2006/07 does not provide the full picture, because of the problems in tracking individual students when they move from one student recording system in FE to another in HE. The limited data available shows that 63 students from Riverside progressed to Level 4 courses within the university, against a target of 44. The Faculty of

Professional Studies performs significantly better than other faculties and operates a Progression Working Group to set targets and monitor achievement. Examination of the progression data in this faculty for 2006/7 shows that a 7.5 per cent progression rate was achieved at Riverside, but that progression from the City and Midtown campuses was 26 per cent, attributable largely to Access courses (Southtown Progression Report, March 2007). At a university level, the FE Diploma was introduced in 2006/07, encouraging students to combine specially designed Level 4 modules, of 10 credits, in Enterprise or Academic Strategies, with their Level 3 programmes. An incentive of a financial reward, together with a guaranteed undergraduate place, was available to students gaining the Diploma, which it was hoped would be an attractive internal progression pathway, but no students enrolled for the additional modules (Southtown Progression Report, March 2007). The reasons for this disappointing uptake may be complex and have not yet been explored by the university, or as part of this study; however, the progression data illustrates that achieving significant increases in the internal rate of progression to higher education is extremely difficult, even when seamlessness is a strategic objective. At the time of the merger in 2004, there were 1233 higher education FTE enrolments at Riverside for the academic year 2003/04, whereas in the academic year 2008/09, this had reduced to 900 (Southtown MIS data). Caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from these institutional data, because the regional picture for the academic years 2003/04 shows that total FTEs in higher education rose in the region where Riverside is situated by approximately 4,000, while FTEs for

higher education delivered in further education colleges remained static. The data for the region in which the main Southtown campus is situated show that FTEs rose by approximately 13,000, while FTEs for higher education delivered in further education college declined by approximately 1200 (HEFCE 2004/48). Hence the Riverside decline in HE provision could have been the reflection of a regional trend.

The assumption that cost savings would result from the merger appears to have been flawed. Although there were initial savings from the closure of duplicate administrative departments, such as Human Resources and Finance, at Riverside, the cost of unifying academic contracts was substantial. The use of the three types of contract, dependant upon the number of HE teaching hours timetabled for individual staff, meant that HE lecturers at the former college had their annual teaching hours reduced from 870 to 550 and all lecturers were granted fifteen days per year of scholarly activity. This resulted in significant increases in delivery costs for programmes, with the consequence that viable group sizes needed to increase at the former college. A concomitant effect of this was that the traditional recruitment to HE provision in FE was insufficient to sustain cost-effective groups, at the new levels, resulting in the closure of courses at Riverside, especially when there was an alternative course delivered at City. This accounts for the comments by academic-managers, when interviewed, that progression to HE at Riverside had declined since the merger and an offer of programme delivery at City was not considered suitable by

students, because of the time and cost involved in travelling. Geography is therefore, a barrier to seamless progression within this particular merged institution.

Another barrier to creating a unified institution is the deep-rooted dualism expressed by the academic staff interviewed. Significant numbers of the former university staff felt that their professional academic identity was threatened by being merged with a college, and that the institutional identity as a university, with all the connotations discussed in Chapter 1, was undermined and diluted, if tainted by further education. The fear of losing a professional and institutional identity was not restricted to the former university staff, as manager-academics at Riverside spoke about their fears of not being able to attract disaffected students to a building signposted as 'a university', and of a decrease in recruitment as a consequence. They also expressed their frustration at the slow speed of decision-making in the merged institution, when LSC funded provision was expected to respond quickly to initiatives.

In summary, the attitudes towards professional identity, expressed by academic staff from the former university, tend to present a more collegial view of their professional community, associated with a view of the institution as a university espousing the traditional liberal values of knowledge, reason and autonomy. whereas, the staff of the former college reflect the instrumental and reactive ethos of a sector, which it could be argued, has been de-professionalised to

some extent, since incorporation in 1993. These divergent attitudes reflect the dualism of different organisational cultures, still in evidence after the introduction of a unified organisational structure, and constitute a professional/managerial dichotomy acting as a barrier to unification.

