A Systemic Study into the Problem Space of Widening Participation in UK Higher Education

Lynn Day

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth

September 2013
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Christine Welch and Professor Frank Stowell, for all your help and support in completing this inquiry. It is true to say that without your support and guidance, I would not have come this far. I am sure that I have tried your patience on many occasions so thank you both for bearing with me and providing me with the motivation to complete this work.

I would also like to thank my husband and best friend, Chris Day, for your love, encouragement, valuable criticism and remarkable fortitude in the face of neglect whilst I carried out this work. Without your support, completing this thesis would not have been possible and without you, it would have been that little bit less significant.

Finally, I would like to thank the members who took part in this inquiry for your time and generosity in agreeing to assist me. For those who allowed their experiences to be used in the final analysis, I am grateful for your openness, honesty and courage in revealing yourselves to me and also, of course, for your good-natured teasing. It was a pleasure working with you and, for some of you, it remains a pleasure still having you in my life.
Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Signed: 

LYNN DAY

30th September 2013

WORD COUNT
79,886
Abstract

In this inquiry, I conduct a systemic study into the wide problem space of Widening Participation in UK Higher Education, an initiative introduced in 1998 to promote positive discrimination for HE participation by young, socially disadvantaged individuals. In addition to redressing social justice, positive outcomes from the policy were expected to contribute to reducing high levels of social deprivation and increasing national competitiveness. It was, therefore, intertwined with other social and economic policy arenas but, by 2009, the Government admitted that rates of widened participation had failed to reach the levels expected.

The majority of current research into possible reasons why fewer socially disadvantaged young people took advantage of the Widening Participation to participate in Higher Education have tended to engage participating students from target groups as though the findings from this group could be representative of those who do not participate. This neglect of targeted HE non-participants is seen to create a major lacuna in understanding of the reason why the Widening Participation policy failed to achieve its ambitions. Existing research has also tended to concentrate on implementation of the Widening Participation initiative, focusing on the narrow confines of the HE sector without considering interrelated policy arenas. I address these two major lacunae by conducting a systemic study into the wider problem space of Widening Participation and interrelated policy arenas, engaging HE non-participants from target groups in practical inquiry.

This study represents a major contribution to what is known about possible explanatory factors for the perceived lack of HE participation by young socially disadvantaged individuals as encouraged by the Widening Participation policy. The major finding from
this study is that, rather than make a decision to not participate in HE, the majority of research members did not consider HE participation as worthy of notice, much less a subject for active decision-making. Underlying reasons for this varied greatly depending upon how members had been affected by multiple indices of social deprivation. For those who had not been negatively affected, HE participation was a ‘non-decision’ because they were content with their situations, had different ambitions and moved into available employment. They did, however, appear to limit their educational outcomes according to the limited employment opportunities available in their socially deprived environment. For those who were severely affected, the ‘non-decision’ of HE was subsumed under their ambitions to change their circumstances to be more tolerable and reduce the effects of social deprivation. Finally, a small minority who did wish to participate in HE were prevented from doing so by the poor financial circumstances of their families, a ‘barrier’ which was not considered in studies engaging WP students and therefore not addressed.

The major contribution to the discipline of “policy-making” from this systemic study is that both systems and ethical thinking are required to ensure the future success of the Widening Participation policy. Holistic policy development should be allied with a move from paternalistic government to gaining an understanding of the cultural situations, values and norms of the socially excluded. Social intervention, a redistribution of resources to reduce multiple indices of social deprivation and regeneration of deprived areas to provide greater employment opportunity to increase educational outcomes should be encouraged. The implication for the future progress of Widening Participation under the Coalition Government and changes introduced in 2010 suggest that blanket measures to encourage young, socially disadvantaged individuals to participate in HE are ineffective. I therefore recommend a targeted approach based on evidence which answers the question “Is
Widening Participation in Higher Education important and to whom?” Further research will clearly be needed in order to answer this.
Contents

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... 1
Declaration ................................................................................................................................... 2
Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... 3
Table of Figures ............................................................................................................................. 14
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................................... 18
Publications .................................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 20
  1.1. The problematic situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education ............... 20
      What is the problem? .............................................................................................................. 20
      Why is it important? ............................................................................................................. 25
      What am I going to do? ........................................................................................................ 28
  1.2. Rationale for the research ................................................................................................. 30
  1.3. The research questions informing the inquiry ................................................................. 31
  1.4. Scope of the inquiry .......................................................................................................... 34
  1.5. Presentation of this thesis ............................................................................................... 34
      The voice of the author ..................................................................................................... 34
      Use of literature ................................................................................................................. 35
      Creating a ‘recoverable’ action learning project ............................................................... 36
  1.6. Organisation of this thesis ............................................................................................. 40

PART ONE – LEARNING FOR ACTION ....................................................................................... 40

PART TWO – FROM LEARNING INTO ACTION ........................................................................... 46

PART THREE – LEARNING FROM ACTION ................................................................................ 49

Part One: Learning for Action .................................................................................................... 52

Chapter 2. Area of Interest: The Problematical situation of Widening Participation in
Higher Education ......................................................................................................................... 53
  2.1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 53
2.2. The wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education ................................................. 54
2.3. Scope of this Chapter ................................................................................................................................. 57
2.4. What was Widening Participation and why was it seen to ‘fail’ ............................................................... 60
2.5. The political ideology underpinning the Widening Participation policy ................................................ 66

   New Labour’s authoritarian communitarianist project .............................................................................. 66

   A Communitarianist Approach to Widening Participation ........................................................................ 71
2.6. Widening Participation for the ‘socially disadvantaged’ ........................................................................... 76

   Defining Disadvantage as a notion of ‘social exclusion’ ......................................................................... 76

   New Labour’s problematisation of social exclusion ................................................................................. 80

   The Moral Underclass Discourse of Widening Participation ..................................................................... 83
2.7. Widening Participation for what? ............................................................................................................. 86

   Educational inequality, equality of opportunity and social justice ......................................................... 86

   The New Labour economic inheritance .................................................................................................... 87
2.8. Widening Participation as a ‘joined-up’ policy? ......................................................................................... 89

   A notion of ‘joined-up government’ ........................................................................................................... 89

   Widening Participation in Higher Education – a non-systemic approach to a joined-up policy ............... 94

   A Stakeholder Society? ............................................................................................................................ 97

   Evidence-based policy or policy informed by evidence? .............................................................................. 99
2.9. Summary – joining up and reaching out ................................................................................................. 104

Chapter 3. Towards a Framework of Ideas: Theoretical Underpinnings .................................................. 111

3.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 111
3.2. A typology of paradigms ....................................................................................................................... 113
3.3. ‘Anti-interpretivist’ views of human behaviour ....................................................................................... 117
3.4. An interpretive view of human behaviour ............................................................................................. 118

   Phenomenology ...................................................................................................................................... 119

   Hermeneutics ......................................................................................................................................... 126

   Significant themes from interpretive thinkers ......................................................................................... 131
3.5. Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 139

Chapter 4. Framework of Ideas: Applying a Systemic Lens to inquiry .................................................... 141

4.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 141
4.2. A Brief history of Systems Thinking ..................................................................................................... 142
Early beginnings .............................................................................................................. 142

4.3. Later developments in the Systems Movement ................................................. 146

4.4. The separation of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking ..................................... 148

   ‘Hard’ Systems Thinking ......................................................................................... 148

   ‘Soft’ Systems Thinking ......................................................................................... 150

4.5. Framework of Ideas .......................................................................................... 152

   The contribution of C. West Churchman ................................................................. 153

   The Contribution of Sir Geoffrey Vickers ............................................................... 155

4.6. Summary ............................................................................................................. 172

Chapter 5. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) .............................................................. 175

   5.1. Introduction ....................................................................................................... 175

   5.2. Matters of methodology versus method ......................................................... 177

   5.3. Rationale for adoption of SSM ..................................................................... 179

   5.4. The development and shape of SSM ............................................................... 183

      Action Learning in the development of SSM ......................................................... 184

      Development of SSM as Action Learning through Action Learning ...................... 186

   5.5. SSM in practice ................................................................................................ 190

      The original form of SSM ..................................................................................... 190

      The developed form of SSM ................................................................................ 197

      Modes of SSM ...................................................................................................... 199

      SSM(p) and SSM(c) .............................................................................................. 200

      How SSM will be used in this inquiry ................................................................. 201

   5.6. Considering criticisms of SSM ...................................................................... 206

   5.7. A lacuna of method in SSM .......................................................................... 209

   5.8. Learning the way to the research questions ................................................... 210

   5.9. Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 211

Part Two: From Learning Into Action ......................................................................... 214

Chapter 6. The Ethical Journey .................................................................................... 215

   6.1. Introduction ..................................................................................................... 215

   6.2. A note on terminology .................................................................................... 219

   6.3. Ethics defined ................................................................................................... 220

      Prevailing perspectives of research ethics .......................................................... 221
Chapter 7. Profiling research membership................................................................. 249
  7.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 249
  7.2. A lack of clarity in defining ‘social disadvantage’ ............................................... 252
  7.3. The age factor ..................................................................................................... 253
  7.4. A lack of clarity in who should be included in the research ............................... 254
  7.5. Choice of Area for Participant Research ............................................................ 255
  7.6. Adequacy of research membership .................................................................... 258
  7.7. Duration .............................................................................................................. 260
  7.8. Barriers and constraints ...................................................................................... 260
  7.9. Research setting .................................................................................................. 261
  7.10. Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 262

Chapter 8. The Framework for Practical Inquiry ......................................................... 265
  8.1. Introduction .......................................................................................................... 265
  8.2. Designing the Framework of Practical Inquiry: An Action Learning Project .... 266
    Incorporating prior learning into the research design as Action Learning ............. 267
    A preliminary Field Study for Action Learning ...................................................... 268
    Testing the Framework for Practical Inquiry through Action Learning ............... 269
  8.3. Gaining a greater appreciation of what? ............................................................. 270
    Vickers’ notion of an Appreciative System revisited ............................................. 271
  8.4. Operationalizing Vickers’ notion of Appreciation for information gathering .... 273
    The basic shape of the guidelines ......................................................................... 273
    Exploring vital elements ....................................................................................... 275
    Structuring the guidelines for information gathering .......................................... 276
  8.5. Issues of communication .................................................................................... 277
Visual interpretations of members’ lived experiences .......................................................... 278
Rich Pictures as a means of communication ..................................................................... 279
8.6. Determining the full research process ...................................................................... 281
8.7. Testing the waters and discovering sharks: an unintentional action learning cycle .... 283
Learning the lessons for navigating dangerous waters...................................................... 285
8.8. Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 287

Chapter 9. Taking the action for learning about the action ................................................. 290
9.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................... 290
9.2. Accessing and recruiting research members .............................................................. 291
9.3. The research members .............................................................................................. 293
9.4. Timeline .................................................................................................................... 294
9.5. Preparation for Field Studies ................................................................................... 298
9.6. Building and maintaining rapport ............................................................................ 298
9.7. “Concerned of Gosport” .......................................................................................... 304
9.8. Analysing the data ................................................................................................... 306
9.9. Negotiating the data analysis gap ............................................................................. 308
9.10. A brief example of the subtle difference between a Relevant System and a Relevant Issue and the construction of a Root Definition ......................................................... 318
9.11. Making sense of research members’ experience ...................................................... 322

Relevant Issue 2 - Perceptions of childhood ........................................................................ 323
Relevant Issue 3 - Factors contributing to perceptions of unhappiness in childhood .......... 324
Relevant Issue 4 - The influence of role models ................................................................. 325
Relevant Issue 5 - A distinction in values and attitudes ...................................................... 325
Relevant Issue 6 - Ambition, aspiration and desire to ‘be something’ ................................ 326
Relevant Issue 7 - Tradition and norms ............................................................................ 327
Relevant Issue 8 – Perceptions of poverty ........................................................................ 327
Relevant Issue 9 – Experience of school ........................................................................... 328
Relevant Issue 10 – A Lack of Opportunity ........................................................................ 328
Relevant Issue 11 - Perceptions of HE ............................................................................ 328
Relevant Issue 12 – HE: a decision to participate .............................................................. 330
9.10 Summary.................................................................................................................... 330

Part Three: Learning from Action ....................................................................................... 335
Chapter 10. Learning from Practical Inquiry: Contribution to Knowledge ..........................336
10.1. Introduction ...............................................................................................................336
10.2. Outcomes of research to address main research question........................................340
   HE: An option worthy of notice? ..................................................................................340
   The effect of family background ..................................................................................343
   The ‘non-decision of HE’ as a ‘normal biography’ ......................................................349
   Reaching the ‘final frontier’: a need for social justice .................................................351
   The notion of barriers: a barrier to effective policy development? ..............................354
10.2.2 The usefulness of systemic research for informing holistic Widening Participation policy development.................................................................................................................356
   Which comes first: the social chicken or the social egg? ..............................................357
   Big picture policy, small detail people .........................................................................358
   Outward-looking policy, inward looking people ..........................................................359
   From economy to society: an egg and chicken situation? .............................................360
   Hatching the egg and loving the chicken ......................................................................362
10.3. Conclusion ................................................................................................................364

Chapter 11. Future directions .........................................................................................369
11.1. Introduction ..............................................................................................................369
11.2. Contribution to knowledge about the discipline of “policy-making” ......................370
11.3. Implications for the progress of Widening Participation in Higher Education under the Coalition Government ...........................................................................................................374
   The Coalition implementation of Widening Participation in Higher Education and other relevant policy ........................................................................................................................................375
   From past to present: implications for the progress of the Widening Participation initiative under the Coalition ..................................................................................................378
11.4. Future directions for research activity ......................................................................383
11.5. Conclusion ..............................................................................................................385

Chapter 12. Reflections on a Research Adventure .......................................................387
12.1. Introduction ..............................................................................................................387
12.2. Reflections on Methodology ..................................................................................388
   Rationale for selection of SSM. .....................................................................................388
   How SSM was used ......................................................................................................390
Visual artefacts........................................................................................................... 391

12.3. Reflections on the conduct of the practical inquiry ........................................... 396

Issues of anonymity.................................................................................................... 396

Accessing research members in groups .................................................................... 397

Use of ‘informal gatekeepers’ ..................................................................................... 398

12.4. Reflections upon a personal journey .................................................................. 400

12.5. Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 402

References .................................................................................................................. 404

Appendix A: A New Appreciation of Appreciation Part One .................................. 443

Introduction.................................................................................................................. 443

A brief interpretation of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation ............................................. 443

Human being versus human doing ............................................................................ 445

The impoverished interpretation of appreciation ....................................................... 446

The richer interpretation of appreciation ................................................................... 449

The effect of decisions.................................................................................................. 453

Application of a richer model of appreciation ............................................................ 454

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 455

Appendix B: Relevant Systems, CATWOE Analyses and Root Definitions for the Primary Research Questions ................................................................. 458

RD 1 – A system to gain a greater appreciation of why more disadvantaged young people do not participate in HE ................................................................. 460

RD2 – A system to gain a greater understanding of whether systemic inquiry into WP in HE may be useful in informing holistic development of inter-related policy arenas ......................................................... 462

Appendix C: Ethical Checklist ..................................................................................... 464

Appendix D: Worksheets and Rich Pictures for Field Studies 2-4 ............................. 468

Field Study 2 – The Builder Boys ................................................................................. 468

Field Study 3 – The Yummy Mummy ......................................................................... 478

Field Study 4 – The Shelf Stackers ............................................................................ 486

Appendix E: Relevant Issues identified from data collected in Field Studies with Supporting Information ................................................................. 491

Relevant Issue 1 – HE: An issue not worthy of notice .............................................. 491
Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SSM (p) framework for inquiry: the Action Learning Cycle</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Checkland's F,M,A, a basic conceptualisation of intellectual work (adapted from Checkland &amp; Scholes, 1990, p. 283 Fig 10.4)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The action learning cycle of SSM (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p. 11)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A holistic view of the WP in HE policy</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Original Socio-economic grouping by occupation (ONS, 2005a)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Socio-economic classification analytical classes (ONS, 2005a)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>POLAR quintiles for measuring HE participation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rates of WP participation in HE</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bridging the extremes: the Third Way (adapted from Giddens, 2003, p. 35)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>%age growth rates of ethnic minorities (adapted from ONS, 2011)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Systemic Summary of Section 2.5</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Systemic summary of Section 2.6</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Systemic Summary of Section 2.7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>WP research themes, 2007-2009</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Systemic summary of Section 2.8</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Systemic summary of political interconnections surrounding WP in HE</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The social &quot;mess&quot; of WP in HE</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The subjective-objective assumptions (adapted from Goodley and Lawthorn, 2005, p. 139; Johnson, 2003, p. 78; Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 6)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>the concerns of sociologies of regulation and radical change (adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 18)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory (adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 22)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Burrell &amp; Morgan's relationship between subjectivity and objectivity (adapted from Stowell and Welch (2012, p. 135)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>A grouping of Systems Thinkers (adapted from ((Ramage and Shipp, 2009, location 221))</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Disciplines and scholars represented at the Macy Conferences (1946-53) (adapted from (American Society for Cybernetics, n.d.))</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 78 - The structure of an appreciative system (P. B. Checkland, 1999, p. A51) ......................................447

Figure 79 - An epistemology for making sense of the (groundless) social process (P. B. Checkland, 2005, p. 28)..................................................................................................................448

Figure 80 - The concept of a regulation through relationship maintenance illustrated through an (adapted) classical feedback model (West, D., 2005, p 272) .................................................................448

Figure 81 - The basic interactions of an appreciative system .................................................................450

Figure 82 - Expanded interactions of an appreciative system ............................................................451

Figure 83 - A richer model of Vickers' appreciation ........................................................................456

Figure 84 - Member's perceptions of childhood .................................................................................493
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEPI</td>
<td>Higher Education Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>High Skills Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUG</td>
<td>Joined-up Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUP</td>
<td>Joined-up Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSE</td>
<td>Low Skills Economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| NCIHE | National Committee of Higher Education  
Commissioned by the Conservative Government in 1996 to determine the shape and purpose of Higher Education over the next 20 years. |
| POLAR | Participation of Local Area Regions  
The “geodemographic” technique used to identify WP students entering HE.  
Split into 5 quintiles, each quintile represents 20% of the population classified by rate of HE participation in the neighbourhood. |
| RP | Rich Picture  
A holistic representation of a situation. Originally used as a device in Stage 2 of Soft Systems Methodology. |
| SEU | Social Exclusion Unit |
| SSM | Soft Systems Methodology  
The systemic methodology employed in this inquiry as the Methodology (M) underpinned by the intellectual Framework of Ideas (F) of Soft Systems Thinking as appropriate for inquiring into the Area of Interest (A). |
| WP | Widening Participation  
A policy initiative originating from the report of NCIHE in 1997 aimed at encouraging traditionally under-represented groups to participate in HE |
Publications


1 Publications are in the name of Akers-Smith up to 2007 after which they appear in the married name of Day
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The problematic situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education

What is the problem?

The Widening Participation (WP) policy was an initiative introduced by the New Labour Government in 1998 aimed at encouraging greater numbers of young disadvantaged people to participate in Higher Education (HE). Introduced as a direct result of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), Widening Participation was intended to encourage Higher Education participation from all groups traditionally under-represented in HE due to factors of socio-economic disadvantage, age, disability, gender, geographical location, race and sexual orientation (NCIHE, 1997, Chapter 7).

Although originally widely inclusive, it has been persuasively argued that, for New Labour, WP became primarily a matter of class equality to the exclusion of other factors such as ethnicity (Pilkington, 2009, p. 17). From 1999 onwards, the Government made it increasingly plain that evaluation of WP projects would be based upon their reaching those from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and it is on this sector of the population that this research project concentrates. Additionally, although a parallel initiative was also introduced to encourage Widening Participation in Further Education, this project concentrates only on Higher Education; any reference to Widening Participation will, therefore, relate to the Higher Education sector exclusively.

Although not a new notion in the history of the UK Higher Education system having been previously addressed by, for example, the Barlow (1946) and Robbins(1963) reports, the
1998 Widening Participation agenda represented the first initiative to positively discriminate for the underprivileged to participate in Higher Education. The initiative was introduced as a discrete policy within the Higher Education sector and is generally viewed as a standalone educational issue. However, deeper examination of governmental ambition for WP policy outcomes demonstrates its inextricable interconnection with other significant social and economic policy areas. Both the economic legacy inherited by New Labour and their political ideology also provide important implications for how and why the policy was formulated.

The historical landscape is significant since it shaped the social policy with which the Widening Participation agenda was so inextricably interrelated. New Labour came to power in 1997 after almost 18 years of Conservative government, inheriting a legacy of high levels of unemployment (Hicks and Allen, 1999, p. 24) and child poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004, p. 1), a rising trend of worklessness and welfare benefit dependence (Fletcher, 2009, p. 76), and growth in income inequality between the higher and lowest income groups (Hills, 1998, pp. 15-16). Tackling this legacy was seen by New Labour to require interrelated policy arenas to address the high levels of poverty, (or ‘social exclusion’), and the lack of prosperity arising from an inability to compete globally due to the predominant Low Skills Economy. These issues were seen to be multi-faceted problems which could not be resolved by any single agency but rather required a ‘joined up’ approach through partnerships involving public, private and non-profit agencies (Blair, 1996, p. 207). Central to the New Labour ‘Third Way’ was the notion of ‘Joined-Up Government’, a holistic approach to governance intended to address every facet of the interrelated elements of social and public policy including health, education and employment. The ultimate aim of Joined-Up Government was to provide more inclusive
and integrated ‘joined-up policy’ through a more holistic and strategic policy making process (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 6). Such ‘joined-up policy’ would be capable of providing ‘joined-up solutions’ to ‘joined-up problems’ (SEU, 1997) the achievement of which was seen to require ‘whole systems thinking’ (Mulgan, 1998).

To this end, New Labour introduced the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997 with a general remit to improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing such ‘joined-up solutions’. Reporting directly to the Prime Minister, the unit was linked to the rest of government through a network of ministers and officials from each of the government departments. New Labour believed education would be effective in moving people out of poverty and exclusion (DfES, 2003c; Blythe, 2001) and so formed a key element in the Social Exclusion Unit joined up solutions. Most significantly, post-compulsory education was believed to be crucial in moving the nation from a Low Skills Economy to a more competitive High Skills Economy by raising the necessary skill levels of the workforce. The Widening Participation policy, ostensibly aimed at actively encouraging under-represented, socially disadvantaged students to participate in Higher Education, also aimed to reduce the traditional disparity between social classes by increasing opportunities for social mobility.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was mandated with implementing the policy and Higher Education Institutions were allocated per capita funding for each “WP student” recruited. Within 3 years of its introduction, Widening Participation progressed from being a “major priority” of HEFCE (HEFCE, 1999a, para 5) to one of its “most important strategic aims” (HEFCE, 2001a, para 24). Consequently, funding allocations increased dramatically in line with initiatives to encourage wider participation in Higher Education. However, only a disappointing impact was realised
upon actual participation of the target Widening Participation individuals leading to greater research into ways in which widened participation could be encouraged and achieved.