The undermining of the professional paradigm is discussed by Randle and Brady (1997), as the proletarianisation of academic labour, citing the de-professionalisation thesis of Wilson (1991), writing about higher education and the new universities. Proletarianisation has resulted from the degradation of work owing to the dilution of the quality of teaching, the lowering of academic standards, the deterioration of teachers' pay and conditions and the erosion of professional status. However, Shain and Gleeson (1999) suggest that the notion of professionalism can be used as a conceptual tool for understanding contemporary educational change, as it is redefined to be based upon personal effectiveness, critical autonomy and community (Hodkinson, 1995). This could be regarded as a consequence of new managerialism, which is associated, by Clarke and Newman (1997) with the ulterior motives of exerting control over professionals by management, through the use of the legitimising language of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Total Quality Management (TQM), representing powerful surveillance mechanisms through a panoptic approach. The reform agenda for further education has produced a workplace containing ambiguities and complexities, to which teachers need to respond, as stated by the interviewees from the FE part of the merged institution. Shain and Gleeson

(1999) categorise three different types of response to this situation, as an alternative to the managerial/professional polarisation of attitudes; these are resistance and rejection, compliance, and strategic compliance. It is the last, strategic compliance, that they regard as offering possibilities for teachers to re-work their notion of professionalism in a preferred way, thus re-professionalising, rather than de-professionalising. However, the way in which academic managers have mediated the implementation of new organisational structures and roles, in some cases to the extent of denial, could be regarded as a rejection and resistance response to the changes resulting from the merger.

When considering the responses from the student interviewees, it is apparent that there is much that is positive about their learning experiences, but that their progression experiences have not been significantly enhanced by occurring in a dual-sector institution and appear to be no different from those which would have been experienced in the respective parts of the pre-merged institution. The preparation for the transition to higher education has not diminished the culture shock of the expectations of more autonomous learning, made upon the HE student, and the designation of 'university' to the site of the learning experience has created un-met expectations regarding the surroundings and resources available, which could be summed up as a dissatisfaction with the 'sense of place', expressed as 'not being a proper university'.

The responses of staff and students raise important questions and debates about the boundaries between FE and HE within dual-sector institutions and these are discussed by Burns (2007) with reference to the Hernes typology of organisational boundaries and their properties (2004). Burns offers an interpretation which presents examples of research at another dual-sector institution. This suggests that the re-setting of boundaries at the micro level, of programme delivery, is contributing to creating spheres that are 'FE', with the consequence that HE expectations of students and lecturers are omitted. This corroborates the findings at Southtown, where physical boundaries of buildings, with different levels of entry security denote difference; for example, swipe cards are needed to access buildings at Riverside (predominantly FE), but not at other sites. The significance of these boundaries, when applying the property typology of Hernes, is that they inhibit seamless transition, as crossing a physical boundary can be regarded as a transgression (breaking the rules). Social boundaries, such as differentiated norms of dress and language, produce distinction effects, which serve to keep the FE and HE sectors separate and cognitive boundaries of ideas and ideologies can create dissent amongst staff and students, when their expectations of a specific sector are not met within a dual institution. The degree to which an institution regulates its boundary thresholds is another effect of the typology and at Southtown, the strict insistence of using UCAS for internal progression applications to the third year of the BA in Music Technology, with the HND tutor writing references to himself, as the BA

admissions tutor, is an example of a strictly imposed boundary threshold that inhibits transition.

A useful metaphor to help understand the results of merger at Riverside is that of 'local ecologies': Spours *et al* (2007) who use the concept of ecologies or ecosystems, taken from the natural sciences, and apply it to the inter-dependent relationships of different LSC providers in a locality, where the behaviour of one provider can have an impact upon the whole ecosystem, with unintended consequences. The research of Spours *et al* also used the related concepts of 'the process of mediation' and 'acts of translation' to understand the ways in which policy levers acted upon eight FE colleges, concluding that the national policy-makers, who design policy initiatives, may not be fully aware of the complexities of the way in which policy is translated and mediated by managers, at a local level, frequently resulting in unintended consequences. In their research, the unintended consequences were unpredictable outcomes caused by the vulnerability of institutions to constant shifts in policy and high transaction costs, because of the need to conform to multiple accountability systems.

This metaphor of local ecologies can be applied to the situation resulting from the merger of further and higher education at Southtown University. Although not part of a national policy initiative to combine the two sectors of post compulsory education, through institutional merger, it was an act approved by national policy making bodies (the HEFCE and the LSC), with the intention of improving

progression to higher education by removing the perceived barriers between the two sectors and improving the educational provision to the region. However, the unintended consequences include a reduction of the higher education offer at Riverside, a failure to increase progression to higher education, increased costs and a deep-rooted dualism between the organisational cultures of the respective sectors, affecting the way in which strategic management decisions, by senior managers, are mediated at the meso and micro levels within the institution. Hence, the complexity of the local situation (the merged institution) has caused interactions resulting in unexpected and unintended consequences from those of the policy aspiration.