Despite the increasing expenditure, research and number of initiatives, the proportion of socially disadvantaged students in Higher Education has continued to remain under target levels. Widening Participation policy outcomes were defined through the setting of target levels of participation by students from lower socio-economic groups; Higher Education Institutions' achievement of these targets was monitored by HEFCE who allocated funding accordingly. Evidence suggests that Institutions were initially reluctant to engage with the Widening Participation initiative and HEFCE acted to ensure their engagement through funding incentives (HEFCE, 2000, p. 8). Higher Education Institutions then became dependent upon meeting targets to attract the necessary funding streams as other Government spending on Higher Education had been reduced.

By 2009, New Labour admitted that widened participation rates were still below the rate of other developed countries and too many people with the ability to succeed were not entering Higher Education (BIS, 2009, p. 26). By the end of New Labour’s term of office in May 2010, over £2.3 billion had been allocated to Higher Education Institutions (in addition to several million pounds allocated to other bodies involved in attempting to widen participation) to achieve only small advances in percentage rates of widened participation. Arnott and Menter (2007, p. 255) state that the setting of targets, key performance indicators and standards created a “discourse where … ‘failure’ and ‘success’ can be identified very easily”; if success of Widening Participation is measured by actual participation rates rather than provision of opportunity, it can be seen that the policy failed to achieve Governmental ambitions.
Many attempts have been made to theorise reasons for the perceived ‘failure’ of the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy but there are two notable areas which remain under-researched in the literature. Firstly, it is plain that the Governmental ambitions for the initiative were much wider than merely redressing social injustices in Higher Education; rather, Widening Participation was considered a major contributor to decreasing high levels of poverty whilst at the same time increasing the global competitiveness of the nation through moving it towards a High Skills Economy. Regardless of this complexity, the majority of current research tends to focus only within the narrow confines of the Higher Education sector in which the policy was placed, considering the policy failure as a simple educational problem. There appears to be a lack of holistic research in the literature to examine the wider problematical situation of the Widening Participation in Higher Education to cohere with its ‘joined up’ nature with other social and economic policy.

A second major lacuna in the research exists within attempts to find explanatory factors for the reasons for under-participation of the socially disadvantaged in Higher Education. Although the implementation and further development of the Widening Participation policy over time was, to a large extent, based on research findings, the majority of this research was quantitative rather than, as could have been expected, holistic to synergise with the notion of ‘joined up’ and holistic policy making. As mentioned above, the Widening Participation initiative tends to be viewed as a standalone educational issue in which, if any consideration is made at all, the positive outcomes on social exclusion and national prosperity are taken-for-granted assumptions. Significantly, this quantitative research tends to revolve around discourses of pre-determined ‘barriers’ to participation which are tested against those non-traditional students who have already elected to
participate in Higher Education as though this group can be seen as representative of those individuals who have not. In 2004, HEFCE invited consultation on a proposed strategy for research into WP to ensure that policy development was informed and supported by a robust evidence base (HEFCE, 2004a, pp. 4-5). Responses recommending that, rather than concentrating research effort on understanding and overcoming barriers to Higher Education, greater research effort should be expended on gaining understanding of the “target WP individual’s” attitudes towards and perceptions of Higher Education. Despite this, HEFCE declared it would continue to prioritise research into Higher Education barriers (HEFCE, 2004b, pp. 23-30) and in 2006, commissioned research into the barriers to Higher Education, which was carried out via a literature review of existing WP research. The reviewers were damning on both the quality and breadth of this WP research, highlighting a number of flaws (Gorard, Smith, May, et al., 2006, pp. 115-146) including the fact that non participants in Higher Education were largely ignored in the research literature. This neglect has been highlighted as a serious gap in understanding WP (see, for example, Maringe and Fuller, 2007, p. 18; Reed, Gates and Last, 2007, p. 21; Watson, 2006a, p. 6).

**Why is it important?**

As clearly shown above, the Widening Participation initiative is seen as an important contributor to the social and economic well-being of the United Kingdom, in addition to providing a means to redress social equalities in access to a Higher Education. The failure of the policy to meet these ambitions has obvious negative outcomes for the inter-related policy arenas which it is expected to contribute to and consequently impacts upon the increased well-being of the nation as a whole. The other equally important implication is
that a failure of the policy means that social inequalities cannot be redressed, so permitting a continuation of social injustice in access to a Higher Education.

Although New Labour were succeeded by a Conservative/Liberal Coalition in May 2010, the Widening Participation agenda remains a key contributor to increasing social mobility and national competitiveness (Cabinet Office, 2011; DBIS, 2011). The new Government came to power in the midst of a global recession and inherited the largest budget deficit in post-war history. Radical reforms of the Higher Education system have so far mainly revolved around reducing public funding for Higher Education and the introduction of a requirement for students to pay full tuition fees of between £6,000 and £9,000 was introduced. Elemental changes to the Widening Participation policy have likewise reflected cuts in public spending as greater responsibility has been placed upon Higher Education Institutions to fund, resource and achieve wider participation. Institutions charging fees above £6,000 must develop Fair Access Agreements to be approved by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) and a specified portion of fee income above this minimum threshold must be spent on Widening Participation activity.

These changes were not announced until June 2011 so that existing Widening Participation policy has remained in operation whilst Higher Education Institutions have prepared for changes to be implemented in academic year 2012/13. At the time of writing, participation rates for this academic year are not available so it is not possible to assess the impact of the changes. However, figures for academic year 2011/12 suggest that Widening Participation rates are, in fact, lower than the previous year. HEFCE remains responsible for Widening Participation in Higher Education and state that their primary focus is to build upon “progress already made to increase the participation in Higher Education of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds” (HEFCE, 2012).
Since the Widening Participation policy under New Labour can be seen to have ‘failed’ in its wider ambitions, its future under the Conservative/Liberal government is uncertain if the strategy of the HEFCE, the responsible body, is to build upon what has gone before. This is especially true given the lacunae identified in current research upon which the policy has been largely developed. With little existing holistic research, all influencing factors and contributions of the Widening Participation policy to interrelated social and economic ambitions remain unexplained. Similarly, the significant influences of political, social and economic factors upon the achievement of widened participation remain unexplored. Both of these may imply a significant gap in understanding of explanatory factors for the lack of widened participation.

The second lacuna, the lack of involvement of non-participants, in current research fails to provide explanatory factors for ‘real’ barriers to Higher Education participation or other reasons for non-participation. All that can be gleaned from research involving young socially disadvantaged individuals who have chosen to participate in Higher Education is that there are some barriers which have made it difficult to participate but which have been successfully overcome. This means that there may be other barriers or factors which explain the reasons for non-participation but which have not yet been fully explored with those who can provide this information who can only be those who do not or cannot participate in Higher Education. As a result of these two lacunae in current research, there is currently a lack of understanding as to why the policy initiative failed to achieve significant increases of young socially disadvantaged people participating in Higher Education. Without such an understanding, it is difficult to see how the future of the Widening Participation initiative can succeed.
What am I going to do?

The purpose of this research study is to address the lacunae of systemic research involving Higher Education non-participants in Widening Participation to provide explanatory factors for the failure of the policy. Through an Action Learning project (discussed in detail in Chapter 5, pages 184 to 190), I will carry out a holistic consideration of Widening Participation in a wider context to include all inter-related political, social and economic factors important to the governmental rationale for introducing the initiative.

Firstly, I contextualise the research and highlight significant themes as a means of gaining a greater appreciation of possible issues surrounding the perceived failure of the Widening Participation policy. New Labour’s focus on ‘social inclusion’ and equality of opportunity was based upon an underlying ethos of rights and responsibilities whereby “…if the government makes a reasonable offer of a route into social inclusion, people who refuse it will be (‘unreasonably’) excluding themselves from society: they will be guilty of a moral failure - a failure to recognise their responsibilities” (J. Clarke and Newman, 1999, p. 107, emphasis in the original). This conferring of the right to participate in Higher Education upon disadvantaged youth with a related expectation of responsibility to accept the right had a dual outcome: the emergence of a Moral Underclass Discourse (Levitas, 1998) which viewed non-participants as deficient in some respect; and an associated taken-for-granted assumption that Higher Education would be an option, or life choice, a target individual would naturally consider prior to acceptance or rejection.

The latter assumption forms the primary focus for this research project. Whilst it is plain that WP was a political priority for New Labour in the interrelated arenas of social exclusion and national prosperity, what is not clear was how the objectives of these policies could be achieved if no account was taken of the non-participants themselves.
Critically, there appears to be a lack of any holistic consideration of the actual issue which the Widening Participation research purports to address, namely why more young disadvantaged people from the targeted social classes do not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education.

Vicker’s (1987a, 1983, 1973, 1970, 1968, 1965) notion of Appreciative Systems is central to research and I use this to theorise that, rather than being prevented from Higher Education by insurmountable barriers, non-participants simply did not consider participation in a University education as something of that interested them. Within the Action Learning project, I also employ the notion of Appreciative Systems to structure the Framework for Practical Inquiry (discussed in Chapter 8, pages 266 to 277), using the integral elements as a guide to conversation with a number of current non-participating socially disadvantaged individuals.

I consider Soft Systems Thinking to be a framework of intellectual ideas useful for reflecting upon the problematical situation of Widening Participation though the application of a systemic lens. Within this, I employ my own expression of Checkland’s (2007; 2005, 2000, 1999; 1990; 1989) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) which is underpinned by Vickers’ work. This use of SSM is based on experience gained and lessons learned through many prior uses of the methodology to provide a rigorous framework for the overarching Action Learning project as illustrated in Figure 1 on page 32.

Integrating the significant issues teased out from reflection upon the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education with the sense-making of the research members’ articulated experiences in practical inquiry, represented through visual rather than textual methods, I then provide some explanatory factors for possible reasons for non-
participation in Higher Education. These contribute to the general body of knowledge about what is currently known about non-participation in Higher Education and reasons for failure of the Widening Participation policy.

Following through the Action Learning cycle (Figure 1), I then reflect upon the usefulness of the holistic research into the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education in relation to other inter-related policy arenas for more effective policy development. I conclude that new insights have been made possible through this research and that holistic research is useful for development of joined-up policy development, so contributing to the body of knowledge of what is known about joined-up policy making and development. The results of this research have the potential to inform future government Widening Participation policy which is one major area of contribution this thesis provides.

1.2. Rationale for the research

I became interested in Widening Participation through my own working environment in Higher Education, particularly in my role as Faculty Widening Participation Co-ordinator. As a result of this professional interest, I launched this inquiry as an Action Learning Project with the original broad intention of gaining a greater appreciation of Widening Participation in Higher Education within the wider environment in which it is situated. Therefore, at the outset of the project, I was unsure of the direction the research would take or the research questions which would inform the inquiry.

Through structuring the research as an Action Learning Project, I was able refine the research questions which inform this inquiry through a cyclical process of learning by iterating through initial stages of the framework (Stages 2 to 6 as illustrated in Figure 1
on page 32). This learning exposed the lacunae described above in Section 1.1 (pages 20 - 28) in addition to teasing out the issues significant to Widening Participation in a wider context.

1.3. The research questions informing the inquiry

I consider that gaining a greater appreciation of targeted non-participants’ attitudes to Higher Education and the factors influencing their worldviews is fundamental to a deeper understanding of why the Widening Participation policy ‘failed’. I argue that useful insight into why target levels were not achieved can only be revealed through such an appreciation, since wider participation can only ever be realised through the engagement of non-participants. This underpins the first research question.

A second thread of interest revolves around the nature of existing research as opposed to the nature of the problem. As discussed above, the Widening Participation policy was instituted as part of joined-up policy with other social and economic policy but little holistic research is evident in the literature (Kettley, 2007, p. 334). This leads to the question of whether holistic research using Systems Thinking (as advocated by New Labour for effective joined-up policy) can be useful, at a theoretical level at least, for more effective holistic policy development.

There were, therefore, 2 main research questions which emerged from the initial learning about the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education:

- Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?; and
Figure 1 - SSM (p) framework for inquiry: the Action Learning Cycle
Could holistic research into the main research question be useful for informing joined-up social and economic policy arenas?

In May, 2010, the New Labour Government was succeeded by the Conservative/Liberal Coalition. Although the funding arrangements and access arrangements for Widening Participation changed, the underlying ethos remained the same and the new Government reiterated the importance of widening participation in Higher Education of the socially disadvantaged for increasing both social mobility and national competitiveness on the global economic stage. However, as discussed in detail in Chapter 11 (page 382), it is widely theorised that the new student funding arrangements for Higher Education would severely impact the future success of Widening Participation (see, for example, Burke, 2013, p. 13; Fazackerly, 2013; Heagney and Marr, 2013; Porter, 2011). This added a new dimension to this project since it was already clear that many proposed explanations for possible reasons for lack of participation in Higher Education by the socially disadvantaged were under-researched due to the lack of inclusion of non-participants in current research.

A third research question consequently emerged as a result of the changing Government and policy direction:

- Could the lessons learned from this systemic research into Widening Participation policy as operationalised under the New Labour government be useful for informing revised Widening Participation policy as introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010.
1.4. Scope of the inquiry

As already stated, the inquiry focuses exclusively on issues of socio-economic disadvantage in relation to Widening Participation in Higher Education. Since Higher Education funding arrangements for the different countries within the UK are dealt with by different Funding Councils, a geographical boundary is applied to constrain the inquiry within England. Finally, I recognise that, alongside the Widening Participation in Higher Education initiative, a parallel initiative was instituted in the Further Education sector; whilst this may well be a prerequisite for Widening Participation in Higher Education, I nevertheless consider this to fall outside the boundaries of this inquiry. Any reference to Widening Participation throughout refers exclusively to the initiative within the Higher Education sector.

The interpretative nature of this systemic Action Learning inquiry will necessarily limit any ability to generalise the findings. However, my interest is not in generalisability but rather on gaining a deeper, situated appreciation of the issues which could inform research questions.

The inquiry explores Widening Participation in Higher Education between academic year 1998/99 and 2011/12 since insufficient public information currently exists beyond this end date.

1.5. Presentation of this thesis

The voice of the author

In my approach to this Action Learning project, I firmly identify as a interpretivist inquirer. As the story of this inquiry unfolds, I demonstrate how I challenge existing
practices and the capacity of traditional research methods to adequately address the social problems I encounter. I also reveal and invest my identity in the work, situating myself as a co-participant with the other research members without whom the inquiry would not have been possible.

As an interpretivist inquirer, I become part of the research and am faced with the fact that detachment, neutrality and objectivity are not possible (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Unlike the positivist research who can remain detached, neutral and objective (Pettman, 2005, p. 7), I am confronted with the dilemma of how to “acknowledge my presence in the study” (Herr and Anderson, 2005). However, the use of first person active voice in research is shown by Fisher and Phelps (2006, p. 143) to be evidenced as acceptable in reporting interpretive studies and that:

“One of the conventions of academic writing that has come under sustained challenge from a number of disciplines is the use of the third person, often in passive voice, that renders the researcher invisible, giving the impression of an ‘objective’ dispassionate stance”.

Consequently, I report this study in the first person throughout, using what Ivanic’ (Ivanic’ and Weldon, 1999; Ivanic’, 1998) terms the authorial self, which is revealed through the extent to which a writer appears in the text and claims responsibility for its content. My use the first person voice is a visible manifestation of authorial self to make transparent the lack of neutrality, detachment and objectivity I possess as interpretive inquirer and author.

**Use of literature**

In many ‘conventional’ theses, the literature review is presented upfront in its entirety. However, in this Action Learning project, such a move would misrepresent the process of
inquiry. Therefore, instead of an upfront literature review of all relevant arenas, I show how I intertwine action, learning and literature so that “literature is woven through the developing arguments” (Fisher and Phelps, 2006, p. 160).

Creating a ‘recoverable’ action learning project

As mentioned above, this thesis is presented as an interpretive social inquiry conducted as an Action Learning project. In line with the systemic lens applied to the inquiry, Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is adopted, a methodology itself developed through Action Learning over a period in excess of 30 years (Checkland, 2000).

Checkland (1998, p. 9) recognises that the validity of Action Learning is often challenged due to the rejection of scientific methods and the attendant ability to provide replicability of results. In common with other interpretive methodologies, Action Learning is variously criticised for being: merely anecdotal (A. Jones, 1996, p. 209; Silverman, 1989); implausible (Seale and Silverman, 1997, p. 380); lacking in integrity (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002, p. 214), constructed merely to support researchers arguments (Silverman, 2006, p. xiii); or providing unsupported conclusions which purport to be evidence (Gorard and Smith, 2006, p. 577). The danger inherent in qualitative reporting practices is that the research can be “considered fictional and worthless as contributing to knowledge” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers, 2002, p. 2).

Several methods are available for ensuring academic rigour in interpretive research. Krefting (1991) carried out a review of the literature and provides a useful summary of strategies for establishing trustworthiness of interpretive inquiry, categorised into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Since I have already declared that I have no interest in generalising the findings of the inquiry (page 34), transferability
strategies are not applicable but the remainder are. In following the strategies, the most significant actions have been: discussing the work with experts, both in Widening Participation and Soft Systems Thinking; using a recognised research methodology; ensuring that interview outcomes have been fed back to, and agreed by, research members; allowing peer review of the work, particularly through conference presentations; reviewing the results of the work; and triangulating against the literature review.

Despite these strategies, the dynamic social context in which interpretive social inquiry takes place negates any ability to repeat the findings. This absence of repeatability is argued by Checkland and Poulter (2007, p. 177) to be the major factor underpinning criticisms of the findings of social inquiry conducted through Action Learning. However, they also argue that it is possible to ensure that such findings can be constructed so as to be acceptable as part of the body of knowledge by making the entire research activity absolutely explicit. This should be done in such a way that the whole process by which the findings were made should be easy to follow so an outside observer can understand exactly how the researcher arrived at the conclusions. Although the strong criterion of repeatability can never be achieved, Checkland (1999, p. A40) argues that this practice will make the research what he terms as “recoverable”:

“…by declaring explicitly at the start of the research, the intellectual frameworks and the process of using them which will be used to define what counts as knowledge in the piece of research. By declaring the epistemology of their research process in this way, the researchers make it possible for outsiders to follow the research and see whether they agree or disagree with the findings”.
Checkland (1998, p. 14) is prescriptive in suggesting how the researcher should make these explicit declarations. He argues that all social research involves 3 specific elements: the Framework of Ideas (F) which will be used in the methodology (M) to investigate an area of interest (A) as illustrated below in Figure 2 below.

In order to ensure that the findings and research lessons of AR are considered valuable contributions to knowledge, it is essential to declare the F,M,A elements in advance. However, Checkland and Holwell (1998, p. 11) warn that conducting an AL project, as illustrated in Figure 3, can be problematical for the researcher; applying F in an M to investigate A may provide learning not only about A, but also about the “adequacy” of F and M. This situation was experienced several times during the early stages of this inquiry.
At the inception of the project, SSM was adopted as the AL methodology and a robust Framework for Inquiry was firstly constructed through SSM. Iteration through this Framework, illustrated in Figure 1 on page 32 widened the research boundary and allowed the final research questions to emerge. However, after each iteration and greater appreciation of the Area of Interest (A), the “adequacy” of both the Framework (F) and Methodology (M) had to be revisited in light of the new learning. It is important to stress that Part One of the thesis represents the stage of inquiry at the point where the final research questions had emerged.

Figure 3 - The action learning cycle of SSM (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p. 11)

The ideas expressed above have provided the guiding principles for the work presented here, not only for the progress of the research process, but also for the presentation of Part One of this thesis. However, to facilitate a logical sequence for the reader, the F,M,A
elements are presented in the order Area of Interest (A), Framework of Ideas (F), and Methodology (M).

1.6. **Organisation of this thesis**

A number of tensions arise between the conducting of systemic research carried out as Action Learning and the production of a logically structured thesis which is understandable to an outside observer. Firstly, the systemic research itself is cyclical and iterative whilst the report must be systematically presented which can lead to some loss of character in translation to written text. Secondly, textual methods can create barriers to full appreciation of the holistic interconnections of issues considered which are more easily presented through visual illustration than through textual methods. For this reason, this thesis has been carefully organised to ensure that the nature of the research is adequately presented. Liberal use of illustrations is made to help overcome identified limitations.

The purpose of this subsection is to present a ‘thesis of the thesis’ which is presented in three parts: *Part One* contextualises the research, sets the intellectual framework and outlines the methodological approach; *Part Two* presents the Action arising from the Learning achieved in Part One; and *Part Three* presents the Learning achieved through the Action carried out in Part Two.

---

**PART ONE – LEARNING FOR ACTION**

Part One of this thesis is concerned with outlining the theoretical concepts and ideas which are operationalised in the practical inquiry. This part of the thesis is essentially a review of the literature for the identified themes.
Chapter 2

Area of interest: the problematical situation of widening participation in higher education

I begin by exploring the wider problem space of the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy to contextualise the research and highlight themes significant to the progress of inquiry. Sources from the literature, including academic research, government documents and information from other relevant professional bodies are used to explore significant issues surrounding the first and central research question (page 31). Firstly, I briefly describe the origins and progress of the Widening Participation policy, including why it could be perceived to have ‘failed’. Following this, the rest of the Chapter is devoted to exploring issues intended to gain a greater appreciation of the issues surrounding this perceived failure.

In exploring the wider problem space, I unpick the intertwining of the Widening Participation policy with other educational, social and economic policy, revealing the overall problematical situation to be highly complex and messy. From the outset, I argue that in order to investigate this problem space effectively, a systemic lens needs to be applied to inquiry. This is underlined by the New Labour move towards Joined-up Government/Joined-up policy to provide “joined-up solutions to joined-up problems” through systemic thinking. The underlying aims of the Widening Participation initiative were to decrease social exclusion, increase social mobility and contribute towards shifting the nation towards a High Skill Economy deemed to be necessary for global competitiveness.
The most significant issues to emerge from this Chapter are as follows. Firstly, I show how New Labour’s authoritarian communitarian project conceived community as lying at the level of nation and the subsuming of local community values by national values. As a result, they attempted to impose the value of participation in Higher Education on those the Widening Participation policy intended to target. New Labour conceived that, having provided the right to participate in Higher Education, young, socially disadvantaged individuals should uphold their part of this ‘social bargain’ by accepting the responsibility and participating. This social bargain positions Higher Education participation as a choice individuals targeted by the Widening Participation policy would consider then accept or reject, a notion which has been the basis for much Widening Participation research (see, for example, Diamond, 2008; Fuller, 2008; Archer and Leathwood, 2003).

I use Vicker’s notion of Appreciation to challenge this idea by highlighting the fact that only issues which individuals consider sufficiently interesting will be deemed worthy of notice to enter into a decision-making process. That socially disadvantaged young people may never consider Higher Education participation, much less make a decision about it, is under-researched in the literature. This led to the first research aim of gaining a greater appreciation of why more disadvantaged young people were not accepting the right to participate in Higher Education as extended by the Widening Participation policy.

Secondly, I stress the interconnectedness of issues throughout the Chapter, including the inextricably links between social, economic and Widening Participation policy. Whilst New Labour advocated systemic thinking to achieve the wider aims of Joined-Up Government and Joined-Up Policy, the non-systemic implementation and consequent disjoin from other policy arenas suggests an inability to achieve Joined-Up Policy as a result. I evidence the lack of holistic research into Widening Participation, leading to the
second research question which is: whether systemic inquiry into the first research question could be found to be useful for achieving more effective Joined-Up Policy, from a theoretical perspective at least.

Thirdly, I evidence the lack of understanding of the Higher Education non-participants the policy intended to target. This arises from the tendency for researchers to engage Widening Participation students in their studies as though the findings from this group could be representative of those who do not participate. I address this lacuna in Widening Participation research by conducting this inquiry with individuals who are Higher Education non-participants but who were targeted by the Widening Participation policy.

Systemic, or holistic, thinking also emerges as a recurrent theme throughout the Chapter, underlining this requirement for the adoptions of a systemic lens to inquiry. This involves applying Soft Systems Thinking, the intellectual Framework of Idea (F) for this work, which falls within the interpretive paradigm for social inquiry.

Chapter 3

Towards a framework of ideas: theoretical underpinnings

Prior to investigating the Framework of Ideas per se, I use this Chapter to explore the philosophical underpinnings of interpretive social inquiry. This provides the foundations for discussions in the following Chapters of Part One.

I firstly employ Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social theory as a framework for positioning the work in the interpretive paradigm. I explore very briefly the ‘anti-interpretivist’ tenets of functionalism and solipsism rejected in the work to illustrate the non-systemic orientation of New Labour’s political ideology. I
then discuss the philosophical underpinnings of interpretivism to define what will count as ‘knowledge’ in this inquiry.

I briefly outline the philosophical traditions of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics to elucidate how individuals interpretively make sense of the world in which they live. I then return to considering interpretive views of issues relevant to New Labour’s political ideology and include the notions of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckman, 1967), social contract theory (Rosseau, 1762) and power (Foucault, 1998, 1991, 1982, 1980) as significant to these.

The phenomenological notions discussed provide the main ideas contained within SSM and hermeneutics assists in the understanding of the practice of SSM (both considered in Chapter 5). The interpretive concepts from phenomenology and hermeneutics underpin Soft Systems Thinking which is explored in the next Chapter.

---

**Chapter 4**

**Framework of ideas: applying a systemic lens to inquiry**

The adoption of a systemic lens in interpretive social inquiry employs Soft Systems Thinking and this chapter is dedicated to outlining the intellectual Framework of Ideas within the F,M,A declaration as described above on pages 36 to 40. I provide a brief history of Systems Thinking to illustrate the separation of two schools of thought, ‘hard’ Systems Thinking and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking. Whereas ‘hard’ Systems Thinking conceives the world of being comprised of systems which may be manipulated, ‘soft’ uses the notion of ‘system’ as an epistemological device to help structure investigations into complexities of the ‘real world’.
I have demonstrated the problematic situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education as being messy and complex. Using Ackoff’s (1974) categorisation of puzzles, problems and messes, I orient this work towards ‘Soft’ Systems Thinking. This is underpinned by an interpretive epistemology, the theoretical underpinnings of which were explored in the previous Chapter. I discuss the contributions of two influential thinkers to the development of Soft Systems Thinking. Firstly, I explore the concepts of Weltenschauungen, boundary, environment and the appropriate design of an inquiring system from Churchman (1982a, 1982b, 1979b). Secondly, I provide a detailed account of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation (Vickers, 1987a, 1987b, 1983, 1973, 1970, 1968, 1965) as highly significant to this inquiry. This offers insight into how individuals systemically construct their realities and not only underpins the development of SSM (discussed in the next Chapter) but also acts as the foundations for the Framework for Practical Inquiry as discussed in Chapter 8.

---

**Chapter 5**

**Soft Systems Methodology**

Having established the underlying theoretical concepts, in this Chapter I turn attention to Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) as the Methodology (M) congruent with the Framework of Ideas (F) appropriate for inquiring into the Area of Interest (A). I firstly provide a rationale to substantiate SSM as an appropriate methodology for inquiry within the F,M,A declaration. I then provide a brief history of the development of SSM, followed by an unravelling in of confusion between versions, modes and uses of SSM to arrive at a comprehensive and rigorous framework for inquiry. The technical stages of SSM, including Relevant Systems, CATWOE analyses, Root Definitions and Analyses One,
Two and Three are briefly described but their use in the inquiry is contained in Appendix B. Whilst I consider SSM to be an appropriate methodology for framing the inquiry, I highlight the fact that there are no prescribed methods for practical aspects of investigation. I address this lacuna in Chapter 8.

At the commencement of the research, I had no predefined research objectives. I explain the process of using the SSM Framework in the early stages of the inquiry to ‘learn my way’ to the research questions, which have been described earlier in Section 1.4.

**PART TWO – FROM LEARNING INTO ACTION**

Part One of this thesis demonstrates the learning from which the active inquiry is to be conducted. Part Two moves into the active inquiry stage of this project which addresses the first main research question of gaining a greater appreciation of why more young disadvantaged people were not accepting the right to participate in Higher Education as extended to them by the Widening Participation policy.

**Chapter 6**

**The Ethical Journey**

In this Chapter, I outline the journey taken to implement a suitable Ethical Framework for the inquiry. I start by defining what is meant by ‘ethics’ in the work and then explore various issues surrounding the development of the Ethical Framework through recourse to the literature. I compare perspectives and categorisation of ethics, concluding that my own stance is Deontological, focusing on the actions of the researcher and ensuring that all actions taken are morally ‘right’. I use interpretive notions to demonstrate how the
definition of morally ‘right’ can only be predicated upon the internal, personal values of individual researchers.

I construct the Ethical Framework from the combination of guidance provided by the European Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Social Research Association (SRA) as being the most comprehensive guidelines. Issues revolving around the engagement of socially excluded individuals are then explored and built into the Framework to reduce possibilities of harm to research members. Finally, I briefly consider the construction of this Ethical Framework in relation to the requirements of the Institutional Ethics Review Committee.

---

**Chapter 7**

**Profiling Research Membership**

I explore the difficulties of specifying suitable criteria for individuals to be engaged in the practical inquiry due to the lack of specific direction in the Widening Participation policy as to whom it intended to target. I construct a ‘good’ fit member specification and then discuss the reasons for selecting Gosport as the area in which the inquiry would take place due to the predominance of social deprivation. I conclude with specifying how many members would take part, the duration of inquiry, the research settings and barriers and constraints. In particular, I highlight the potential difficulties of accessing and locating suitable members to engage in the inquiry.

In Chapter 5, I previously highlighted the lack of prescribed research method within the SSM methodology as an issue to be resolved. I earlier stated that social disadvantage became the primary focus of the Widening Participation policy (see page 20) and that this inquiry would seek to involve socially disadvantaged individuals in practical inquiry.
Using Vicker’s notion of Appreciation, I theorise that Higher Education participation is not necessarily a *choice* ‘target WP individuals’ automatically make, but may be more likely to be something they do not deem interesting enough for the issue to become the basis of a decision. Selecting elements which are worthy of notice from the environment is predicated on lived experience through the operation of the Appreciative System. Based upon this, I argue that understanding whether this is the case requires an understanding of the lived experience of research members which forms the foundation for the practical inquiry. This means that, although questions around Higher Education still need to be asked, the emphasis on inquiry not be on HE participation to prevent influencing members early in the process.

Chapter 8

The Framework for Practical Inquiry

This Chapter is dedicated to the design of a suitable Framework for Practical Inquiry to cohere with both the intellectual framework of ideas and the overall methodology and to incorporate the ideas above. Vicker’s notion of an Appreciative System is employed to construct a framework for conducting the practical inquiry through interview. I describe the preliminary field studies carried out to assist in development and testing of the Framework. I also discuss the difficulties of understanding between social classes, concluding that the use of visual methods, rather than textual, would be the most appropriate method for agreeing interpretations of data gathered during interview with the research members. These would take the form of Rich Pictures. I conclude the Chapter by recounting the unsuccessful first Field Study and how it contributed to developing the Framework. Safety issues were revealed as important and addressed through the shift from
a ‘cold access approach’ to the employment of informal gatekeepers from my social network to facilitate access to potential research member.

---

**Chapter 9**

**Taking the Action for Learning about the Action**

This Chapter details the conduct of the practical inquiry itself. Informal gatekeepers facilitated access to 48 socially disadvantaged individuals who took part in the research. Of these, however, 18 withdrew and 7 were found to not meet the member specification, resulting in 23 HE non-participants engaging with the full research process and allowing their experiences to be used in analysis. I describe the role played by the informal gatekeepers in establishing rapport and contributing to the success of the interviews.

The use of visual representations of interview data which are then used for sensemaking is discussed and ‘accepted’ methods of data analysis shown to be inappropriate due to their orientation towards textual representations. I explain the adaptation of SSM Stage 3 as the method of data analysis chosen and outline the outcomes of the sensemaking activities.

---

**PART THREE – LEARNING FROM ACTION**

Part Three of this thesis describes the contribution to knowledge made by the findings of this inquiry.

---

**Chapter 10**

**Learning from Practical Inquiry: Contributions to Knowledge**

In this Chapter, I address the first two research questions to consider:
Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?; and

Could holistic research into the main research question be useful for informing joined-up social and economic policy arenas?

This is achieved by comparing the outcomes of the sensemaking of research data in Chapter 9 against the issues of the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education as revealed in Chapter 2. The two main contributions to knowledge in this Chapter are the emergence of new possible explanatory factors for the lack of progress in widened Higher Education participation by young, socially excluded individuals as a result of including non-participants as research members. Secondly, the use of holistic research is demonstrated to be useful for informing joined-up social and economic policy arenas, so contributing to the body of knowledge regarding policy formulation and development.

Chapter 11

Future Directions and Contribution to Policy Knowledge

The findings from the previous Chapter are carried forward into this Chapter to address the third research question, which is:

Could the lessons learned from this systemic research into Widening Participation policy as operationalised under the New Labour government be useful for informing revised Widening Participation policy as introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010.
Through the findings of the previous Chapter allied with consideration of potential issues arising from new policy directions, several recommendations are proposed to facilitate greater effectiveness of future Widening Participation policy. The results of this research have the potential to inform future government Widening Participation policy which is one major area of contribution this thesis provides.

The outcomes of this research study highlight areas worthy of further investigation and I conclude the Chapter by recommending that further targeted research is conducted with Higher Education non-participants to provide a much rounder picture and create a stronger knowledge base of explanatory factors upon which to base future measures to increase rates of widened participation in Higher Education.

Chapter 12

Reflections on a Research Adventure

The final Chapter in this thesis concentrates on reflecting upon the whole process of the research. Researcher competency is based upon continual improvement in praxis through reflection upon each research project and elucidation of the lessons learned, including what was done, what could have been done and how these may have been improved. In this Chapter, I consider issues of methodology, method and personal involvement with the research, exposing gaps and suggesting how these could have been filled. Outcomes from this reflection will be fed forward into future research projects to improve praxis and ideas for further research effort will be taken forward in new studies.
Part One: Learning for Action
Chapter 2. Area of Interest: The Problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education

“The English Higher Education Act 2004 put the concept of ‘under represented groups’ into legislation (I believe) for the first time. Whilst undoubtedly well-meaning, this may turn out to be a dangerous development. The notion of a political majority deciding at any time who is and who is not most ‘under-represented’ for the purposes of selective help should chill the blood”

Watson (2006a, pp. 5-6)

2.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 (pages 36 to 40), I described this research study as an Action Learning project, highlighting the various criticisms which are often levelled at this type of ‘non-scientific’ study. I also declared that I intended to address such criticisms through employing Checkland’s (1998, p. 14) notion of explicitly declaring the Framework of Ideas (F) which will be used in the methodology (M) to investigate an area of interest (A) to make the work recoverable. In keeping with this, this Chapter explores the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy which is the Area of Interest (A) for this work.

In the first Chapter (pages 20 to 28), I described the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy as a ‘failed’ policy. I suggested that it is problematical, emphasising the lack of both systemic inquiry and involvement of non-participants in studies which attempt to explain reasons for low rates of wider participation as areas currently under researched in the literature, leading to serious gaps in understanding.
In this Chapter, I address the first of these identified gaps by conducting a systemic exploration of the wider problem space of the Widening Participation policy to contextualise the research and highlight themes significant to the progress of inquiry. Sources from the literature, including academic research, government documents and information from other relevant professional bodies are used to explore significant issues surrounding the central research question (page 31) Firstly, I briefly describe the origins and progress of the Widening Participation policy, including why it could be perceived to have ‘failed’. Following this, the rest of the Chapter is devoted to exploring issues intended to gain a greater appreciation of the issues surrounding this perceived failure.

2.2. The wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education

The Widening Participation in Higher Education policy, instituted in 1998 by the New Labour Government, was aimed at encouraging disadvantaged young people who had previously been under-represented in the student body to participate in a University education. From its inception, Widening Participation remained high on the political agendas until May 2010 when New Labour was succeeded by a Conservative/Liberal coalition. It has been viewed from many differing perspectives ranging from a well-meaning attempt to redress social injustices in access to Higher Education (see, for example, Cornwall, Holtom, Rebane and Willbourne, 2007; DfES, 2003a, p. 65) to the ‘dumbing down’ of the Higher Education sector (see, for example, Frean, 27th March 2009; Clark and Curtiss, 20th January 2009). It has also traditionally been treated as a standalone issue affecting the Higher Education sector. However, the Widening Participation policy, although greatly concerned with the Higher Education sector by its very nature, is situated in a much wider environment embracing social and economic
issues, all of which are underpinned by the political ideology of the New Labour Government. I argue from the outset of this inquiry that attempting to examine the Widening Participation policy without fully considering the wider problem space in which it is situated will result in an impoverished appreciation of what it was and what it intended to achieve.

New Labour came to power after 18 years of Conservative NeoLiberalist rule which New Labour claimed had created levels of poverty “unseen since the last war” (Blair, 1998, January 30th). This situation was prioritised for urgent action in the first years of New Labour’s reign. Linked to, and equally important, was the lack of competitiveness of the nation in the global economy due to the predominant Low Skills Economy which also appeared on the political agenda for urgent action (Winch, 2002, p. 110). Within these two political arenas, the Widening Participation agenda was seen to provide a means of both improving social mobility (and hence reducing poverty) and increasing the skills level of the nation to achieve the High Skills Economy considered to be essential for becoming more competitive in the global economy (Blunkett, February 15, 2000).

The complexity and interrelatedness of the historical issues were acknowledged by New Labour, who subscribed to a notion of ‘joined-up government’ as a means of combating the pathology of traditional departmental silos which had historically resulted in the fragmentation of policy and, consequently, the achievement of policy goals (Ling, 2002, p. 616). This resulted in a modernised policy-making process which advocated whole systems thinking for the creation of ‘joined-up policy’ (Cabinet Office, 1999; Strategic Policy Making Team, 1999) providing “joined up solutions to joined up problems” (Mulgan, 1998).
Within any government, policy is never merely ‘policy’ but is always underpinned by the political ideology of the government at the time of policy creation, regardless of the process by which it was formulated. Politically, New Labour heralded a “Third Way” of governance which would go “beyond old left and new right” by finding alternatives to state Welfare provision and government control based upon values of “democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism” (Blair, 1998, p. 1). Commentators agree that New Labour’s Third Way ideology was essentially an authoritarian communitarianist project based on Etzioni’s (1993) notion of shoring up moral and social order through matching “individuals’ rights with social responsibilities” (see, for example, Burnett, 2004; Driver and Martell, 2002, 1997, 1996).

Many attempts have been made to theorise, or provide solutions to, the ‘failure’ of the Widening Participation policy to achieve its ambitions, but these have focused mainly on the sluggish increases in participation of the socially disadvantaged within the narrow confines of the Higher Education sector. The systemic perspective I adopt in this inquiry, however, posits that gaining a greater appreciation of what Widening Participation was, and what it intended to achieve, requires moving outside of the narrow confines of the Higher Education sector to encompass the wider problem space in which it was situated. Therefore, whilst my primary focus is Widening Participation in Higher Education, the inquiry will necessarily incorporate the implications of New Labour’s political ideology, social policy discourse and economic issues of national competitiveness. All of these influenced not only the creation of the Widening Participation policy, but also its implementation and further development. These interactions are illustrated in Figure 4 below.
All of these factors are interconnected, requiring holistic thinking which forms part of the rationale for the adoption of a systemic lens to the inquiry; this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Figure 4 - A holistic view of the WP in HE policy

2.3. **Scope of this Chapter**

In May 2010, New Labour was succeeded by a Conservative/Liberal Coalition government which inherited the largest budget deficit in post-war Britain. ‘Austerity measures’, (defined as “official actions taken by the government, during a period of adverse economic conditions, to reduce its budget deficit using a combination of spending cuts or tax rises” (FT, 2013)), were instituted, primarily involving public spending cuts.
Higher Education was not immune to either austerity measures or sweeping changes in the sector. Reforms to the Higher Education system were formally announced in June 2011 for implementation in academic year 2012/13. The most radical reforms revolved around the need to restrict public spending within which Higher Education funding would be greatly reduced by 80% (Brink, 2012). The Coalition Government also accepted the recommendations of the latest review of Higher Education (Browne, 2010) that students should bear the total costs of their education. As a result, new undergraduate students would be required to pay full tuition fees which HE Institutions were allowed to set within the thresholds of £6,000 and £9,000. It was anticipated that universities would charge an average of £7,000 in order to compete for students through their fee-setting, but the majority opted to charge nearer the maximum of £9,000 (Johnston, 2013, pp. 200-201). At the same time, restrictions resulted in approximately 25,000 fewer student places in English Universities (Hackett, Shutt and Maclachlan, 2012, p. 20).

The hiatus between May 2010 and the formal announcement of reforms left Higher Education Institutions uncertain as to what the future of Widening Participation would be. However, the Coalition Government, again believing Widening Participation to be critical to improving both social mobility and economic competitiveness, announced that the policy would remain a key priority (Cabinet Office, 2011; DBIS, 2011). The most fundamental change to existing policy placed greater responsibility for funding, resourcing and achieving widened participation on HE Institutions. This included greater involvement in outreach activities. HE Institutions were also mandated to participate in a National Scholarship Programme which they would increasingly be required to fund. For every Widening Participation student recruited, HE Institutions would have to provide
benefits of not less than £3,000 which could take the form of, for example, tuition fee waivers, bursaries or reduced accommodation charges.

Since the reforms were not formally published, existing Widening Participation policy remained in force throughout academic year 2011/12. During this time, HE Institutions prepared strategic WP assessments and negotiated Fair Access Agreements for introduction in 2012/13. Overall, though, apart from making HE Institutions more responsible for achieving higher rates of widened participation, little else was changed. Responsibility for the policy remained with HEFCE and Access Agreements continued to be overseen by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). Both bodies, however, were awarded greater regulatory powers including the power to apply sanctions against low performing HE Institutions.

HEFCE state that Widening Participation remains a key priority and that their primary focus is to build upon “progress already made to increase the participation in HE of students from more disadvantaged communities” (HEFCE, 2013). Widening Participation itself is defined as “a broad expression that covers many aspects of participation in HE, including fair access and social mobility” (HEFCE, 2013).

Whilst it is evident that HE Institutions are unsettled by the “draconian” cuts and other changes, (Arthur, 2011), no figures are yet available to illustrate the effects for academic year 2012/13. For this reason, the scope of this work considers only the formulation, implementation and further development of the Widening Participation policy from its inception in academic year 1998/9 to academic year 2011/12, although available data for 2012/13 (such as HEFCE funding) are included. By necessity, the influence of New Labour is examined since there is no evidence as to the effects of the Coalition
Government’s changes at the time of writing. However, the lessons learned from this inquiry will be used to theorise implications for the future of Widening Participation in Higher Education and these discussions are contained in Chapter 11.

2.4. **What was Widening Participation and why was it seen to ‘fail’**

The Widening Participation policy originated from the findings of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) which had been commissioned by the Conservatives in 1996 to determine the shape and purpose of the sector over the next 20 years. A specific focus of the NCIHE report was the under-participation of a number of groups in Higher Education due to a number of factors including age, disability, gender, geographical location, race and sexual orientation (NCIHE, 1997, Chapter 7). In particular, a major finding was that HE continued to be socially divisive, affording opportunities only to those from more privileged backgrounds which, by their very nature, engendered greater academic achievement and consequent possibility for taking advantage of a university education. As a result, those from lower Socio-Economic Groups were denied opportunities to participate in Higher Education due simply to circumstances of birth (NCIHE, 1997, p. 23, Report 6, para 4). NCIHE recommended that steps should be taken to ensure that *all* persons who possessed the potential to do so should be allowed to take advantage of a university education and that “when allocating funds for the expansion of higher education”, the Government should “give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation” (NCIHE, 1997, Report 6, Recommendation 2).

Despite not having commissioned the Inquiry, New Labour accepted the recommendations and in 1998, the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy was instituted,
concentrating only undergraduates. The NCIHE report mentioned many factors for under-representation, but it has been persuasively argued that, for New Labour, Widening Participation became primarily a matter of class equality and other issues such as ethnicity were marginalised (Pilkington, 2009, p. 17). Accordingly, I focus exclusively upon social class within Widening Participation policy although I acknowledge that the original notion of ‘under-representation’ intended to encompass more disadvantaged sectors of the population.

Whilst issues of age, race, gender and disability are relatively easy to identify, establishing a reliable method for identifying students from disadvantaged backgrounds for implementation of a formalised Widening Participation policy is more difficult, an issue I revisit in Chapter 7. I consider it useful here to consider briefly the difficulties inherent in using established socio-economic classifications. These schemes are generally employed to help direct social policy and provide explanations for variations in social behaviour and other social phenomenon (ONS, 2005b, p. 3). The original classifications in use at the time of Widening Participation policy creation are shown in Figure 5 and those in groups III, IV and V were seen as being socially ‘disadvantaged’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Economic Groups Based on Occupation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I  Professional, etc, occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Managerial and technical occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Skilled occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N) Non-manual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(M) Manual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Partly skilled occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Unskilled occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 - Original Socio-economic grouping by occupation (ONS, 2005a)
By 2005, it was acknowledged that the problems within this scheme were “legion” and did not, for example, include those involuntarily excluded from the workforce (ONS, 2005a, p. 11). This led to the introduction of a revised classification system as illustrated in Figure 6 in which classes 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 became the officially socially ‘disadvantaged’. The revised system was felt to enable *causal narratives* specifying how a particular classification could be linked to particular social outcomes.