The use of this metaphor could indicate a negative consequence of the institutional merger, as the interaction of unplanned factors militated against the achievement of its stated objectives. However, to return to the current diversity of the higher education sector, as outlined in Chapter 1, and the positioning of institutions within this diverse market, perhaps the merged University is an example of a dual-sector institution which can offer a curriculum to meet the needs of local populations in its three locations, by a locally differentiated offer. The trauma of transition has caused a concentration upon management structures, roles, responsibilities and the mechanics of institutional operation, rather than the curriculum and learning strategies, constituting the curriculum product of the university. There are obvious problems associated with the failure to meet the targets for increased recruitment and progression, which threaten

financial security and staff confidence, but what emerges from the student narratives is a demand for a local offer, with the flexibility to combine study with employment and the support for the development of study skills necessary for HE achievement. This reflects the student base of the pre-merged university, with its majority of mature, local students and high levels of ethnic minority representation; whereas, achieving internal progression from the mass of younger FE students, seeking a full-time university experience, is a very different proposition.

To return to the national policy environment, the recent government document concerning the higher and further education interface *Supporting higher education in further education colleges Policy, practice and prospects* (HEFCE, 2009), states that partnership arrangements form a central plank of policy for the expansion of higher education and the widening of participation. It does not, however, refer explicitly to institutional merger. Instead, further education colleges are required to have a strategy in place for partnerships, and guidance is provided on the aspects of duality that proved problematic for Southtown University. These include staff development, scholarly activity, management and resourcing; citing examples of good practice where the management of the HE provision is separated within the college. This enables the different demands of supporting HE to be dealt with effectively. The student experience is also referred to in this document; reporting that students progressing from sub-degree study, frequently experience transition problems because of the volume of reading

necessary and their lack of academic writing skills; thus corroborating the findings of my research. This report provides statistics for the volume of HE activity in FE, which has increased from 96,435 in 2002-03, to 105,287 in 2005-06, with the majority (52.5%) of students being taught in colleges, through direct funding, rather than indirect funding arrangements. In contrast, the volume of HE activity at the former FE College of Riverside, declined during this period, although relevant regional data (see above) indicates low or nil growth in the Riverside area, so the possibility of a regional picture, at variance with the national situation, emerges. The HEFCE report discusses the multiplicity of partnership arrangements which exist between HE and FE providers, in some cases colleges have numerous types of partnership arrangements with different institutions, to meet differing needs. The University of Plymouth is cited as an example of good practice, having its associate college partnership managed by a unit which is a full faculty of the university, but not in a merged situation.

Whatever the partnership model, some pre-requisites are listed:

- clarity of purpose – a clear, shared understanding of why the partnership should exist and what it is seeking to achieve
- a commitment to collaborative working at all levels, including senior management and the board or corporation
- real benefits for all partners
- informed awareness of the costs of working in partnership, especially in terms of time
- clear roles and responsibilities
- clear communication structures

- clear financial and service agreements

It is interesting to note that these pre-requisites were not found in the Southtown merger, which may have been significant to the problems encountered.

In conclusion, this research does not find that full institutional merger produces a more appropriate organisational model for the future development of post - compulsory education in England than any of the other three models identified; rather, the particular model of dual-sector organisation is dependent upon the prevailing local factors. The binary divide between the two sectors, caused a dualism in identities and cultures which has not been removed by merger, in this case. The complexities of the local situation caused contradictions which worked against the aspirations of the merger. Significant among these is the decline in higher education student numbers at Riverside, since the merger. This is an unintended consequence, attributed by Riverside staff to the imposition of the University funding model, requiring a forty two per cent contribution to central costs to be made. Whilst this information was gleaned from conversations with academic-managers at Riverside, and is, therefore, of a lower order than systematically obtained data, it illustrates that the financial modeling of a large university, which operates on the basis of common modules across programmes, resulting in large, cost-efficient student cohorts, is not appropriate for the smaller, local offer of HE delivered in a FE setting.

The student experiences of transition across the boundary from further to higher education are facilitated in many ways by tutors and peers, at the local level, but this could occur as effectively within a strategic alliance model of a dual-sector institution, rather than through full merger, with its high associated costs and organisational complexities. In particular, the higher costs of introducing HE contracts to lecturers at the former FE college resulted in a reduction of individual annual teaching hours. Without the accompanying rise in student numbers to enable the cost-effective cohort size operating at the City site, this has resulted in the closure of programmes at Riverside.

In this context, Southtown University is a diverse and complex institution, exhibiting the multi-perspectives of the contemporary university, contributing to the discourses of crisis (Preston 2001) and sociological and conceptual undermining (Barnett 2003). However, both these authors find optimism for the future of the university in the form of influential localised cultures, which perceive institutional mission as purely an executive tool (Preston), which echoes the metaphor of local ecologies. Barnett attributes optimism regarding the future of the university to the commitment to its virtuous ideals, on the part of its members, which make it a 'site of being', rather than '*a site of knowing*'.