![Figure 6 - Socio-economic classification analytical classes (ONS, 2005a)](image)

Use of these systems is criticised on a number of fronts. Classification schemes create “abstract” notions of class which, by necessity, homogenise social groups but social groups are never wholly homogenous in nature (SØrensen, 2003; Adonis and Pollard, 1998). Therefore, any social and cultural differences which may exist not only between social groupings but also within them are ignored by the classifications. For example, regional variations which may exist *between* rural and urban communities cannot be accounted for, and any differences which may arise from religious or racial values *within* specific regional communities remain unexplained.
The occupational status used in the classification scheme is intended to be indicative of income level which, in turn, is used to define social ‘advantage’ or ‘disadvantage’. Use of the occupational status of the male within the household in either two parent families or lone paternally parented families is widely criticised (see, for example, Crompton, 2000; Devine and Savage, 2000; Bourke, 1994; Crompton, 1993). With 66.4% of working-age women in employment (OECD, 2011), neither the effect of combined incomes, nor cases where the female partner may be employed in a higher SEC than the male, can be accounted for.

My own situation illustrates a good example of the difficulty inherent in using occupational status as an indicator of social ‘advantage’ or otherwise. I am employed in NS-SEC 1.2 whilst my husband is employed in NS-SEC 5. Since it is the male occupation which is used in the scheme rather than the highest NS-SEC classification, we would be classed as a ‘disadvantaged’ household which is clearly not the case, especially given our combined incomes. Furthermore, it is often the case that my husband is able to command a greater income than I, so divorcing occupational status from income level. Such arguments, and indeed practicalities, undermine the claims for provision of causal narratives linking SEC to outcome and may provide a flawed basis for social policy direction.

These difficulties were acknowledged by HEFCE (1999c, para 12), resulting in the implementation of “geodemographic techniques” for the purposes of identification, target setting and performance monitoring of Widening Participation. Based upon evidence correlating rate of HE participation with neighbourhood affluence, 40 different neighbourhood “types” from the most affluent to the most deprived were identified. These were then linked via postcode to the average rate of neighbourhood participation in Higher
Education. Calculating the average national rate of participation to be 32% across all
eighbourhood types, the country was then divided equally into 5 quintiles as illustrated in
Figure 7 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
<th>of the National HE Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Less than 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25-32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Greater than 40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These became known as Participation of Local Area (POLAR) rates and funding for
recruitment of Widening Participation students was allocated for quintiles 1 and 2. A
higher amount was allocated for quintile 1 students who were perceived to reside in the
most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (which can be roughly equated to those in the lowest
socio-economic groupings). Per-capita funding was provided for full-time entrants
between the ages of 18 and 21 whilst part-time students attracted pro-rata funding based
upon the equivalence between the number of HE credits per year studied in comparison to
full-time programmes.

Rates of Widening Participation participation have increased only slowly as illustrated in
Figure 8 below, which combines information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency
(HESA) and HEFCE. Allocations to HE Institutions were based upon targets for
admission of WP students decided through key performance indicators for each individual
Institution. By academic year 2011/12, total allocations to HEIs of £2,447 million
achieved minor but not significant improvements in participation of disadvantaged
students. Actual improvements cannot be measured in specific terms (with the exception of the 4.3% increase in students from State Schools) due to changes in socio-economic classification systems and POLAR groupings.

Arnott and Menter (2007, p. 255) state that the setting of targets, key performance indicators and standards created a “discourse where … ‘failure’ and ‘success’ can be identified very easily”; if success of Widening Participation is measured by actual

---

2 * POLAR classifications were updated to reflect the participation rates recorded between 2000 and 2004; LPN rates are therefore not comparable between these periods.

3 ** The move from the old SEG classification to the new NS_SEC makes comparison between years prior to and years after 2008 not comparable in the dataset despite the appearance of improvement continuity.

4 *** No participation data is available for academic year 2012-2013. The funding allocation is included and shows a continuing downward trend.
participation rates rather than provision of opportunity, it can be seen that the policy failed to achieve Governmental ambitions. The rest of this Chapter focuses on highlighting the significant issues underlying the formulation, implementation and further development of the Widening Participation policy to provide a greater appreciation of this perception of ‘failure’ within the confines of the definition provided above.

2.5. The political ideology underpinning the Widening Participation policy

I firstly examine New Labour’s political ideology as it underpins all other issues explored in this Chapter, in addition to directly affecting the shape of the Widening Participation policy. New Labour came to power heralding a new “Third Way” form of government which Giddens (1998, p. 99) considers to be an alternative philosophy transcending the concerns of both the Classical Social Democracy of the traditional old Left and the Neoliberalism of Thatcher’s new Right as illustrated in Figure 9.

New Labour’s authoritarian communitarianist project

Third Way alternatives to old Left state provision and new Right governmental control were based upon values of “democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism” (Blair, 1998, p. 1). In pursuance of these ideals, New Labour rejected the traditional notion of government in favour of a ‘governance agenda’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 298). Within this, power moved away from ‘social control’ to ‘social production’ developed and negotiated between partners (Taylor, 2007, p. 300). Consequently, citizens were no longer regarded as governed subjects but as active participants in policy making, creating what became known as a “Stakeholder Society”. The full implications of the
Stakeholder Society are discussed later in Section 2.7 but I introduce the notion here as important in understanding New Labour’s political ideology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical Social Democracy (the old Left)</th>
<th>Thatcherism or neoliberalism (the new Right)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pervasive state involvement in social and economic life</td>
<td>Minimal government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State dominates over civil society</td>
<td>Autonomous civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keynesian demand management plus corporatism</td>
<td>Market fundamentalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>Moral authoritarianism, plus strong economic individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confined role for markets: the mixed or social economy</td>
<td>Labour market clears like any other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full employment</td>
<td>Acceptance of inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong egalitarianism</td>
<td>Traditional nationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive welfare state protecting citizens from cradle to grave</td>
<td>Welfare state as safety net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear modernisation</td>
<td>Linear modernisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low ecological consciousness</td>
<td>Low ecological consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalism</td>
<td>Realist theory of international world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongs to bipolar world</td>
<td>Belongs to bipolar world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 - Bridging the extremes: the Third Way (adapted from Giddens, 2003, p. 35)

New Labour’s reinvention of government through this ‘stakeholder society’ was to be achieved by collective action in the community. At the heart of their political project lay communitarianism (or communitarism) which takes as its starting point the social construction of individuals as being shaped through lived experiences and relations within their communities.

Driver and Martell (1997) offer a useful insight into New Labour’s implementation of communitarianist thinking through application of Caney’s (1992) framework which explores communitarianism at 3 levels; sociological, ethical and meta-ethical. The
sociological level holds that individuals are socially constructed. New Labour’s communitarian ideals drew deeply on this level in that individuals were considered to be unable to be divorced from the society in which they lived. The ethical level holds community as a good thing; the social nature of individuals means they would become alienated and bereft of the social context they would need to develop fully if communities were fragmented. ‘Good’ communities are seen to be those in which social and civic values are promoted above the values of the individual. New Labour also drew deeply upon this level in the Third Way’s promotion of the good of the community above all else. The third level, the meta-ethical level, is more concerned with the basis on which ethical claims are made than with ethics per se. The ‘proper’ values of community are held to be those shared by members of a particular community and there is no philosophical basis for asserting the priority of any particular set of values. This implies that the notion of ‘community’ is essentially one of local community since questions of value are embedded in, and relative to, particular communities. It is at this level that New Labour’s communitarianism is considered to have become divorced from communitarianist ‘norms’.

It is widely acknowledged that New Labour thinking on communitarianism closely followed the work of Etzioni (see, for example, Burnett, 2004; Driver and Martell, 2002, 1997, 1996). Etzioni (1995, p. 25) defined ‘community’ as “webs of social relations that encompass shared meanings and above all shared values” However, rather than holding these to flourish from local levels, New Labour constructed ‘community’ as lying at the national level (Driver & Martell, 1997, p. 34). Blair’s (1996) ‘one nation, one community’ theme opted for values which transcended local communities and elevated them to shared, national values.
This national perspective reveals some interesting tensions in New Labour’s politics and policies. Both Driver and Martell (2002, p. 149) and Cole (2000, p. 237) highlight the fact that national community is impractical in multicultural societies since ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ cannot form the same values of nationality. In the multicultural society of Britain in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this lack of consideration of ethnic and religious values is important. It is estimated that 12.1% of the population belong to ethnic minority groups and these are growing at a greater rate than the majority white group as illustrated in Figure 10 below (ONS, 2011).

![Figure 10 - % age growth rates of ethnic minorities (adapted from ONS, 2011)](image)

In 2009/10, 50% of ethnic minorities inhabited households estimated to be earning incomes less than the national average (DWP, 2011), so falling into a classification of social exclusion. It is also estimated that almost 35% of the population are non-Christian; whilst many practice no religion, there are thriving Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities who hold specific values based upon their faith. New Labour’s notion of ‘national community’ holding universal values discounted the cultural and religious
values held by these important sectors of the population. Even more fundamental was the
negation of personal values upon which all other values held by an individual are founded.

Equally significantly is Miller’s (1995, p. 53) argument that ethical universalism cannot be
justified. He holds that membership of ‘community’ is generally voluntary but nations are
not voluntary because citizens do not have the same freedom to opt in or out of national
community as they do with local, cultural or religious community. He also believes that
nation as community is simply too large for individuals to bind themselves into special
relationships with. To overcome these tensions and impose common values on the nation
as a whole, New Labour’s communitarianist project could not be voluntary but was
necessarily centralised, prescriptive and authoritarian (Calder, 2004; Martell, 2004; Driver
and Martell, 1997).

New Labour perceived Thatcher’s conservatism to have not only led to huge fiscal burdens
on society, but also to have “contributed to social fragmentation and a moral vacuum in
society” (Driver and Martell, 1997, p. 33). Etzioni (1993, p. 249) placed great emphasis
on the shoring up of societal morality to restore “civic order”. New Labour held
increasingly moral views on family form, parenting, education and social destitution which
they used as the Etzionian basis for restoring social cohesion (Driver and Martell, 1997,
pp. 38-39). This required an authoritarian imposition of moral order to create the
necessary relationships between citizen and state (Burnett, 2004, p. 2).

Etzioni (1995, 1993) also held that individual’s rights must be matched by social
responsibilities. Although members of a civic society may be entitled to unconditional
benefits or services, the responsibility for each individual should be seen as lying, first and
foremost, with the individuals themselves. For New Labour, this matching of rights with
responsibilities translated into a belief that any right extended to a citizen should be matched with a responsibility for that citizen to “give back” to the state. This is demonstrated in New Labour’s approach to the revised New Deal Welfare to Work system (whereby claimants could be refused benefits if they did not accept offers of employment, a system intended to “promote opportunity instead of dependence” (DSS, 1998, p. 19). It can be argued that the Third Way notion of mutual obligation was revealed by Prime Minister Blair (1998, p. 12) as being more concerned with enforcing the acceptance of responsibilities than with encouraging citizens to accept them on a voluntary basis. Citizens who did not accept their responsibilities were held to be morally deficient (see pages 83 to 86 for further discussion on the Moral Underclass Discourse of social exclusion).

A Communitarianist Approach to Widening Participation

I argue here that the most crucial factor in the success or failure of the Widening Participation policy was whether the targeted sectors of the population deemed a University education as something of value and hence something they would want to participate in. I later demonstrate that no consultation with the affected social groups took place (pages 97 to 99), resulting in the introduction of the policy without evidence of a requirement for it in practice. Regardless of this, New Labour’s communitarianist project imposed the desirability of participation in Higher Education as a national value, implying from the outset that all young disadvantaged people would want to study at University if provided with the opportunity to do so.

I contend that the implications of this national ‘norm’ had far-reaching consequences. Firstly, by positioning Higher Education participation as universally desirable, it was
implied that all young people would naturally consider it as a life choice to be either accepted or rejected through conscious decision. Secondly, the communitarianist notion of “rights and responsibilities” suggested that, having been extended the right to participate in Higher Education, young disadvantaged people were responsible for accepting the right. Thirdly, the moral emphasis of New Labour’s communitarianism held those who failed to accept the responsibility as morally deficient.

As the Widening Participation policy progressed, HEFCE were criticised for treating non-participation as deviance and urged to gain a greater understanding of why non-participants were not engaging with the initiative (HEFCE, 2004b, p. 30). Several factors were suggested as reasons why more young disadvantaged people were not shouldering their ‘responsibilities’ to participate. For example, Connor et al. (2001, p. 16) argued that they either needed to become financially independent at an earlier age than their more advantaged peers or preferred to follow employment opportunities not requiring a Higher Education qualification. Poverty and community were suggested to not only negatively affect perceptions of academic culture (HEFCE, 2004b, pp. 28-29) but also to create disaffected children who wanted to sustain social capital in ways other than education (Reed, Croudace, Harrison, Baxter and Last, 2007). Until 2008, when a new Widening Participation research strategy was introduced, HEFCE largely ignored the evidence, remaining focused on researching and removing barriers perceived to prevent more young disadvantaged individuals from participating in Higher Education. For example, many commentators found that a major barrier to participation of the socially disadvantaged was a financial one (Callender, 2009; M. Bowl, 2008; Curtis, 2004; A. Forsyth, and Furlong, A., 2003; Lynch and O’Riordan, 1998) and measures to alleviate this thought to stimulate Widening Participation rates (Mandelson, 2009). However, the majority of this research
was carried out with WP students who had *already elected to participate* in HE as discussed in more detail on page 217.

The findings from research into HE barriers were accepted and acted upon as though the opinions of the participating WP students were representative of non-participants. I argue that this practice created a fundamental flaw in policy implementation and greatly contributed to the ‘failure’ of the Widening Participation initiative. My contention is that New Labour’s communitarianist project posited Higher Education participation as a life choice which would *naturally* be considered by those targeted by the initiative and that the removal of perceived barriers was designed specifically to allow more disadvantaged people to *decide to* participate.

I challenge the view suggested above as being overly simplistic, since other cognitive processes which precede the making of a decision are not considered. Vickers’ notion of Appreciation offers a useful insight into how individuals determine what is or is not important to them but, prior to discussing this notion, I consider it critical to explain here the reasons for harnessing the work of Vickers. Chapter 3 outlines the underpinnings of the intellectual framework providing the substantive arguments for this work, including ideas from phenomenology, hermeneutics and other relevant interpretive thinkers. I position this work as interpretive social inquiry employing SSM as methodology congruent with the intellectual framework as discussed in Chapter 4. SSM itself is based, in part, on Vickers’ notion of an Appreciative System and I also incorporate the underpinning principles as the foundation of the framework for practical inquiry (discussed in Chapter 8). The work of Vickers is therefore important throughout this work but, most significantly, I contend that the notion of Appreciation (discussed below) neatly
encapsulates the substantive arguments underlying the intellectual framework of this inquiry. For these reasons, I consider it apposite to introduce Vickers at this point.

Vicker’s notion of Appreciation illustrates the complexities underlying the processes by which individuals determine what is important to them. It also demonstrates that several stages of cognition precede the making of a decision and that the making of a decision does not necessarily dictate the taking of an action. Vickers (1987a, p. 92) evaluated the human condition as constituted from 3 particular worlds; the physical world which must be survived; the social world shared with other communicating humans; and the inner, personal world constituted from experience. The inner world – or appreciated world - of humankind is structured by a readiness to see, value and respond to situations in particular ways (1968, p. 59) but only situations considered to be of interest are selected for notice. This results in an incomplete world, a world both limited by and giving form to expectations (1970, p. 98).

Vickers’ demonstrates the crucial operation of personal values when individuals determine what they considered to be important, or of interest. For every individual, a kaleidoscope of myriad opportunities exists in the environment but only relatively few will prove to be of sufficient interest for notice. Only those opportunities which are deemed to be of sufficient interest will then be selected for notice and used within a decision-making process. I argue that this discourse negates the taken-for-given assumption that HE participation was a life choice rejected by non-participants since it suggests that the option may not have been of sufficient interest to be selected for notice and consideration in the first place. This is an issue seemingly neglected in the literature. The arguments presented in this Section are represented holistically in the Rich Picture at Figure 11 below.
Figure 11 - Systemic Summary of Section 2.5
2.6. **Widening Participation for the ‘socially disadvantaged’**

*Defining Disadvantage as a notion of ‘social exclusion’*

The Widening Participation policy was aimed at the “socially disadvantaged” but the term itself was never fully defined. As mentioned earlier, HEFCE circumvented the difficulty of adequately identifying a “WP individual” through traditional classification system methods by introducing geodemographic techniques and the POLAR system. The logic of measuring ‘disadvantage’ through median rates of HE participation was based upon an assumption that low rates of neighbourhood participation were highly correlated with poverty and “other measures of disadvantage” (HEFCE, 2005, p. 16). From this, it can be seen that ‘disadvantage’ extends beyond mere economic poverty and includes other measures of social deprivation. These measures defined what became known as ‘social exclusion’ and I provide a brief explanation of this here.

New Labour’s inheritance included 24% of the entire population, 33% of children and 22% of pensioners living below the poverty line (Sutherland, Sefton and Piachaud, 2003, p. 8), partly caused by the high level of unemployment which saw 1.3 million unemployed workers actively looking for work (Penman and Dyson, 1998, p. 17). However, of equal concern was the rising culture of ‘worklessness’ (Fletcher, 2009, p. 76) caused by the 19% of households in which no adult had worked for three years of more, were not actively seeking employment and did not intend to.

Of the 3-4 million children estimated to be living in poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2004), 1 in 6 were living in ‘workless’ households (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000).

---

5 These levels are calculated using a poverty indicator of household income below 60% of the national median after housing costs are taken into consideration.
Whole communities were emerging where worklessness was no longer the exception but the norm, a cultural expectation handed down from generation to generation (H.M. Treasury, 2002, p. 76). During the 1990s, numbers of workless households grew exponentially by 25% (Howarth, 1998, p. 11).

3 million of those estimated to be at the highest level of poverty, many of whom were workless, lived in the worst 1,300 council ‘sink’ estates in England (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004, p. 1). Here, and in other poverty-stricken areas, multiple factors of deprivation were considered to exist in areas such as access to services, housing conditions, health inequalities and education. These factors, in conjunction with poverty levels, underpinned notions of ‘social disadvantage’.

Immediately following election, New Labour used the terms ‘underclass’ and ‘socially excluded’ interchangeably, but, historically, the ‘underclass’ had tended to be demonised. Lewis (1961, 1959) originally described the “culture of the underclass” as a coping strategy employed by poor families in order to survive. He effectively pathologised the cultural deficiencies of the poor, holding them responsible for their own situation. Attempts to move away from this early position (for example, Myrdal’s (1963) underclass concept) failed, and the notion of ‘underclass’ remained class-oriented, value laden and pejorative (Leavitt and Fryberg, 2013, p. 121; Lawler, 1999, p. 4; K. Sayer and Fisher, 1997, p. 60), blaming the behavioural characteristics of the poor for hindering social mobility (Bullock, Lott and Truong, 2011, p. 151; Baumann, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 2001; Gans, 1995).

More recent debates have sought to distance themselves from the notion of ‘underclass’ (Welshman, 2007, p. x), preferring instead to refer to the ‘socially excluded’. New Labour
followed this pattern, gradually superceding references to the ‘underclass’ until ‘social exclusion’ became ingrained in political rhetoric. The term itself originated in 1975 within a European Commission policy context where it was defined as “the social rights of citizens … to a certain standard of living in the major social and occupational opportunities of society” (G. Room, 1992, p. 14). By 1993, increasing public debate on issues of social exclusion had greatly changed how it could be problematised (Commission of the European Communities, 1993, p. 20), leading to many different, and sometimes conflicting, notions of exactly what ‘social exclusion’ is, who can be considered socially ‘excluded’ or ‘included’, how exclusion can be measured and, consequently, what should be done about it.

Modern conceptions of social exclusion depend upon the perspective emphasised. Social hierarchies structure class distinctions (Guinote and Vescio, 2010), and position in the hierarchy dictates access to resources and opportunities (Keltner, van Kleef, Chen and Kraus, 2011). Whilst some commentators such as G. Room (1995), Atkinson (1998) and Millar (2007), for example, concentrate upon exclusion from opportunities, choices and life chances, others, including Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) and Steinert and Pilgram (2003), emphasise an individual’s ability to participate in such things. However, regardless of emphasis, all definitions appear to be linked by the understanding that social exclusion is not only about lack of income and material resources, but also about the processes by which some sectors of the population become marginalised in society (Wiggans, 2010, p. 95) and so are unable to partake of the standards of living, opportunities, choices and life chances available to the majority (Millar, 2007).
The precise causes of social exclusion are widely debated in the literature, again resulting in conflicting and contradictory evidence, but there are several areas of agreement (see, for example, Tsakoglou and Papadopolous, 2002; Atkinson, 1998; G. Room, 1995):

- A strong point of consensus is the *multidimensional nature of causation* whereby a wide range of indicators beyond income and material worth are considered to be crucial, including housing, health, education, neighbourhood, and community facilities.

- Social exclusion is also generally agreed to be *dynamic* in nature, relating to not only an individual’s current life situation but also to their prospects for the future; there are triggers for entry and exit so that previously included individuals may become excluded by particular events (for example, becoming a single parent) and vice versa.

- A third area of agreement, and one which is the most crucial in distancing social exclusion from previous conceptions of ‘underclass’, is the notion of *agency* whereby the causes of social exclusion are seen to lie beyond the narrow responsibility of individuals who are excluded due to the acts of others.

In 1997, Levitas (1997) completed an ESRC funded research project into social exclusion, the findings of which she discussed in her book, *The Inclusive Society?* published the following year in which she stated:

“A central political question for Labour’s first term in office will be how it negotiates between the different available discourses of social exclusion, and how, especially through the Social Exclusion Unit, it translates them into policy. Their performance will be judged not only on whether they deliver ‘social inclusion’, but
what kind of inclusion they deliver, for whom and on what terms.” (Levitas, 1998, p. 28)

The work of Levitas (1998) offers three influential discourses of social exclusion which I use as a useful framework for investigating New Labour’s problematisation of social exclusion. The discourses offered are:

- The **Redistributive Egalitarian Discourse**, which focuses on poverty and lack of resources and attempts to reduce these through redistribution of wealth; it explains social disadvantage as resulting from the structural roots of society (Bullock et al., 2011, p. 151);

- The **Social Integrationist Discourse**, which views unemployment as the primary cause of exclusion and inclusion as getting individuals into paid work; and

- The **Moral Underclass Discourse**, which attributes exclusion to deficiencies in culture and blames individuals for their moral failings and attempts to bring about cultural change to ensure inclusion.