A simplistic summary of Government policy regarding education is that it is based upon the concept of the knowledge economy, the need to be competitive in global markets and the development of higher level skills for a majority of the

population. This has resulted in a highly instrumentalist approach to vocational skills education and training in the further education sector, which has permeated the boundary with higher education, to some extent, although the diversity of the university sector has retained elements of the concept and values of the Western liberal university. Watson (2008) in a briefing paper for the QAA *Who owns the university?* states that universities are private corporations, with a lot of important public contracts and several potential candidates for ownership. This may herald the need for a re-examination of the purpose of the university and its role in developed societies, emphasising the importance of producing graduates able to cope with unpredictability and uncertainty as another chapter in the societal narrative. It may also add to the stakeholders and shareholders who are potential candidates for university ownership. In that case, the various configurations of dual-sector institutions offer a range of models which could contribute to the post-compulsory landscape of education in England. It is worthwhile, therefore, to reflect upon and try to resolve some of the dilemmas of dualism identified in this research.

Postscript

Since concluding this research, developments have been announced by Southtown University, which are significant to the conclusions. An independent review of the provision at Riverside was commissioned by the University in January 2009, following a failed Ofsted inspection of the further education provision there. It was announced that the draft inspection report cited the complex organisational structure as contributing to problems of management and performance. This quality problem was compounded by the announcement of a £5 million operating deficit for further education at Riverside in 2007/8, with a similar deficit projected for 2008/9. The recommendation of the review, which was accepted by the University's Board of Governors in July 2009, was that the further education provision at Riverside should be divested from the University. A suitable provider is being sought to take over the further education operations in Riverside, from January 2010, and the higher education provision will continue to be part of the University, at a reduced campus in Riverside (source: Southtown University internal communications).

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- 1 How did you get to be here doing your current studies?
- 2 What did you do before?
- 3 Tell me about your experience at school.
- 4 What do you plan to do next year?
- 5 Do you see it as a change from what you are doing this year?
- 6 Are many of you on your course planning to do something similar to you next year?
- 7 How did you decide on what you are planning to do next?
- 8 Who helped?
- 9 Was being able to study in a further education college important to enable you to pursue higher education (rather than somewhere else)?
- 10 What have you had to do to prepare for next year/your next step?
- 11 What has helped you most with preparing for the next stage/next year?
- 12 What has been least helpful/got in the way, put you off preparing for the next stage?
- 13 What do people at home think of what you are doing now and what you plan to do?
- 14 Did any of them carry on with education after school?
And if so, who did
- 15 How do you feel about next year?
- 16 What do you think studying will be like?
- 17 How do you see the future – what are your plans?
- 18 Anything I have not asked that you think is important/relevant.

- 1 Are you doing what you said you planned to do in your first interview?
- 2 Describe what has happened since we last met.
- 3 What is studying like now compared to before?
- 4 Is it what you expected?
- 5 Do you get support and help with your studies?
- 6 What about financial support?
- 7 Do you see this course as very different to what you were doing last year or a continuation of the same?
- 8 Do you feel this college/university is the 'right' place to be?
- 9 Where are you living now and have you moved?
- 10 Do you have commitments alongside studying?
- 11 How important has this move/transition been in your life?
- 12 Do you see yourself as different to before, now you are on this course?
How does that show for you?
- 13 What about friends now?
- 14 What do people at home think?
- 15 Looking back, what helped you most with preparing for what you are doing now?
- 16 And what has been less helpful?
- 17 Who has been important to you in helping make this transition?
- 18 How do you see the future – what are your plans?
- 19 Anything I have not asked that you think is important/relevant.
- 20 If not asked at first interview, ask about family experience of education after school?

- 1 Are you doing what you said you planned to do in your first interview?
- 2 Describe what has happened since we last met.
- 3 Reflect back on what studying has been like this year
- 4 Has studying been what you expected?
- 5 Have you used any support or help with your studies?
- 6 Have you had financial support?
- 7 Has this worked out OK?
- 8 What has been good about being at this institution?
- 9 What has been less good?
- 10 Where are you living now and have you moved?
- 11 How important has where you are living been to your experience of HE?
- 12 How important has this last year been in your life?
- 13 Do you see yourself as different to before, now you are on this course?
- 14 How does that show for you?
- 15 What about friends now?
- 16 If you had to described what it means to do HE to friends or others thinking about following a similar route, what would you tell them?
- 17 What do people at home think?
- 18 What are your plans for the future?
- 19 Who has helped you with thinking about your next step?
- 20 Ask student to go through list and talk about the people on it.
- 21 Anything I have not asked that you think is important/relevant.