**New Labour’s problematisation of social exclusion**

In rapid response to the prioritised issues of poverty and deprivation, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was created in August 1997 with a general remit to reduce social exclusion by providing ‘joined-up solutions to joined-up problems’ (SEU, 1997). In line with the new anti-departmentalism approach to ‘joined-up government’, the SEU was established with a unique structure and membership which comprised “a mix of insiders and outsiders – with people from social services, police, voluntary, church, business as well as people from
national government departments” (Mulgan, 1998, p. 265). Based in the Cabinet Office and reporting directly to the Prime Minister, the SEU was linked through a network of ministers and officials from each of the government departments, rather than through a separate Cabinet Committee as was traditionally the case.

For the first 4 years after establishment, it was not entirely clear how social exclusion would be problematised as the Social Exclusion Unit concentrated on investigating specific areas which had been initially prioritised. These included: truancy and exclusion from school (SEU, 1998c); rough sleeping (SEU, 1998b); community and neighbourhood deprivation (SEU, 1998a); teenage pregnancy (SEU, 1999b); and 16 – 18 year olds not in education, employment or training (SEU, 1999a). Prior to the 2001 General Election which returned New Labour to a second term in government, the SEU published the report “Preventing Social Exclusion” (SEU, 2001). This amalgamated all previous reports to provide a clear explanation of how notions of ‘social exclusion’ were constructed in the ‘joined-up’ policy making process.

The SEU (2001, p. 10) agreed the multidimensional causes of social exclusion were broader than just poverty and low income, encompassing both the causes and consequences of poverty, but beyond this, only a vague and “deliberately flexible definition” of social exclusion was given:

“a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, low skills, poor incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.”

The SEU (2001, p. 11) also agreed that social exclusion was dynamic and something that could happen to anyone but that some individuals were at greater risk than others.
Finally, the notion of *agency* was also subscribed to through the identification of three main contributory factors in the causes of social exclusion: social change, economic change and previous governmental action in relation to these changes. Both economic and social change were described as “forces that affected most Western countries in the last two decades” (SEU, 2001, p. 4) and, as such, were depicted as having been outside the control of government. Previous governmental actions to tackle the effects of these forces were decried as ineffective, especially in tackling social problems. This was ascribed to previous governments’ provision of a “passive” welfare state which failed to match rights and responsibilities which, rather than enabling individuals to help themselves, had resulted in them becoming ensnared in a benefit trap (SEU, 2001, p. 27). Therefore, whilst New Labour’s problematisation of social exclusion included a notion of agency in that external and inevitable forces, allied with ineffective previous governments, were contributory factors, the Moral Underclass Discourse of social policy is revealed in the references to lack of individual responsibility and the perceived need to change the culture of the socially excluded.

It is generally accepted that New Labour’s stance on social exclusion was underpinned by not only a Moral Underclass but also a Social Integrationist Discourse (see, for example, Long and Bramham, 2006, p. 137; Fairclough, 2000, p. 57). In her 1997 speech as Minister for Welfare, Harman (1997) demonstrated the interleaving of these two discourses:

“Work is central to the Government’s attack on social exclusion. Work is the only route to sustained financial independence. But it is also much more. Work is not just about earning a living, it is a way of life … There are some estates in my constituency where: the common currency is the giro; where the black economy
involves much more than moonlighting – it involves the twilight world of drugs; and where relentless anti-social behaviour grinds people down …”

A Social Integrationist Discourse underpins Harman’s emphasis on work as a social norm and moving people into employment as a central theme of the Governments’ action on social inclusion. The Moral Underclass Discourse underpins her references to a “twilight world” and the cultural deficiencies extant in the sink housing estates. Although both discourses are seen to be relevant, the Moral Underclass Discourse gains the greatest attention in research related to New Labour’s political orientation towards social exclusion.

*The Moral Underclass Discourse of Widening Participation*

New Labour’s Moral Underclass Social Policy Discourse can be seen to resonate with the moral focus of the communitarianist project (discussed earlier on pages 66 to 71) which lay at the heart of their political ideology. As argued earlier, political ideology naturally ‘infects’ all policy and this was especially true since the Widening Participation policy was so interconnected with social exclusion policy.

Greenbank (2006, pp. 145-146) felt that even the fundamental principle of Widening Participation had a Moral Underclass orientation, arguing that the NCIHE Report was based on a ‘victim-blaming’ model which implied under-represented groups in Higher Education were responsible for their own poor rates of participation. New Labour were also accused of employing a ‘deficit model’ in which powerful blaming discourses all too easily marked out the individual as a failure (Reay, 2001b, p. 338). ‘Target WP individuals’ were consequently judged as deficient in many respects (Maringe and Fuller, 2007, p. 18; Gorard, Smith, H., et al., 2006, p. 117; Greenbank, 2006, p. 117; HEFCE,
2004b), especially in their failure to *aspire* to a higher level education. This was evidenced in a DfES (2003c) report which stated that working class young people lacked aspirations, did not achieve well at school and therefore did not progress into HE, effectively devolving responsibility from the State and blaming them for their own lack of educational progression.

‘Low aspirations’ were identified as a major barrier to HE participation (Greenbank, 2007, p. 371; Leathwood, 2005, p. 19). This resulted in the creation of *Aimhigher* to work in partnership with HE Institutions, FE Colleges and schools with the specific intention of raising aspirations of young people from under-represented groups which were “overwhelmingly … from lower socio-economic groups and disadvantaged backgrounds” (HEFCE, 2007, p. 8). The Moral Underclass Discourse of Widening Participation can also be witnessed in the fact that not only were the disadvantaged young people seen to be deficient, but their parents were also consistently ‘blamed’ for not engaging with the Widening Participation agenda or *Aimhigher* (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008, pp. 1-2; EKOS Consulting, 2007, p. 3; Morris, Rutt and Yeshanew, 2005, p. vii; Steer, 2005; HEFCE, 2002a, para 5).

Within the Higher Education sector, Widening Participation activity was considered to be ‘low status’ (Higher Education Consultancy Group and the National Centre for Social Research, 2003) and the Government stood publicly accused of ‘dumbing down’ as a result of the Widening Participation agenda (see, for example, Frean, 27th March 2009; Clark and Curtiss, 20th January 2009). There was, it appeared, as great an external prejudice against WP as there was from within. The information in this Section is summarised in the Rich Picture at Figure 12 below.
Figure 12 - Systemic summary of Section 2.6
2.7. Widening Participation for what?

*Educational inequality, equality of opportunity and social justice*

The recommendations of the NICHE Report stressed the provision of equality of opportunity for the socially disadvantaged, implying Widening Participation was primarily a matter of social justice. It is argued here, however, that equality of opportunity in the Widening Participation policy was less a matter of redressing social injustices and more a vehicle for the wider political ambitions of New Labour, again underpinned by both Moral Underclass and Social Integrationist Discourses.

Barry (2005, p. 254) argues that social justice should involve intervention to compensate for environmental disadvantaged for greater equality rather than provision of what Atkins (2010, p. 254) terms the “smoke and mirrors” of equal opportunity. Whilst equal opportunity is seen to be a “conceptually ambiguous notion” (Entwhistle, 2011, p. 9), Brown and Lauder (2001, p. 6) questioned the social justice aspect of New Labour’s policies, stating that in “Britain the mantra of market competition tells us that the problem of distribution and reward in a capitalist economy can be solved through paid work” and that people “are nobody unless they can make their way in the world through paid employment”. Levitas (1998) likewise argued that to be included in New Labour’s ‘stakeholder society’, individuals must necessarily be included in paid employment and both perspectives are reflected in the “welfare to work” social policy (see page 71).

However, it is Brown and Lauder’s (2001, p. 6) that comments “the size of one’s wallet is a measure of one’s social worth” allied with the “mantra of market competition” which provides the basis for demonstrating how, rather than concentrating primarily upon redressing social injustice, New Labour instituted the Widening Participation policy based
on 3 intertwined elements: economics, society and the liberation of individuals through education (Blunkett, January 6, 2000). Throughout, Widening Participation was held by the Government to be crucial for achieving both increased social mobility and improved national competitiveness through the raising of the skill level in the nation.

**The New Labour economic inheritance**

In common with all Westernised countries, Britain had been subject to shifting economic conditions from as early as 1973, creating changes in the worldwide economy comparable to “the changes experienced during the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution” (Jensen, 2010, p. 16). Most pervasive of these changes was ‘globalisation’ which, according to the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR, 2008, p. 2), was driven and facilitated by several developments including the removal of international trade barriers, the emergence of developing countries such as China into the global arena as important economies and rapid technological progress, especially in information and communication technologies.

The dual casualties of the previous Tory government, reductions in industrial output and high unemployment levels, were attributed to the effects of globalisation. Rapid technological changes and the emerging ‘knowledge economy’ provided new opportunities for the increasingly affluent high skilled sectors of the workforce who experienced a 40% rise in average income. However, a decline in the traditional manufacturing base of the UK meant that the high levels of unemployment tended to target low and unskilled workers, resulting in a greater income differential than had previously been the case (Hills, 1998, pp. 15-17). There was considerable evidence that the UK economy was run as a Low Skills Economy whereby poorly paid and low-skilled workers produced cheap but low-
quality goods and services tailored to budgets of unskilled, low-paid workers in a vicious cycle. European competitors, on the other hand, had followed an High Skills Economy route whereby highly-skilled and highly paid workers produced relatively expensive goods and services to affluent customers in a virtuous cycle, providing them with considerable competitive edge (Winch, 2002, pp. 110-111). The Government believed that raising the skills of the workforce would effectively move the nation from the traditional Low Skills to a more globally competitive High Skills Economy (Rammell, 2006).

Raising skill levels was seen to be not merely necessary for a successful modern economy but also to impact upon income distribution required for fulfilment of social policy. A low-skill labour force could only attract and sustain firms that require a low skills mix; by raising the basic skills of those at the bottom, an adequate supply of educated people on higher wages would sustain an High Skills Economy and so eliminate child poverty and social exclusion (Glennerster, 2002, p. 121). Social exclusion from a Social Integrationist perspective would also be reduced. The linkages between education and the labour market are conceptualised as follows by Fasih (2008, p. 11): the determinants of education determine educational outcomes which, in turn, determine labour market outcomes of individuals. To achieve an High Skills Economy, then, greater participation in HE was seen “as the only way of keeping us internationally competitive in the years to come” (Denham, 2008, p. 1). This resulted in a new imperative to ensure that 50% of all young people aged 18 to 30 participated in a university education by 2010 (Blunkett, February 15, 2000). Within this overarching aim for Higher Education participation of all young people regardless of class, the Widening Participation initiative was launched as ‘joined-up policy’ with social and economic policy as discussed in the next section. Several commentators have stated that the two agendas for Higher Education were contradictory.
and competed against each other (R. Jones, 2006, p. 12; Keep, 2004). This Section is summarised in the Rich Picture at Figure 13 below.

2.8. Widening Participation as a ‘joined-up’ policy?

A notion of ‘joined-up government’

The social legacy of New Labour was seen to be what Rittel and Weber (1973, p. 161) termed as a “wicked problem”, a set of interacting issues evolving in a dynamic social context in which any attempts at resolution would necessarily result in the evolution of further wicked problems. The inherent “wickedness” of the inherited problematical situation was acknowledged by New Labour who believed that achieving effective social change would require co-ordinated action through a number of different inter-related policy arenas as demonstrated throughout this Chapter.

Ackoff (1974) referred to such complex issues as “social messes”. He categorised issues into three levels: “puzzles”, well-defined issues with specific solutions; “problems”, issues with defined structure for which there will be a number of different alternative solutions; and “messes”, complex problems in which all issues interact to become a system of problems. Unlike puzzles and problems, there are no solutions to “social messes”. Instead, only improvement can be sought through holistic treatment of the whole problem. According to Pidd (1996, p. 40), the greatest mistake that can be made is to perceive a mess as a problem and then attempt to solve it as a puzzle. To do so would result in an error of the “third kind”, a “systemic error” arising from an attempt to resolve an incorrectly conceptualised problem which would lead to inevitable failure of all policies and procedures based on that conceptualisation (Whyte, 1982, p. 47).
Figure 13 - Systemic Summary of Section 2.7
Ackoff (1977) also stated that, in a turbulent economic and political environment, optimal solutions to such messes were not possible; only improvement could be realised through systems thinking. In line with this, New Labour announced its intention to modernise governmental policy-making processes to encompass: holistic rather than linear thinking; a capacity to work outside traditional departmental boundaries; involvement of the public in policy development; and a willingness to think and work in new ways (Ling, 2002).

To achieve these objectives, New Labour announced it would operate as ‘Joined-Up Government’ which, it believed, would combat the traditional pathology of departmentalism. This was perceived to have prevented previous administrations from achieving important goals through the fragmentation of policy and services (Ling, 2002). The overarching aim of Joined-Up Government was to promote joined-up policy-making to provide ‘joined up solutions’ to ‘joined up problems’ (SEU, 1997). The means by which this would be operationalised was outlined in two White Papers in 1999 (Cabinet Office, 1999; Strategic Policy Making Team, 1999). The first objective was to ensure that policy making was more joined-up and strategic based on the keystones of inclusiveness and integration of policy (Clark, 2002, p. 114). Such strategy would require considering the interrelated issues “in a joined up way, regardless of the organisational structure of government” (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 10).

Whilst the Government never defined exactly what was meant by Joined-Up Government, the underlying intention to take a holistic approach to cross-cutting problems was very clear and it is generally accepted that this attempt was not successful under the New Labour regime. The main reasons suggested for this are attributed to the Government’s failure to adhere to its own advice for the making of effective Joined-Up Policy. The
White Papers (Cabinet Office, 1999; Strategic Policy Making Team, 1999) outlined those elements which were seen to be critical for this process.

Firstly, it was deemed critical that all policy should be **evidence-based and outcome-focused**. A wide evidence base was defined to include: “expert knowledge; published research; existing statistics; stakeholder consultations; previous policy evaluations; the Internet; outcomes from consultations; costings of policy options; output from economic and statistical modelling” (Strategic Policy Making Team, 1999). The intention to consult widely was key to the Third Way governance agenda and the “Stakeholder Society” Consultation would ensure that all policy was inclusive by taking “full account of the needs of all those –individuals and groups, families and businesses – likely to be affected by them” early in the process (Cabinet Office, 1999, para 6). In practice, though, whilst public consultations at local government level proliferated (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2004, p. 268), few consultations were undertaken at national level (UK Coalition on Poverty, 2000, p. 16). In keeping with New Labour’s authoritarian communitarianist project, this effectively meant that important policies which affected large sectors of the population were imposed rather than negotiated as promised through the Stakeholder Society.

Another element considered to be crucial in the making of effective Joined-Up Policy was that **performance monitoring should be based upon a whole systems consideration of outcomes**. This can be considered from two perspectives. Firstly, New Labour’s general focus on **performance management** is considered by several commentators to have been a major contributor to the failure of New Labour’s Joined-Up Government. Pollitt (2003, p. 38), for example, highlights the fact that performance management had become widespread throughout the UK public sector since the 1980s and points to the tension
between new Labour’s ambitions for Joined-Up Government on the one hand and their building of momentum in performance management by New Labour on the other. He illustrates this tension through the example of Health Authorities being encouraged to work in partnership to develop joint strategies for overcoming health irregularities whilst at the same time being subject to the more pressing agenda of meeting governmental waiting time targets. Since Health Authorities were judged on their ability to meet targets, performance monitoring was necessarily prioritised.

In practice, performance monitoring can entail evaluation systems built around “a highly centralised approach based on a panoply of performance indicators, standards, targets, inspection and audit regimes” (Newman, 2002, p. 351). This can result in some outcomes or “desired changes in the real world” being less easily operationalised or side-lined (CMPS, 2001, p. 5). Ringen (2009) concluded that New Labour had “achieved nothing” in his major study of flagship policies between 1997 and 2007. He attributed this mainly to the retention of a command and control approach in Joined-Up Government and the failure to mobilise stakeholders in policy making and implementation.

The second perspective arising here is the consideration of whole systems thinking as critical to the making of effective Joined-Up Policy. Mulgan, the newly appointed special advisor to the Prime Minister, championed the use of Systems Thinking in governmental policy making (Mulgand Lee, 2001; Mulgan, 2001); indeed, the term systems was used frequently in governmental discourse. For example, Cabinet Office (1999, p. 37) stated that one of the principles for assessing improvements would be the encouragement of a whole systems approach which would consider the “whole system …not just the constituent parts”. I argue that, although the intention for systemic thinking was clearly
articulated, what was not clear is exactly what was meant by ‘systems thinking’ or exactly how it was intended to be implemented across Joined-Up Government.

Several commentators hold that neglect of Systems Thinking in the policy making process was a major contributor to the overall failure of Joined-Up Government (see, for example, Dodgson, Hughes, Foster and Metcalfe, 2009; Parsons, 2002; Sterman, 2002). Mulgan (2001) argued that little use of systems thinking was made by the Government due to, in some degree, the huge sunk investment in other disciplines, especially economics. To this, I would also add that a neglect of systemic treatment of policy implementation and the use and feedback of appropriate systemic evidence into consequent cycles of holistic policy development are issues which have been under-researched in the literature, a situation this research attempts to address. I also argue that the adherence to target setting and performance monitoring effectively negated whole system consideration since it is difficult to determine, in this case, the ‘system’ under consideration.

I now turn attention to considering how the factors described above can be construed to have contributed to the failure of the Widening Participation policy in specific terms.

*Widening Participation in Higher Education – a non-systemic approach to a joined-up policy*

I have demonstrated throughout this Chapter that the Widening Participation policy, whilst relating specifically to the Higher Education sector, was in fact situated within a wider problem space encompassing social and economic policy arenas. I contend here that, although the policy was created as Joined-Up Policy, it was implemented in a non-systemic manner which necessarily inhibited its ability to achieve required outcomes.
In order to fully appreciate the non-systemic implementation of Widening Participation, I consider it worthwhile firstly to elucidate the opposition to the devolution of responsibility to the Higher Education sector. Prior to the NCIHE recommendations, HEFCE (1996, pp., Executive Summary, para 3a) opposed the intervention of the HE sector in attempting to widen the participation of disadvantaged groups, believing only action at an earlier stage of the educational process would be effective. From its inception and throughout implementation, this has been echoed by many other commentators (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008, pp. 1-2; Cooke, Mannion, Warmington, Mackenzie and Soni, 2007, p. 43; Reed, Gates, et al., 2007, p. 3; Watson, 2006a, p. 8; HEFCE, 2004b, p. 24; Gayle, Berridge and Davies, 2003, p. 56; HEFCE, 2002b, p. 6). It has also been highlighted in the NICHE Report which, even whilst making recommendations for widening participation of the disadvantaged, suggested that many of the causes for under-representation lay outside of HE and HE could, at best, only contribute to improving the situation (NCIHE, 1997, para 29).

Despite this evidence against and, rather than adopting a holistic approach to Widening Participation to involve the wider educational sector, the responsibility for implementing and developing a practical policy was devolved to HEFCE, the funding body for Higher Education in England. I argue here that such a move represented a non-systemic implementation which greatly reduced the possibilities for Joined-Up Policy with other social and economic policy.

Pollitt (2003, p. 37) provides a useful distinction between Joined-Up Policy and Joined-Up Implementation. Whereas Joined-Up Policy is defined as co-ordinated policy, Joined-Up Implementation is related to delivery of multiple services within a single policy. The creation of Aimhigher in 2001 can be seen as an attempt at Joined-Up Implementation
within the Widening Participation policy. Aimhigher was tasked with raising aspirations of young disadvantaged people to encourage participation and “build cross-sector relationships which break down the barriers which institutions and systems can unwittingly create for learners” (HEFCE, 2009). It worked with schools, Further Education Colleges and HE Institutions, effectively delivering multiple services with a single aim of widening participation. In some respects, the position of Aimhigher can be likened to the position of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) within social policy contexts. Unlike the SEU, however, the power of Aimhigher to affect policy direction was extremely limited. Power to accept, reject or merely ignore Aimhigher recommendations rested firmly with HEFCE who were responsible for implementation and development of Widening Participation policy.

It is interesting to note that, from their original oppositional position, HEFCE made significant shifts in attitude towards Widening Participation. Immediately following publication of the NCIHE report, HEFCE (1997, para 24) continued to assert its previous position that many of the causes were outside the reach of the HE sector but conceded that HE could still “make a contribution to redressing particular imbalances”. However, having later been mandated with not only funding arrangements but also responsibility for policy implementation, Widening Participation progressed from becoming a “major priority” HEFCE (1999a, para 5) to being one of its “most important strategic aims” (HEFCE, 2001a, para 24). The devolution of responsibility onto HEFCE is questioned here as being discordant with the principles of Joined-Up Policy; whilst social policy continued to be overseen by the Social Exclusion Unit which was able to influence policy direction, Widening Participation was effectively divorced from anything outside of the Higher Education sector. I argue that this move left HEFCE no other option but to
implement methods of target setting and performance monitoring for allocation of funding which was, after all, their main responsibility by default.

A final comment here is that throughout the implementation of the Widening Participation initiative, and in face of growing evidence that it was failing to achieve its stated objectives, opportunity existed for the Government to act to change the focus of responsibility. Widening the remit of *Aimhigher* to parallel the remit of the Social Exclusion Unit, for example, can be seen to be a missed opportunity in this respect.

*A Stakeholder Society?*

Public consultation to inform Joined-Up Policy as promised by the Stakeholder Society has already been demonstrated to have been negligible (see page 92 above). This also appears to have been the case with the Widening Participation policy.

I evidenced in the previous subsection that objections to devolving responsibility for Widening Participation onto the Higher Education sector were ignored from the outset. There is no published information to determine whether explicit consultation with HEFCE was undertaken prior to policy creation. The extent to which HE Institutions were consulted is equally unclear. However, it is likely that little consultation with Institutions was undertaken since there is clear indication that their resistance to Widening Participation was foreseen and pre-emptive preventative measures taken to combat this through the linking of performance to funding. Although HEFCE (1999b, para 24) described the provision of funding as being to “encourage the improvement in the recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds”, the linking of performance in Widening Participation to much-needed funding streams acted to mandate HE Institutions’ compliance rather than encourage engagement with the initiative.
Of particular significance to this work is the fact that those targeted by the initiative – i.e. those in social groups III to V (or NS-SEC 4,5,6 and 7) – appear to have been entirely neglected in any consultation on Widening Participation. Despite New Labour’s insistence on participatory policy-making, I argue that the inherent tensions between creating a “stakeholder society” and the communitarianist imposition of national norms led to the introduction of a policy for which there was no known requirement in the targeted social groups.

Arnott and Menter (2007, p. 255) argue that the pace of change for educational policy making had been so fast that there was little time for public or professional participation in the process but analysis of documentation throughout the implementation phase reveals that 55 separate consultations were undertaken between 2000 and 2009. I stress that this analysis intended only to aid understanding how Widening Participation was informed rather than to produce statistics as ‘scientific facts’. Of the responses from 67,492 individuals, groups, organisations or institutions, only 230 inputs were received from the targeted Widening Participation stakeholder group most affected by the policy. These were culled from 112 individual interviews and 118 individuals involved in focus groups between 2000 and 2009 and it is unclear what account, if any, was taken of these responses. Of particular significance, and resonant with the Moral Underclass Discourse of Widening Participation, is the lack of opportunity provided to this target group to participate in such consultations since invitation to do so was either by internet documentation or letter.
Evidence-based policy or policy informed by evidence?

A second and important element of New Labour’s modernised policy-making process was the use of evidence (see page 92). Throughout the implementation and development of the Widening Participation policy, it is clear that evidence was available for use, but it is equally clear that, in several instances, such evidence was discounted when it ran contrary to underlying political ambition.

Firstly, as has already been outlined, both the National Committee for Inquiry into Higher Education and HEFCE questioned the ability of the Higher Education sector to significantly contribute to Widening Participation, an issue which attracted criticism throughout. Throughout the first 5 years of implementation of the policy, Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) director Bekhradnia (2003, p. 2) continued to assert that participation disparities were “by and large not a problem caused by higher education nor one which higher education is able to resolve”, an argument that has continued to be made (Thompson, 2008, p. 143). As already mentioned, there were many calls for interventions to be made at a younger and for Widening Participation priority to be placed on improving the school experience (page 94). The mandating of HEFCE to implement and develop Widening Participation within the Higher Education sector, however, rendered such a radical policy development impossible.

Secondly, the economic basis of Widening Participation was also heavily disputed. Many felt the economic case was not convincing enough and needed to be more clearly articulated and disseminated (HEFCE, 2001b, pp. 20-21) Whilst commentators such as Glennerster (2002) and Winch (2004, 2002) stressed the importance of the ability of Higher Education to move an economy to an High Skills Economy, others contested the
notion (see, for example, P. Clarke, 2004; Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004; P. Brown, 1999). The National Skills Task Force argued that the labour market could only suffer from a focus on Level 4 since there was an existing shortage of intermediate skills at Level 3 (HEFCE, 2001b, pp. 1-21). The flooding of the labour market with graduate skills was seen to both produce a counter-intuitive outcome of preventing Widening Participation (N. Brown and Clark, 2003) and devalue degree qualifications (DfES, 2003b, p. 10). Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002) argue that Higher Education participation is a ‘non-decision’ for many middle class students, since it is part of their “normal biography”. However, the National Student Forum (2008, p. 5) felt that even these students were being disadvantaged in HE because, although their parents earned too much for grants, they either could or would not provide financial support for HE study. This acted to reduce the talent pool from which Higher Education students could be culled. Regardless of such evidence, the commitment to Widening Participation as a means of increasing national competitiveness was restated many times (BIS, 2009; DfEE, 2000).

Thirdly, the majority of academic research into Widening Participation revolved around the notion of barriers to Higher Education, specifically those elements which could dissuade or act to prevent target young people from attending University. In the vast majority of cases, the research was quantitative utilizing statistical survey methods or analysis of existing data sets. Qualitative research represented a much smaller proportion of the overall body of work carried out. Of the qualitative research which did exist, the majority was criticised for being of poor quality and hence having little value as an evidence base (Gorard and Smith, 2006, p. 577).

In 2004, HEFCE (2004a) stated that, in order to ensure policy development was informed and supported by a robust evidence base, it needed to improve its capacity for taking
account of external research it had not specifically commissioned. An invitation to consult on a proposed research strategy was published to which many responses were received. The lack of understanding of those whom the Widening Participation policy intended to target was a consistent theme and one which I return to in Section 7.4 on pages 254 to 255 in considering who could be considered ‘suitable’ as a research member for this inquiry. It was recommended that HEFCE should prioritise research to address this. HEFCE (2004b, pp. 23-30) responded by stating that, although such information was undoubtedly important, it was better carried out by DfES. It also restated its own commitment to prioritising research into HE barriers.

In 2006, HEFCE commissioned a review of research on barriers to Higher Education which was carried out via a literature review of existing research. The resulting report highlighted the fact that ‘target WP individuals’ not participating in HE were largely neglected in the literature which tended to address Widening Participation issues through research with those who had chosen to participate (Gorard, Smith, May, et al., 2006). In a second HEFCE-commissioned report in the same year, Watson (2006a, p. 6) concurred and urged HEFCE to consider the “position of those who do not participate” if policy developments were to succeed in their intention.

I carried out a brief review of Widening Participation literature written after publication of the Barriers Review to determine to what extent researchers had attempted to address criticisms regarding the neglect of non-participants. The search term “Widening Participation” with a date range of 2007-2009 returned a total of 68 national research papers from major academic journal search engines. I aligned these into broad themes as illustrated in Figure 14 below.
I acknowledge the rudimentary nature of this analysis but my intention was only to gain a broad view of the type of activities carried out rather than to produce quantitative analysis. Of those detailed above, only two research papers (Fuller, 2008; Heath, Fuller and Paton, 2008) used non-participants as the research population and both papers resulted from a single research project. Other works continued to concentrate on those who had chosen to participate.

From the inception of the Widening Participation policy, many suggestions were made as to why more disadvantaged young people were not participating in Higher Education. Sen’s (1999) capability approach states that, although individuals may have the ability to do something, their circumstances may preclude the opportunity for them to do it. This was theorised to be the case for many socially disadvantaged young people (Bufton, 2006, p. 71). Poverty and drug use were seen to undermine the ability of disaffected children to form attachment to the learning experience, resulting in them seeking to attain social

---

**Figure 14 - WP research themes, 2007-2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Theme</th>
<th>Number of reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government and institutional policy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and teaching issues</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation issues</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methods and themes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation, aspirations and ambitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection, recruitment and retention of WP students</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elitism in HE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and other barriers to HE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP student support</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP student experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance indicators and targets</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP student identity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
capital in ways other than education (Reed, Croudace, et al., 2007). Connor et al. (2001, p. 16) found that many wanted to follow career goals which either did not require HE qualifications or fulfilled a desire for early financial independence (Hatt, 2005, p. 343). Negative perceptions of academic culture arising from influences of poverty and neighbourhood or local community were suggested to be more significant deterrents than other identified barriers (HEFCE, 2004b, pp. 28-29). Certain community characteristics such as close knit social networks, sense of isolation from broader opportunities and history of economic decline also acted as barriers to participation (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008, pp. 1-2). Others felt that it was not a lack of aspiration but rather either that the non-engaged had come to hate school (HEFCE, 2001b, p. 14), were “seriously angry about the hand they have been dealt” (Watson, 2006a, pp. 5-6) or simply had different aspirations (Greenbank, 2007, p. 368; Maringe and Fuller, 2007, p. 19; M. Watts, and Bridges, D., 2006; Hutchings, 2003, p. 97). It was not, however, until 2008 that HEFCE attempted to address this lack of understanding through the development of a new Widening Participation research strategy, quoting Sir Howard Newby, a previous CEO of HEFCE:

“We probably know less today than we did in 1960 about how family, community, school experiences and social subcultures intersect to help or hinder both the aspirations and achievements of children from backgrounds who have not traditionally participated in HE.”

HEFCE (2008) declared that the research strategy would address these issues since an informed understanding of such factors was seen to be “essential in ongoing development of WP policy” and that it would work “to ensure that these broader social and cultural questions are fully considered” by gaining a “holistic picture”. Kettley (2007, p. 334) argued the need for systemic research but, rather than commissioning systemic or
interpretive research, the HEFCE (2008) strategy separated the intertwined factors into individual ‘strands’ of communities, cultures, transitions, choices and attributes of students. Each of these would be investigated separately, so ensuring further non-systemic research activity. The information provided in this Section is summarised in the Rich Picture at Figure 15 on page 105.

2.9. Summary – joining up and reaching out

In this Chapter I have explored the complex, messy problematical situation of the Widening Participation in HE policy, moving outside of the narrow confines of the Higher Education sector to include the wider environment in which it was situated. This holistic view has incorporated a variety of significant social, political and economic issues.

Whilst the majority of Widening Participation research tends to focus only on the narrow confines of the HE sector, I claim from the outset that gaining a greater appreciation of what HE was, and what it intended to achieve, requires exploration of the wider problem space. Implemented by the New Labour ‘joined-up government’ and underpinned by the authoritarian communitarianism at the heart of political ideology, Widening Participation was intended to contribute to the ‘joined-up solutions’ for improvement of the ‘joined-up problems’ of social exclusion and lack of national competitiveness in the global economy. My claim, then, is that holistic consideration of Widening Participation is required within this wider problem space to make sense of what Ackoff (1974) would term a “social mess”. This Chapter highlights the significant issues I believe substantiate this claim, summarised here to demonstrate the emergence of the main research questions which inform the further progress of the inquiry.
Figure 15 - Systemic summary of Section 2.8
Although the NCIHE recommendations concentrated on widening participation in HE as a means of redressing social injustices, New Labour instituted the initiative as a means of contributing to their wider ambitions to decrease social exclusion and increase national competitiveness. Faced with a legacy of high levels of ‘social exclusion’, unemployment and an emerging culture of ‘worklessness’ allied with a lack of national competitiveness in the global economy, New Labour prioritised action on two fronts: reducing social exclusion and moving the nation from a Low Skills Economy to a High Skills Economy. Widening Participation was heralded from the outset to be a major contributor to these objectives. It should, however, be noted that both the social and economic arguments have been criticised as being unfounded and contradictory (Francis and Wong, 2013; Lindley and Machin, 2012; Burke and Hayton, 2011, p. 9).

It can be argued that increasing social mobility of the disadvantaged through Higher Education participation represents an ethos of social justice and I acknowledge the validity of such argument to some degree. However, I contend that such claims are undermined by implications of the authoritarian communitarian project at the heart of New Labour’s political ideology. These political interconnections are illustrated below at Figure 16 on page 108.

Generally acknowledged to rest on Etzioni’s communitarian ideals of moral order, social cohesion and citizen rights and responsibilities, the combined Moral Underclass and Social Integrationist Discourses of social policy effectively held the disadvantaged responsible for their own situations, dictating employment as the only valid route to social inclusion. Significantly, New Labour’s conception of ‘community’ as lying at national rather than local level, imposed values on citizens which they were not necessarily culturally disposed to do. The implication of this on the Widening Participation policy is an important theme
for this work; the intrinsic value of HE as a life choice was imposed upon young disadvantaged sectors of the population without any attempt being made to elicit information on their worldviews about HE or desire to participate. Despite the focus given by New Labour on the need for participatory policy making to include those affected by the policy, I demonstrate that the non-participants were largely neglected in the formulation, implementation and further development of the Widening Participation policy.

Governmental expectation that citizens should shoulder responsibility for accepting rights extended through policy initiatives led to a conception of ‘barriers’ to Higher Education as factors which may prevent WP individuals from participating. I maintain that the notion of ‘barriers’ carries with it an understanding that their removal would engender wider participation of students from the socio-economic groups targeted by the Widening Participation policy. Such an understanding positions HE participation as a life choice such individuals would automatically consider as an option for rejection or acceptance.

I employ Vicker’s notion of Appreciation to negate this taken-for-granted assumption, claiming instead the possibility that such young people may not consider HE participation to be of sufficient value or interest to notice. From this arises the fundamental question emerging from this initial research; why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended by the Widening Participation initiative? I believe that gaining a greater appreciation of this is can only be possible through inquiring into the lived experiences of such young people to determine their worldviews of Higher Education and the factors influencing these.
Figure 16 - Systemic summary of political interconnections surrounding WP in HE
The discussion also highlights the intentions for systemic consideration of Joined-Up Policy within New Labour’s Joined-Up Government along with evidence of the lack of systems thinking and the non-systemic implementation of the Widening Participation policy. This leads to the second specific area of interest for this work; could holistic investigation into the main research question be useful, at a theoretical level, for informing more joined-up social and economic areas?

Finally, I am interested to determine whether learning the lessons from this inquiry in relation to the above two questions can be useful in theorising the effects of the changes to the Widening Participation policy instituted by the Coalition Government in 2012.

The information provided in this Chapter is illustrated holistically in the Rich Picture at Figure 17 overleaf.

In Chapter 1 (page 29), I suggested that Soft Systems Thinking is framework of intellectual ideas useful for reflecting upon the problematical situation of Widening Participation though the application of a systemic lens such as been adopted in this Chapter. Continuing the explicit declaration of F, M, A (see Chapter 1, pages 36 to 40), and having teased out issues significant to the progress of inquiry in the Area of Interest (A), in Chapters 3 and 4, I turn attention to Soft Systems Thinking which is the intellectual Framework of Ideas (F) for this work. In Chapter 3, I explore the theoretical concepts underpinning Soft Systems Thinking, particularly Hermeneutics which helps to understand notions of Action Learning, and Phenomenology which provides the main ideas contained in Soft Systems Methodology, the Action Learning methodology (M) as discussed in Chapter 5. The ideas underpinning Soft Systems Thinking are then considered in Chapter 4.
Figure 17 - The social "mess" of WP in HE
Chapter 3. Towards a Framework of Ideas: Theoretical Underpinnings

“I must understand my lifeworld to the degree necessary to be able to act in it and operate in it”

(Schutz, 1973, p. 6)

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I outlined the problematical situation of the Widening Participation policy which is the Area of Interest for this work. In describing the situation, I have attempted to demonstrate the complexities of the “social mess” which contains interrelated threads of: a communitarian political ideology; discourses of social exclusion; educational inequality and social justice; economic issues; joined up government; and a notion of a stakeholder society. I qualify my achievement as an ‘attempt’ since, as previously mentioned, although this research is systemic, the account of it must necessarily be systematic; this creates a tension whereby the full impact of the systemicity may be compromised in the reading. To reduce the impact of this tension, I concluded the previous Chapter with a Rich Picture illustrating the complex interplay of issues which cannot be easily separated in effective inquiry into possible reasons why the Widening Participation initiative did not fulfil its intended promise.

The majority of research in the arena of Widening Participation in Higher Education reported in the literature ignores the wider problem space in which the problem is situated to focus on matters of implementation. As previously noted, Gorard, Smith, H., et al. (2006) were commissioned to review existing research in the field and their conclusions
were highly critical of the work to date. In particular, they noted that the small proportion of qualitative research lacked methodological rigour and defensibility. The lack of research that involved ‘WP target individuals’ not participating in Higher Education was also heavily criticised in the review. I addresses these criticism through firstly using Checkland’s notion of F (Framework of Intellectual Ideas), M (Methodology), A (Area of Interest) to ensure the work is recoverable (see Chapter 1, pages 36 to 66), and secondly by accessing research members who meet defined ‘WP criteria’ (see Figure 54, page 264) but who are not participating in HE. However, I maintain that the problem to be investigated cannot be simply taken to be implementation of the Widening Participation agenda, but is rather the wider problem space in which it is situated as outlined in the previous Chapter. As such, I argue that a holistic approach to the problematical situation must be taken which can only be achieved through the application of a systemic lens to the social inquiry. I furthermore argue that attempts to gain a greater appreciation of the Widening Participation policy without such systemic consideration will necessarily lead to an impoverished understanding.

The Framework of Ideas relating to this holistic research is ‘Soft Systems Thinking’ (explored in Chapter 4) which underpins the Methodology, SSM (described in Chapter 5) as applied to the Area of Interest (outlined in Chapter 2). In this Chapter, however, prior to examining the Framework of Ideas per se, I examine the theoretical concepts which underpin Soft Systems Thinking. Such concepts not only elucidate the philosophical frames of reference incorporated into Soft Systems Thinking but also explicate the ways in which we make sense of the world in which we live.

I have declared this work as an ‘interpretive social inquiry’ and I firstly employ Burrell and Morgan’s Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social theory as a useful device
for positioning this work in the interpretive paradigm. I then provide a brief account of the significant philosophical ideas contained in the Phenomenological and Hermeneutical traditions relevant to the ideas underpinning both Soft Systems Thinking and SSM (the particular systemic methodology employed). Phenomenological concepts provide the main ideas contained in SSM whilst hermeneutics helps to understand the notions of Action Learning and hence the practice of SSM. This brief account does not merely describe the significant ideas but, where relevant, also details their usefulness for both the theoretical and practical aspects of the work.

Whilst the main focus is on the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions, I include themes from other interpretive thinkers, specifically those of Berger and Luckmann, Rosseau and Foucault, as particularly relevant to aspects of the work at hand.

3.2. A typology of paradigms

I use the Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social theory formulated by Burrell and Morgan (1979) as a useful framework for positioning this work in the interpretive paradigm. I acknowledge that some criticisms have been levelled at this typology (see, for example, R. Harper, 1999, p. 25; Deetz, 1996, p. 193). However, its continued adoption (in, for example, works by Kuada, 2009; Nwokah, Kaiable and Briggs, 2009; Boonstra and de Caluwe, 2007) and the absence of a suitable alternative paradigm provide sufficient grounds to justify its use here as a convenient vehicle for outlining the substantive arguments underpinning this inquiry.
Burrell and Morgan’s work (1979, pp. 1-6) revolves around 4 basic assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology (as illustrated in Figure 18 below) either explicitly or implicitly adopted by social researchers. In combination, these assumptions define their perceptions of the nature of the social world and how it might be investigated. Their analysis then considers 2 opposing sociological assumptions, the Sociology of Regulation against the Sociology of Radical Change (illustrated below in Figure 19) to provide the basis for analysis of social inquiry in a particular paradigm.

Figure 18- The subjective-objective assumptions (adapted from Goodley and Lawthorn, 2005, p. 139; Johnson, 2003, p. 78; Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 6)
From this framework, inquirers who adopt a nominalist ontology, an anti-positivist epistemology, a voluntarist view of human nature and an idiopathic methodology, along with a view of sociological regulation, fall into the interpretive paradigm as illustrated in Figure 20 overleaf. This Chapter deals only with the theoretical assumptions of interpretivism; the practical methodological concerns are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The notion of paradigm as presented by Burrell and Morgan is one of mutually exclusive constructions whereby each paradigm represents a different view of society. Synthesis between paradigms is impossible to achieve since accepting the assumptions of one automatically defies the assumptions of another; as such, it is only possible for an individual to operate in one particular paradigm at a specific point in time (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociology of regulation (order) is concerned with:</th>
<th>Sociology of radical change (conflict) is concerned with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The status quo</td>
<td>Radical change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social order</td>
<td>Structural conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Modes of domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>Contradiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Emancipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need satisfaction</td>
<td>Deprivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actuality</td>
<td>Potentiality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 19 - the concerns of sociologies of regulation and radical change (adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 18)
The essence of paradigm is described by Lincoln and Guba (1989, p. 80) as a basic belief system representing the most fundamental positions individuals are willing to take. Consequently, the particular viewpoint adopted by an interpretive social inquirer will differ greatly from that adopted by a functionalist inquirer and that the theoretical bases regarding the nature of human nature will differ widely. Burrell and Morgan (2005, pp. 28-30) summarize the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity according to these paradigms as illustrated below in Figure 21.
3.3. ‘Anti-interpretivist’ views of human behaviour

Prior to examining the interpretive foundations of this work, I find it useful to examine briefly the philosophical tenets which are rejected in the intellectual framework of ideas by firstly outlining the two opposing extremes of functionalism and solipsism.

Durkheim (1951, 1938, 1933) and Comte (1798–1857) are generally acknowledged to be the founding fathers of functionalism (see, for example, Welch, 2007, p. 23), the basic tenet of which is that society has a concrete existence and follows certain order. This leads to the notion of an objective and value-free social science that can produce true explanatory and predictive knowledge of the reality “out there”. This concrete external world is described by Bernstein (1982, p. 8) as “the permanent ahistorical framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness or rightness”. In other words, the concrete world is available to all and defines the nature and behaviour of mankind. Universal truth exists since all individuals experience the same reality. This is reflected in Durkheim’s view of humanity as being imposed upon individuals from the world in which they exist:

“Yet since it is indisputable today that most of our ideas and tendencies are not developed by ourselves, but come to us from outside, they can only penetrate us by imposing themselves upon us.” (Durkheim, 1938, p. 50)

New Labour’s communitarianist project, and in particular the transcendence of national values for the common good, reflect the functionalist orientation of their political ideology. In particular, there are similarities to Durkheim’s notion of “collective or common conscience” which he describes as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to
average citizens of the same society” to form “a determinate system which has its own life” (Durkheim, 1933, p. 79).

At the other extreme, solipsism rejects the existence of an external world, holding that nothing can be known except one’s own self and the contents of one’s consciousness (Mautner, 2000, p. 259). Believed to have originated from Gorgias of the Greek Sophist tradition, and anecdotally suggested to have come from a lost work “On Non-Existence”, solipsism expounds the theory that 1) nothing exists; 2) even if something exists, nothing can be known about it; and 3) even if something can be known about it, knowledge about it cannot be communicated to others. In simple terms, this positsthat objective knowledge is not possible. Descartes (1968) is generally accepted to have created the landscape for the modern conceptions of solipsism through the view of the self in philosophic ‘methodic doubt’. This presents the ego, as revealed by the cogito, as a solitary consciousness, a res cognitans that can be assured of its own existence exclusively, and only, as conscious mind. The essential root of solipsism that makes it an untenable philosophy is the ultimate statement it subscribes to, “I am the only mind that exists” which denies the existence of a social context or an external reality.

3.4. An interpretive view of human behaviour

Interpretivism occupies a middle ground between the two extremes of functionalism and solipsism. Whilst individuals are conceived to be shaped by their experiences, the existence of an external ‘reality’ is acknowledged. Unlike the functionalist viewpoint, however, ‘reality’ is seen to be individually constructed by humans as a result of their experiences of the world and those around them. Important influences upon interpretivism
in general and Soft Systems in particular can be seen in the following philosophical ‘schools’ of thought, namely Phenomenology and Hermeneutics.

**Phenomenology**

The underpinning ideas of functionalism as discussed above can be found in the principles of Descartes (1596-1650) who was concerned with the natural sciences. His focus was on *method*, which can be summarized simply as follows:

a) Only accept what is true, that you know is the case – i.e. there are no doubts;

b) Break the problem into the smallest parts as necessary;

c) Address the easiest problems first; and finally

d) Make comprehensive lists to be sure that you have forgotten nothing

(Stowell and Welch, 2012, p. 141)

These principles, known as the *scientific method or reductionism*, have become a favoured approach for problem solving, denying as they do opinions and unverifiable observations. There is no doubt that this method has yielded great success in the pursuit of knowledge in the natural sciences such as medicine, chemistry and physics. Indeed, so successful has this method been, it has become the foundation of traditional Western education but it has become increasingly apparent that it has deficiencies when attempting to inquire into human behaviour, social systems and interactions.

Kant (1724-1804), a major influence on interpretivism and a forerunner to phenomenology, rejected the notions of the scientific method in relation to understanding humanity. He argued that rather than being born into a concrete existence, the world, and our experience of it, is structured by our minds:
“Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but ... let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition.” (Kant, 1960, Preface, B/XVI)

Kant’s philosophy differentiated between a *noumenal*, or intelligible, world and a *sensible* world which he saw as the world that is presented to us in phenomena and so forming our understanding of reality as we see it (Rohlf, 2010). This idea was influential on the concept of phenomenology.

Husserl, generally accepted as the founding father of Phenomenology, expanded upon the concepts of Kant. He (1989, 1983)\(^6\) proposed a notion of *Lebenswelt* or ‘lifeworld’ (first appearing as *nāturlich Welt* or ‘natural world’) which described a world of people and the products of human culture. It rejects the idea that consciousness creates the world in any ontological sense or that it exists merely as pure *sensibilia* as solipsists would suggest. Instead, *Lebenswelt* is conceived as a pre-existing world of objects and other human beings. In contrast to the functionalist view, individuals are not shaped by the *Lebenswelt* into which they are born but rather make the world meaningful through consciousness. Husserl’s ideas negate the idea of universal truth; since individuals experience their everyday lifeworld differently to other individuals, *Lebenswelt* experiences will be incompatible between individuals. Therefore, what counts as ‘truth’ in the lifeworld of one individual will be neither true nor false in another’s lifeworld. This is significant in denying the New Labour communitarianist ideals of national community and the truth of shared experience, shared values and especially the imposition of moral values since

\[^6\text{Husserl's Ideen I/II were first published in 1913 and 1917 respectively; the sources cited here are later translations of these original works.}\]
individuals, in this interpretivist view, are free to create the truth of their own values and morality.

(Husserl, 1970, §37) later wrote “to live is to be steeped in the certainty of the world around us”. His complex pure phenomenological philosophy was concerned with sense-making of the a priori Lebenswelt from a purely cognitive perspective through the transcendental reduction (or epochê); this means that all scientific, philosophical, cultural and everyday assumptions must be set aside so that essential knowledge can be gained “irrespective of what goes in in the actual world, irrespective of the existence of that world” (Moran, 2000b, p. 133). In other words, any notions about the existence of a ‘thing’ must be suspended in favour of reflecting upon one’s experience of it. This Husserl described as his “principle of all principles; that every originary presentitive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originiarily ... offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also within the limits in which it is presented there.” (Husserl, 1983, p. 44 §24). This principle can be summed up as ‘back to the things themselves’. Within this philosophy is Husserl’s notion of the ‘other’; we experience the world as an inter-subjective world in which we experience our own reality as subjects but also experience others as subjects (Hermberg, 2006, p. 34).

Heidegger (1889-1976) is an equally significant figure in the development of the phenomenological tradition. Husserl, a lecturer at the University of Freiburg from 1915, exerted a great influence on Heidegger whom he employed as his assistant in 1919. However, Heidegger’s phenomenology differed from Husserl’s in a number of ways.
Heidegger (1985, p. 215) considered attempts to prove the existence of the world as “absurd” and concentrated instead on questioning how individually constituted “worldhood” is to be understood. He believed that human understanding is interpretive from the very start, but such interpretive involvement with the world comes through concernful, practical dealings whereby lived experiences are bodily encounters with things in the environment (Moran, 2000b, pp. 228-231). Heidegger (1992, pp. 89-80) considered Husserl’s analytical concepts to have been developed for the purpose of expounding relations of cognition and theoretical thinking, but proved inadequate when tackling the more fundamental relations characteristic within our practical dealings with entities. In other words, rather than evoking some reaction, Husserl’s phenomenology posited the objects of experience as inert phenomena “incapable of attracting, repulsing or motivating by their forces and powers” (Heinamaa, 2011, p. 28)

A major point of departure between Husserl and Heidegger was the concept of intentionality described by Husserl (1983, p. 349) as “the name of the problem encompassed by the whole of phenomenology”. Central to Heidegger’s philosophy is the notion of Dasein which he describes as “this entity which each of us is himself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 27). Whereas Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology draws exclusively upon pure reflection which excludes every type of external experience, Heidegger (1962, p. 84) was more concerned with being-in the world, since “Dasein is essentially an entity with Being-in, it can explicitly discover those entities which it encounters environmentally, it can know them”. In other words, whilst Husserl’s phenomenology strove to exclude the external world, Heidegger’s connected with it. However, whilst it is widely agreed there are significant differences between Husserl and Heidegger’s notions of phenomenology, it should also be noted that there is a significant
body of authors who also believe that Heidegger, far from dismissing Husserl’s concepts, was in fact developing or reinterpreting them (see, for example, Heinamaa, 2011; Moran, 2000a; Crowell, 1990). According to Moran (2000b, pp. 228-231). The major difference between Husserl and Heidegger is between pure cognition and practicality.

A further significant figure in the development of Phenomenology was Schutz (1899 – 1959) who was influenced by Husserl, Simmel and Weber amongst others. Greatly influenced by Husserl in all but the epoché, Schutz developed a phenomenology of the social world to create a philosophy of the social sciences which he saw as “an objective context of meaning constructed out of and referring to subjective contexts of meaning” (Walsh, 1967, p. xxviii). In particular, Schutz dealt with not only subjective experience but also the interaction of humans in inter-subjective experience and the nature of human relationships since

“...the primary task of this science is to describe the processes of meaning-establishment and meaning-interpretation as these are carried out by individuals living in the social world. This description can be empirical or eidetic; it can take as its subject matter the individual or the typical; it can be performed in concrete situations of everyday life or with a high degree of generality. But, over and above this, interpretive sociology approaches such cultural objects and seeks to understand their meaning by applying to them the interpretive schemes thus obtained.” (Schutz, 1967, pp. 248-249)

An important fundamental concept for this work is Schutz’s view of the Lebenswelt as a pre-existing world of reality given so that “I must understand my lifeworld to the degree necessary to be able to act in it and operate in it” (Schutz, 1973, p. 6). Rather than being
the concrete reality embraced by functionalists, Schutz (1973, p. 103) argued that only a certain segment of the a priori Lebenswelt is available to individuals so that “only part of the world is in actual reach”. He further maintained that individuals will experience this limited lifeworld as “something to be mastered according to my particular interests” (Schutz, 1973, p. 13). Furthermore, although individuals construct an inner world from the portion of the lifeworld available to them, they must necessarily live with others to construct shared meanings (Schutz, 1967, p. 9). He later maintained that individuals can only live inter-subjectively through the “determinate relation-constraints” they experience in the myriad relationships they form during their lifetimes so that “Whilst I may project my plans on the world, it will resist the realisation of my goals” (Schutz, 1973, pp. 16-18). This proposes a view of individuals as less teleological, but rather as displaying behaviour predicated on maintaining relationships experienced during their lifetimes.

Although we live inter-subjectively, judgements in choice are based on individually constructed values (Schutz, 1973, pp. 120-122). Heidegger (2000, pp. 44-48) argues that some of these values will represent ideals or norms which will place an ought on the judgements between fact and value. In simple terms, individuals may feel a responsibility to act in a particular way to conform to social norms. I consider Schutz’s ideas and Heidegger’s work on values, norms and choice to be highly significant for this interpretive inquiry, not only for their theoretical conceptions of human behaviour but also for their significance in the design of the practical research. The ideas outlined above resonate strongly with Vicker’s notion of an Appreciative System which underpins the ideas and practice contained within SSM, the methodology used within this study. I will return to these notions in Section 4.5 (pages 152 to 172) where I explore Vickers’ Appreciative System and its importance to the design of the framework for practical social inquiry.
Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was greatly influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger and develops notions of choice. Like Heidegger, he was concerned with man’s being in the world, particularly in relation to perception, stating that “the task of phenomenology is to reveal the mystery of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. xxiv). However, for him, there was no separation between mind and body; individuals do not have bodies but are bodies so that “the body is our general way of having a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 169). The subtle distinction here is that unlike Heidegger, who was concerned with our bodily encounters with the world, Merleau-Ponty argued that all human experience and understanding is grounded in, and shaped by, our finite bodily orientation in the world.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962, §27) proposes a concept of ‘Das Man’, the meaning of which is widely debated. For this discussion, I adopt the translation of Egan (2012, p. 290) as a gender-neutral third person singular in passive voice or ‘one’ as in ‘one does ….’, rather than the more widely used translation as ‘the They’ as in, for example, Mcquarrie (1968). The concept of das Man is used in Heidegger’s notion of inauthenticity of which he states “inauthenticity denotes a way of being in which man may go astray, and generally does go astray, but in which he need not necessarily and always go astray” (Heidegger, 1992, p. 259). He uses das Man to explain a certain mode of inauthenticity in which Dasein, rather than making an authentic choice which is true to Dasein, makes a choice because, for example, it is what is socially expected or it is what others do. The importance of social relationships in the construction of an individual is underlined by Merleau-Ponty (1965, Preface) who argued that “man is in the world and only in the world does he know himself” so that “we become others and we become world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 160). He echoes Heidegger’s notion of das Man in his argument that we must engage with the norms and values of the world we inhabit with others; in order to become
and create ourselves as moral beings by exercising our freedom, we cannot exercise choice in a vacuum but must incorporate and take a stand on collectively created set of meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 522).

**Hermeneutics**

Having its roots in the translation and interpretation of text, the history of Hermeneutics can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy where Plato, for example, is believed to have used the term (Ramberg and Gjedsal, 2009). Traditional hermeneutics was concerned with formulating and implementing rules for interpretation of texts which were assumed to contain a determinate meaning which could be discerned by an interpreter through proper exegetical method. Attention was primarily paid to the linguistic aspects of textual interpretation, including issues such as grammar, syntax and vocabulary (Vines and Allen, 1987, p. 310).

During the 17th Century, the focus of hermeneutics was on gaining a greater understanding of the scriptures. An important influence at this time was Spinoza (1623-1627) who believed that in order to fully understand a biblical text, it was also necessary to have insight into the historical horizon and the minds which produced the texts. He proposed an idea of the *hermeneutic circle* (Goetschel, 2004, p. 54) which claims that understanding of parts of the text hinges on an understanding of the larger whole but the whole can only be understood on the basis of the parts.

The constant negotiation between the parts and the whole is an important hermeneutic theme and one which was furthered by Schleiermacher (1766-1834) who formed part of what has become known as Romantic Hermeneutics. During this period, hermeneutics expanded from textual interpretation to encompass “the conditions of possibility for
symbolic communication” (Ramberg and Gjedsal, 2009). In other words, it was no longer confined to the question of how to read but opened the question of how human beings communicate at all.

Schleiermacher believed that understanding did not happen as a matter of course but rather that “misunderstanding occurs as a matter of course, and so understanding must be willed and sought at every point” (Bowie, 1998, p. 110). The underlying thesis of this statement was that interpretation is not merely linguistic (as in the shared meaning of words) but also rests upon the psychology of the author’s and his/her meaning of the words, leading to difficulties in understanding the original intention of the author. Schliermacher’s widening of hermeneutics included such understanding of meaning in verbal communication or conversation (Forster, 2002).

Dilthey (1833-1911) was concerned with the reality of lived experience, distinguishing between the natural and the human sciences as more than a metaphysical distinction. He was critical of Schliermacher’s hermeneutics, considering them to relate more properly to the natural sciences. Rather than concentrating only on the psychological and grammatical elements claimed by Schliermacher, Dilthey moved towards a greater emphasis on historical and cultural influences (Bulhof, 1976, p. 24).

He saw the natural sciences as hard science, concerned with the external relations cause and effect which he felt should be replaced with relations of “agency and suffering, of action and reaction” in the realm of human sciences (Dilthey, 2002, p. 219). Dilthey grounded hermeneutics in a general theory of human life and existence (Ramberg and Gjedsal, 2009). Using dual concepts of Erlibnis (lived experience) and Verstehen (understanding), he distinguished between self-understanding as connected to Erlibnis and
understanding of others through Verstehen. His fundamental point was that Erlebnis does not provide self-understanding as such, since understanding of self can only be obtained to the extent that the self relates to itself as it relates to others.

Dilthey’s main contribution to hermeneutics was his emphasis on connecting past and present in understanding; where time for the natural sciences is merely abstract, for the human sciences, it represents experience (Hodges, 1944, p. 97). Makkreel (2012) suggests that Dilthey (2002, pp. 220-227) expressed this through his proposition of 3 classes of life manifestations:

   a) Theoretical, incorporating judgements and concepts and larger thought-formations which are intended to communicate states of affairs rather than states of mind. They do not communicate anything about the person;

   b) Practical, encompassing actions which do not intend to reveal anything about the actor but may reveal something about his/her intentions; and,

   c) disclosive, which Dilthey (2002, p. 227) terms “expressions of lived experience”; these include reflections, self-disclosures, exclamations, gestures and even works of art, all of which disclosed something more about the person making them.

Dilthey’s work had a great influence on Heidegger who was a significant figure in not only the development of phenomenology as discussed above, but also on the hermeneutic tradition. Ramberg and Gjedsal (2009) described Heidegger’s contribution as creating an ‘ontological turn’ in hermeneutics since he did not view it as being a matter of understanding communication nor about providing a methodological basis for human sciences. Rather, Heidegger saw hermeneutics as an ontology concerning the most
fundamental conditions of man’s being in the world. He effectively shifted hermeneutics
away from Dilthey’s idea of understanding the other to understanding being in the world.

Heidegger’s hermeneutics is necessarily interlinked with his phenomenology to which I
briefly return in order to further this discussion. Giorgi (2007, p. 63) asserts that
Husserl’s notion of phenomenological reduction led him to given priority to careful
description whilst Heidegger saw the meaning of phenomenological description as a
method lying in interpretation. Heidegger’s fundamental question revolved around what
to exist means; he felt that all previous metaphysical questions presupposed the answer to
this (Wheeler, 2013). In this, he distinguished between the ontic (i.e. concerned with facts
about entities) and the ontological (i.e. concerned with the meaning of entities or Being),
stating that “Dasein is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being
is an issue for it” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 32). In other words, humans are set apart from all
other living organisms in that they are aware of their Being. However, although Beings
are aware of being, their knowledge is obscured so that it is “something that proximally
and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden”
(Heidegger, 1962, p. 59). This is Heidegger’s turn to hermeneutics since, as Giorgi (2007,
p. 67) points out:

“Because of this hiddenness, or the “covered-up-ness” which Heidegger calls “the
counter-concept to phenomenon”, interpretation is required and therefore a
hermeneutic becomes necessary. This hermeneutic turns to Dasein, since Dasein is
the being that has some understanding of what it means to be. Being is somewhat
uncovered to Dasein and the hermeneutic task is to tie into that uncovering
moment. Yet, for Heidegger, Being is for the most part hidden, even to Dasein,
and so phenomenology must be a hermeneutic”.
Gadamer (1900–2002), generally renowned as the most definitive figure in the development of modern hermeneutics, studied under Heidegger at Marburg University and worked as his assistant for a time. It is therefore not surprising that Heidegger was the major influence on his work. Gadamer continues to develop Heidegger’s hermeneutics as understanding of being in the world. Although his work mainly revolves around the ways in which individuals understand texts, the concepts are equally applicable to human communication. He examines the difficulties individuals face when attempting to understand each other and come to agreement. Such understanding, he argues, occurs in language, so necessitating a common language. There is a two-sided problem, a double hermeneutic regarding understanding and interpretation in communication through this common language. One individual can only understand another through interpretation of it according to his own experience. For example, if you tell me that you are ‘sad’, although I have a general understanding of what ‘sad’ means, I will understand your sadness, not as a sadness which is yours, but in relation to my own experience of being sad. This is termed by Gadamer (2004, pp. 302-306) as a fusion of horizons, a meeting of minds where each mind is predicated on its own experience and only a delineated understanding is therefore possible. In this view, whilst “shared meanings” can be taken to exist, the precise meanings will be uniquely interpreted by each individual.

A subtle implication of Gadamer’s work is in the nature of a common language. A notional language does not necessarily represent “the common language” of a population. Neighbourhoods, religions, societies and institutions, to name but a few, all develop a “common” language packed with idioms, acronyms and myths to which members become attached for as long as they profess membership. Such local languages may hold more
“shared meaning” than the national language for individuals, especially where strong bonds exist.

This fusion of horizons and how individuals can understand each other is an important thread in this work which I explore in detail in Section 8.5 (pages 277 to 281).

**Significant themes from interpretive thinkers**

The above discussion outlines philosophical concepts from phenomenology which provide underpinning theoretical bases for the substantive arguments in this work. These concepts have not only theoretical but also practical significance for this work. The dual notions of freedom of choice and authentic choice in opposition to socially shaped behavioural norms are particularly relevant for this work and will be returned to later in Chapter 10. In this subsection, I examine themes significant to this work from four influential thinkers, Berger and Luckmann, Rousseau and Foucault.

Earlier, I introduced ideas of the social construction of reality through the work of Merleau-Ponty (1968, 1965) (see page 125) which is an important theme for this inquiry. Any discussion of this would be lacking without including the work of Berger and Luckman (1967), generally considered to be one of the major sociological influences of the 20th Century (see, for example, Soeffner and Zifonun, 2008, pp. 3-4; International Sociological Association, 1998; Eberle, 1992).

To illustrate the importance of this theme, I return to the complexity of the problem situation under consideration in this inquiry. In the previous Chapter (pages 66-71), I have examined at some length the New Labour Communitarian Project in which ‘community’ is conceived at national level with norms and shared meanings naturally occurring at this
level. Making an appeal to community members, as the Widening Participation initiative does, necessarily places HE participation as a national social ‘norm’ in this conception. The question emerging here is how ‘community’ is to be conceived; for example, where is the primacy of community for individuals? Is this in the more local environs of their everyday existence or in the wider nation space they inhabit? Berger and Luckmann’s influential ideas are helpful in understanding this.

Whilst often described as being of the social constructivist tradition, both Berger (1992, p. 2) and (Luckmann, 1992, p. 4) vehemently deny any affiliation with it. It is, therefore, difficult to definitively ascribe their work to any particular school or tradition although it is pertinent that they were heavily influenced by Schutz’s phenomenology. Indeed, they collaborated with Schutz on their work, a collaboration which ended only due to geographical distance (Berger, 1992, p. 2; Luckmann, 1992, p. 4). This being the case, I feel their contribution does not compromise this interpretive discussion and these notions are reflected in the work of many other interpretive social inquirers (see, for example, R. White and Wyn, 2004; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977).

The basic concept of Berger and Luckman (1967) is that people and groups interact in a social system. Over time they create concepts of each other's actions and these concepts eventually become habituated into the roles actors play in relation to each other. These roles are made available to other members of society and the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. Meaning then becomes embedded in society in the process of institutionalization. Reality is consequently socially constructed as knowledge and individual’s conceptions and embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Knowledge is not theoretical knowledge as this is seen to be only a very small portion of social knowledge since
“...the primary knowledge about the institutional order is the sum total of ‘what everybody knows’ about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth” (Berger and Luckman, 1967, p. 83).

What is of particular interest in this discussion is the notion of socialisation and the distinction between primary socialisation and secondary socialisation. Primary socialisation (Berger and Luckman, 1967, pp. 150-157) is the most important socialisation for an individual, the effect of which is so momentous that “the basic structure of all secondary socialisation has to resemble that of primary socialisation”. It occurs as the world into which the child is born and in which he “encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialisation”. The significant others who, for example, appear as parents, are imposed upon the child and will “filter” the social world so that the self of the child is a “reflected entity” who becomes “what he is addressed as by his significant others”. The child will take on the roles and attitudes of the significant others, internalizing them and making them his own:

“Thus, the lower-class child not only absorbs a lower-class perspective on the social world, he absorbs it in the idiosyncratic coloration given it by his parents (or whatever other individuals are in charge of his primary socialisation). The same lower-class perspective may induce a mood of contentment, resignation, bitter resentment, or seething rebelliousness. Consequently, the lower-class child will not only come to inhabit a world greatly different from that of an upper-class child, but may do so in a manner quite different from the lower-class child next door.” (Berger and Luckman, 1967, p. 151)

Of particular importance to this discussion is the notion of lack of choice in primary socialisation; the child has no choice in either the world into which he is born or the significant others who will shape that world for him. The child must accept this situation
with “no option for another arrangement”. Consequently, the child does not internalize the world of the significant others as one of many possible worlds but rather internalizes it as the world:

“It is for this reason that the world internalized in primary socialisation is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary socialisations. However much the original sense of inevitability may be weakened in subsequent disenchantments, the recollection of a never-to-be-repeated certainty - the certainty of the first dawn of reality - still adheres to the first world of childhood.” (Berger and Luckman, 1967, pp. 154-155)

Secondary socialisation occurs as the individual then enters into other subworlds and will occur as the child grows into other groups and communities, for example, education and work. It is fundamentally the process of learning appropriate behaviour in other communities or groups according to the behavioural patterns reinforced by the socialising agents of society.

“The more 'artificial' character of secondary socialisation makes the subjective reality of its internalizations even more vulnerable to challenging definitions of reality, not because they are not taken for granted or are apprehended as less than real in everyday life, but because their reality is less deeply rooted in consciousness and thus more susceptible to displacement. For example, both the prohibition on nudity, which is related to one's sense of shame and internalized in primary socialisation, and the canons of proper dress for different social occasions, which are acquired as secondary internalizations, are taken for granted in everyday life”. (Berger and Luckman, 1967, pp. 167-168).

From Berger and Luckmann’s concepts, two things become evident. Firstly, freedom of choice is restricted from the start through the internalisation of the significant others; in this internalisation, the child will absorb norms and values that become his own.
Secondly, since primary socialisation infects secondary socialisation, the nearer the norms and values of the subworlds are to those of the world, the more readily will they be accepted by an individual. From this, it follows that the norms and values most readily adhered to by individuals are most likely to be those held as shared meanings in localised groups and communities, and not those of the national community. Having said this, I must point out that there is no intention here to suggest that national norms are irrelevant, merely that they are of less relevance.

Returning to the original point of this discussion, I talked about HE participation as a national social ‘norm’ and the use of quotation marks is deliberate. HE participation did not grow up as a ‘norm’ through shared meaning and shared value but rather was imposed as such by the Government. Effectively then, it was an artificially imposed value which the populace was expected to embrace as a ‘norm’; the Moral Underclass Discourse (see page Error! Bookmark not defined.) led the Government to consider non-participation by the socially disadvantaged as morally deficient. New Labour’s authoritarian communitarianist project attempted to persuade citizens to accept the responsibilities conferred upon them as rights by the Government.

At this point, I introduce the notion of the ‘social contract’ as conceived by Rosseau (1762) which theorises that legitimate political authority can only rest on a covenant between members of a society. He perceived the fundamental problem of humans living together as being how to find:

"… a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before." (Rosseau, 1762, p. 10)
In simplistic terms, Rosseau felt that the fundamental societal problem was how individuals in a society can live together without surrendering to the coercion others. The social contract provides the solution to this so that "Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole" (Rosseau, 1762). Subscribing to the tenet that all men are born equal, he believed that no individual has a natural right to rule others. Therefore, the only authority that can be justified is the authority emanating out of social contracts, or covenants between the parties. In this view, there can be no basis in nature for political authority founded on force or coercion.

In the previous Chapter, I argued that New Labour’s practiced politics of coercion to achieve their ends. As such, New Labour did not enter into social contracts with citizens, but rather attempted to coerce them into compliance, a theme I shall return to in Chapter 10. The Welfare to Work example on page 71 earlier demonstrated how citizens could be denied the right to benefits if they did not accept the responsibility to become active participants in the world of work. In this, freedom of choice was removed and attempts to impose new social ‘norms’ made through politics of coercion and the exercise of governmental power.

To omit a discussion on power here would be to ignore an ‘elephant in the room’ when reflecting on freedom, choice and social norms in relation to the Widening Participation agenda. Foucault (1926-1984) offers conceptions of power which have been pervasive within the social sciences and should not, therefore, be ignored here. Whilst he is more widely deemed to be associated with the structuralist and post-modernist movements, he was greatly influenced by both Merleau-Ponty (one of his university lecturers) and
Heidegger (Kelly, 2010); again, I feel that inclusion of these matters here will not compromise this discussion but add to it.

Gaventa (2003, p. 1) believes that the wide acceptance of Foucault’s ideas rest on his departure from traditional notions of power. Rather than being concentrated in and possessed by people and institutions, Foucault (1991, p. 220) saw power as being something that is diffuse and enacted, always entailing a “set of actions performed upon another’s actions or reactions”. He also stated that “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1998, p. 63), challenging traditional viewpoints of power as a negative influence:

“We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault, 1991, p. 194)

The rituals of truth Foucault (in Rabinow, 1991) talks about are those discourses which society accepts and makes function as true to enable, for example, individuals to distinguish between true and false statements and the means by which each is sanctioned. They also define the status of those who are charged with “saying what counts as truth”.

Within his overall project on power, Foucault (1998) introduced a concept of “biopower” which combines disciplinary power with “biopolitics”. This effectively states that since people live at a biological level, they are forced to live according to social norms necessary to regulate the human population. The ideology of life becomes a public morality that is transparently absorbed by individuals who consequently become self-governing. The power of biopolitics is described as an “endeavour, begun in the eighteenth century, to
rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristics of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1991, p. 202). As such, biopolitics is configured as a governmental control and regulation of the population. “Thanatopolitics”, the politics of death, remains as the ultimate sanction for social non-conformity as witnessed in, for example, capital punishment or the Nazi holocaust.

Freedom is central to Foucault’s thesis of power since “power relations are exercised only through or with free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790); it is not possible to exercise power over a slave, for instance, since this is merely a relationship of physical constraint. His notion of freedom differs from other phenomenological notions of freedom in some respects, but the underlying ethos is similar. Merleau-Ponty (1965), for example, believes that the social environments in which humans are “situated” places both physical and cultural limits on choice. This necessarily renders free will as conditional. Foucault’s thesis of power further restricts the freedom to live “a beautiful life” to a small elite only (Foucault in Rabinow, 1991, p. 341). This is despite the fact that:

“Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Despite the underlying differences in outlook of Foucault and phenomenologists, the notion of intersubjectivity is common to both as is the concept of shared meanings.
3.5. **Summary**

At the beginning of this Chapter, I maintained that effective inquiry into the complexities of the problematical situation of Widening Participation as outlined in Chapter 2 can only be adequately achieved through the application of a systemic lens. I also argued that not applying a systemic lens for holistic consideration would necessarily result in an impoverished appreciation of the issue. I additionally noted that there is a lack of systemic inquiry into the area in the existing literature. By applying a systemic lens, I explicitly declared the Framework of Ideas to be employed as that of Systems Thinking in general and Soft Systems Thinking in particular, as employed in SSM, the Methodology adopted for practical inquiry (discussed in Chapter 5).

I have additionally declared this work as an interpretive social inquiry carried out as an Action Learning project. Prior to examining the Framework of Ideas per se (which is the subject of the next Chapter), I have used this Chapter to outline the theoretical underpinnings relevant to the substantive arguments of the work. I consequently employed Burrell and Morgan’s Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social theory as a useful device for positioning this work in the interpretive paradigm. I then briefly examined the ‘anti-interpretive’ stances of functionalism and solipsism to demonstrate opposing views and provide a backdrop for further discussion.

Following on from this, I then turned to providing an outline of the significant voices and concepts seen to reside in the interpretive paradigm. In particular, I have investigated the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions which help us to understand how we interpretively make sense of the world in which we reside. Using a very simplistic summary of these ideas, where functionalism states that we are born into a concrete world
of reality which is given to us and shapes us, interpretivism holds that we construct our worlds of reality as a result of being in the world and as a consequence of our lived experience. On the other hand, whereas solipsism denies the existence of an external world, asserting that nothing can be known except one’s own self and the contents of one’s consciousness (Mautner, 2000, p. 259), interpretivism acknowledges the existence of an external world about which we gain understanding through our being in the world.

In discussion of the theoretical concepts in the interpretive paradigm, I have identified particular issues which are of significance to the progress of this work. In pursuance of these, I have also identified authors deemed to be important in the field of interpretive social inquiry. In particular, I include Berger and Luckmann’s influential notions of the social construction of reality, Rosseau’s social contract theory and Foucault’s conceptions of power which limit the freedom and choices of individuals.

The concepts of phenomenology investigated in this Chapter provide the main ideas contained in SSM, the systemic methodology described in Chapter 5 and employed through my own expression for this inquiry. Hermeneutics helps to understand the notions of Action Research and hence the practice of SSM. This methodology in underpinned by the Framework of Ideas of Soft Systems Thinking which is explored in the next Chapter.
Chapter 4. Framework of Ideas: Applying a Systemic Lens to inquiry

“Social science is the science of social systems. For this reason, it will have to use the approach of general systems science”

(von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 195)

4.1. Introduction

In the progress of this work to date, I have demonstrated the need to apply a systemic lens to this social inquiry by illustrating the complexities of the Widening Participation policy within the wider problem space within which it is situated in Chapter 2. The issues described are irrevocably intertwined and I have argued that without application of a systemic lens to inquiry, any appreciation of the Area of Interest will necessarily be impoverished. I have therefore explicitly declared that this project will employ a Framework of Ideas of Soft Systems Thinking as embodied in the Methodology of SSM (described in the following Chapter).

I have also explicitly declared this work as an interpretive social inquiry (see page 36). Chapter 3 outlined the theoretical underpinnings of interpretivism, firstly employing Burrell and Morgan’s Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social theory as a useful device for positioning the work in the interpretive paradigm. I then outlined significant voices and concepts within this paradigm, most especially from phenomenology and hermeneutics, to illustrate the theoretical concepts underpinning Soft Systems Thinking. These concepts articulate ideas of how we understand the world we live in and how we construct reality through lived experience. Themes significant to the substantive
arguments of this work from interpretive thinkers were also identified. In particular, I included Berger and Luckmann’s influential notions of the social construction of reality, Rosseau’s social contract theory and Foucault’s conceptions of power.

In this Chapter, I turn attention to the Framework of Ideas, namely Soft Systems Thinking. Following a brief history of the Systems Movement, I examine the separation of two particular schools of thought, ‘hard’ Systems Thinking and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking, which is interpretive in nature. It should be noted that some modern Systems Thinkers and Practitioners object to the notion of such a separation, but I have included the distinction here as an aid to greater understanding of the ideas underpinning SSM. I then conclude with a brief discussion of the contributions of two highly significant thinkers, C. West Churchman and Sir Geoffrey Vickers, whose notion of an Appreciative System underpinned the development of SSM, discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2. A Brief History of Systems Thinking

Early beginnings

Ramage and Shipp (2009) provide a categorisation of a number of influential Systems Thinkers, primarily as device for ease of reading their work. However, the authors also point out that they do represent coherent groupings of authors: “Some of them might be considered explicit schools of thoughts (such as systems dynamics), while others group authors with connected ideas (such as learning systems)”. The categories are not meant to be a definitive statement of Systems Traditions (for example, Stowell and Welch (2012) separate Critical Theory from other strands of Systems Thinking), nor are they comprehensive since they contain only scholars that are actually discussed in the work.
Nevertheless, they are presented in Figure 22 below as a useful device for introducing a history of Systems Thinking and furthering a later discussion on the separation between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking.

Figure 22 - A grouping of Systems Thinkers (adapted from (Ramage and Shipp, 2009, location 221))

The ‘Systems Movement’ can be seen to have its foundations in the pioneering work of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the early 1920s to fill what he identified as “obvious lacunae in the research and theory of biology” (von Bertalanffy, 1969, pp. 12-13). Such lacunae, or empty spaces, resided in the prevalent mechanistic approach to the natural
sciences which attempted to explain the behaviour of living organisms as though they were “complicated clockwork”. This, he believed, resolved them into “parts and partial processes”, effectively neglecting or actively denying “what is essential in the phenomena of life” (von Bertalanffy, 1962, p. 1). Rather than being machine-like entities which could be so treated, von Bertalanffy conceived the living organism as an irreducible whole or ‘open’ system. Such systems, he argued, were purposive, composing a complex set of interrelated components organised in a particular way and incapable of being reduced to individual parts. They also exchanged material with the environment and were self-regulating in that, although they temporarily reacted to stimuli from the environment, would homeostatically return to a steady state. At this time, these ideas were radical since physical chemistry was limited almost exclusively to consideration of processes in closed systems.

Over time, this organismic conception of living organisms as open systems developed into a General Systems Theory, applicable to all the sciences (von Bertalanffy, 1949, p. 45). In 1945, von Bertalanffy joined forces with with three like-minded thinkers, economist KE Boulding, physiologist R.W. Gerard, and mathematician A. Rapoport, to found the Society for General Systems Research in 1956. Their overriding aim was to encourage and develop General Systems Theory, providing language and tools for analysis and understanding which could transcend the problems arising from traditional subject boundaries:

“Modern science is characterised by its ever-increasing specialization, necessitated by the enormous amounts of data, the complexity of techniques and of theoretical structures within every field. Thus science is split into innumerable disciplines continually generating new subdisciplines. In consequence, the physicist, the biologist, the psychologist and the social scientist are, so to speak, encapsulated in
their private universes, and it is difficult to get word from one cocoon to another” (von Bertalanffy, 1955, p. 75).

General Systems Theory conceived a system as an irreducible whole having “amazing order, organisation, maintainance (sic) in continuous change, regulation and apparent teleology” (von Bertalanffy, 1962, p. 4). These elements were also seen to be characteristic of human behaviour leading von Bertalanffy (1969, p. 8) to assert that “social phenomena must be considered as ‘systems’ – difficult and at present unsettled as the definition of sociocultural entities may be” and furthermore, that “Social science is the science of social systems. For this reason, it will have to use the approach of general systems science” (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 195).

Whilst von Bertalanffy and colleagues were working on their conception of a theory of General Systems, the Early Cybernetic strand shown above in Figure 22 was also active, primarily through their participation in what are now known as the Macy Conferences held between 1946 and 1953. Membership of the Conferences is shown in Figure 23 which illustrates the wide range of disciplines represented.

The early Systems Movement, then, had two ‘strands’ which, whilst disparate and significant in later developments in Systems Thinking, were similar in that the scholars were all pursuing ideas which sought to break down the artificially imposed boundaries between subject disciplines. Churchman (1973, p. 73) commented that “one of the strongest lessons we have learned in systems science is that a systemic approach to social problems is – not interdisciplinarian – but antidisciplinarian.”. In simple terms, Churchman implies that the systems approach, rather than working across disciplines, supercedes them to the effect that they become insignificant in the practice of systemic inquiry into social problems.
### Figure 23 – Disciplines and scholars represented at the Macy Conferences (1946-53) (adapted from (American Society for Cybernetics, n.d.))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Scholar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Margaret Mead</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Filmer S.C. Northrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gregory Bateson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>George Evelyn Hutchinson</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>Arture Rosenblueth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>Julian Bigelow</td>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>Henry Brosin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Heinz von Foerster</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lawrence S. Kuble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>John von Neumann</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Molly Harrowe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walter Pitts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Heinrich Klüwer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leonard J. Savage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kurt Lewin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norbert Weiner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Donald Marquis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Frank Fremont-Smith</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>Lawrence K. Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroanatomy</td>
<td>Gerhart von Bonin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurophysiology</td>
<td>Ralph W. Gerard</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Paul Lazarsefeld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rafael Lorente de Nó</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuropsychiatry</td>
<td>Warren McCulloch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3. Later developments in the Systems Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Later Cybernetics</td>
<td>With roots in early cybernetics which was based on concepts of feedback and information and the parallels between human and machine behaviour, the scholars in this category can be seen to be ‘second generation cyberneticists’ who have all taken their work in slightly different directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Dynamics</td>
<td>Focuses on computer modelling of systems with a high degree of feedback and circularity. Has an intellectual similarity to cybernetics but is considered a separate tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity Theory</td>
<td>With roots in GST and cybernetics, models highly complicated and interconnected systems using techniques derived from the physical sciences with a focus on self-organisation, emergence and non-linearity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft and Critical Systems</td>
<td>An applied approach arising from the use of techniques in systems engineering and operational research underpinned by a dissatisfaction of those approaches to take account of the reality of human systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Systems</td>
<td>A broad group of thinkers with a common focus on the way people learn and the systems within which they learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 24 - A brief account of the development of the Systems Movement (adapted from Ramage and Shipp (2009))*
From these early beginnings, several developments have taken place in the ‘Systems Movement’. Developments in the various categories of Systems Thinking following the early beginnings in GST and Early Cybernetics is illustrated in Figure 24 above which, whilst greatly simplified, is offered as a useful device for understanding the later discussions. Checkland (1981, p. 96) believes that progress has remained slow due to the historical hold which non-systemic thinking continues to exert on Western cultures. Nevertheless, different ‘schools’ of systemic thought have emerged as illustrated in Figure 25.

Figure 25 - The shape of the systems movement adapted from Checkland (1981, p. 97)
This illustrates the separation of two particular schools of thought, ‘hard’ Systems Thinking and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking, the distinction between which is highly significant to the framework of ideas in this work.

**4.4. The separation of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking**

I begin this section by firstly qualifying the notion of a separation of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Systems Thinking. It should be noted that some modern Systems Thinkers and Practitioners object to the notion of such a separation, believing it an artificial distinction which diminishes the field (see, for example, Leleur, 2005; Midgeley, 2000; Rees, 2000). There is a further emergent debate which recognises that such a distinction exists but that neither approach in isolation can achieve effective inquiry. These Systemists believe that there is a consequent need to combine hard and soft approaches to inquiry (see, for example, S. Clarke, 2012, p. 43; Salerno et al., 2008; Mathiassen and Neilsen, 1989).

I highlight these arguments to demonstrate that there is no general agreement on the notion of ‘hard’ versus ‘soft’ Systems Thinking but do not intend to enter into debate about them. Instead, I merely offer an explanation of the two approaches to provide the observer with a greater understanding of the Intellectual Framework of Ideas underpinning this inquiry.

**‘Hard’ Systems Thinking**

Within ‘hard’ Systems Thinking, the world is viewed as being systemic, as though it is composed of systems that can be engineered. This represents a systemic ontology, in the sense that such systems are taken to exist in the real world and are capable of being manipulated. This view is neatly encapsulated by (Fuenmayor, 2001, p. 5) who describes a systems approach as entailing “approaching (seeing, studying, transforming) things as if
they were systems”. Hard systems thinking also assumes that a scientific approach to problems solving will work well and is characterised by having an end or objective to be achieved. In simple terms, hard Systems Thinking seeks solutions to problems. It is therefore useful for investigating well-defined problems to which a single, optimal solution can be prescribed.

Epistemologically, ‘hard’ systems approaches fall into a functionalist paradigm as discussed in the previous Chapter. Social problems cannot be characterised in this way, making a hard systems approach inappropriate. Ackoff (1974) defined 3 levels of problem:

- **Puzzles.** Puzzles are well-defined and well-structured problems which generally have a specific solution that can be worked out and applied. At this level, hard Systems Thinking is appropriate.

- **Problems.** This is an issue which possesses defined form or structure with variable about which we know something of the interactions. However, there is no single, clear-cut solution; problems will always have a number of different alternative solutions which depend on other things such as resources, power, weather and so on. Many of the dependencies may remain uncertain so the problem’s solution must be open to different perspectives of how the future may unfold. It is unlikely, although not impossible, that hard Systems Thinking would be appropriate at this level.

- **Messes (or ‘wicked problems’).** Ackoff’s notion of a wicked problem or ‘social mess’ has been touched upon earlier (see page 89). He saw social problems as complex ‘messes’ in which a number of problems interact with other problems.
The ‘mess’ is therefore a set of interrelated problems or a system of problems. There can be no solution to ‘messes’. Only improvement is possible and in order to achieve improvement, holistic treatment of the whole problematical situation is required through application of Systems Thinking.

It is noticeable that Ackoff did not differentiate between hard and soft Systems Thinking in his treatment of social ‘messes’. The problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education has already been demonstrated to be a complex interaction of related issues and as such can be seen to be a social ‘mess’. To address the problematical situation through hard Systems Thinking would be entirely inappropriate, since this would be to reduce the ‘mess’ to the level of a ‘puzzle’. As Pidd (1996, p. 40) so eloquently states:

“One of the greatest mistakes that can be made when dealing with a mess is to carve off part of the mess, treat it as a problem and then solve it as a puzzle – ignoring its links with other parts of the mess”.

From this, I argue that the only approach which is appropriate for the inquiring into the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education is a soft systems approach.

‘Soft’ Systems Thinking

‘Soft’ Systems Thinking does not represent an ontology per se, but rather uses the notion ‘system’ as an epistemological device to help structure investigations into the complexities of the real world. It does not seek once-and-for-all solutions to problematical situations but instead concentrates on processes of learning. It is therefore appropriate for
investigating messy, ill-defined problems, especially those containing humans who behave unpredictably and tend to hold conflicting worldviews.

The distinction between the two schools of thought, as illustrated in Figure 26 is emphasised by Checkland (1986, p. 14) who states that:

“...the historical failure to recognise that systems is an epistemology leads in fact to the vitally important distinction between the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ traditions in Systems Thinking: there is a “crucial difference between models which strive to be part of the perceived world, and models relevant to debate and argument about it”.

In this view, systemic models can only ever be “devices (epistemological devices, in fact) to enable coherent exploration of perceptions of the real world to take place” (Checkland, 1995, p. 10)
The problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education resides within the social sciences. It is ill-defined, messy and highly complex and as such, finding a definitive single solution is impossible. It may however be possible to seek improvements through learning. Most importantly, it comprises human beings who are both unpredictable and hold differing worldviews, not only about what the problem is but also about what should be done about it. A ‘soft’ systems approach is, therefore, adopted in this work, so negating the view that the complex social world is composed of systems which exist and can be manipulated.

Using a soft systems approach to investigating problems acknowledges that the complex and cyclic nature of real-world problems do not possess clear and simple causes and cannot be easily solved (Rigoni, 2000, p. 293). This suggests that an interpretive stance is implicit within soft systems thinking. This is underlined by Flood (2000, p. 726) who believes that all interpretive thinking is implicitly systemic “because it helps all involved to ‘see’ people’s lives as a whole by uncovering what is meaningful to them in terms of social rules and practices, and underlying constitutive meaning”.

4.5. Framework of Ideas

The Framework of Ideas for this work can now be explicitly declared as Soft Systems Thinking which is underpinned by an interpretive epistemology, the theoretical underpinnings of which have been explored in the previous Chapter. Within this framework of ideas, the contributions of 2 particular scholars, C. West Churchman and Sir Geoffrey Vickers, are significant.
The contribution of C. West Churchman

Churchman (1913-2004) is described as “probably the most influential philosopher of the systems movement so far” (Ulrich, 1999). Throughout his work, he believed that philosophy should have meaning in the world (Churchman, 1982b, p. 19). His contribution was not only to Systems Thinking, but also to Systems Practice. He advocated a systems approach to inquiring into “wicked” problems” which he saw as:

“social problems which are ill formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision-makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” (Churchman, 1967, p. 141).

Churchman’s work implicitly draws distinction between hard and soft systems approaches, and it is the soft systems approach to social problems which is at the heart of his work.

“It is only natural to expect that improvement can occur in certain sectors of the system without our having delved deeply into the characteristics of the whole system. Thus, for example, there is a tradition in Western thought that parts of the whole system can be studied and improved more or less in isolation from the rest of the system.

“So deeply ingrained is this concept of social improvement in Western thought that we naturally think it proper to subdivide our society into functional elements. We think it proper that each element develop its own criteria of improvement and that the elements be as free as possible from the interference of the other parts of the social structure... Men have neglected a very serious problem in defining improvement. The problem is very simple: How can we design improvement in large systems without understanding the whole system, and if we the answer is that we cannot, how is it possible to understand the whole system?” (Churchman, 1979a, p. 2)
Churchman (1979a, p. 35) talked about how individuals can be “deceived” in their understanding of the world by which he meant that individuals view the world from a particular viewpoint, or Weltanschauung. Each individual will have a different Weltanschauung from the others in a particular situation so that there may be disagreement about, for example, what the situation actually is. A related idea is the notion of boundary. This refers to the view one has of the situation under consideration; from a particular Weltanschauung, an individual will construct a particular reality which is bounded and surrounded by an environment with which it interacts. The environment lies outside the system and is made up of “things and people that are ‘fixed’ or ‘given’ from the system’s point of view” and about which the system can do little about its characteristics or behaviour (Churchman, 1979a, p. 35). The boundary defines what is to be included or excluded for any analysis of a situation and should be considered a vital component of inquiry (Churchman, 1970). The boundary, in effect, can relate to either the view of the reality of the situation or limits of knowledge, both of which are intertwined with individual Weltanschauung. Churchman (1979a, p. 231) felt that “a systems approach begins when you first see the world through the eyes of another”.

The difficulty of reconciling the various Weltenschauungen and boundary conceptions of actors in human situations was recognised by Churchman who devoted much time and energy into how an inquiring system could achieve this. He argued that the “ultimate meaning of the systems approach . . . lies in the creation of a theory of deception and in a fuller understanding of the ways in which the human being can be deceived about (her) his world, and in the interaction between these different viewpoints.” (Churchman, 1979a, p. 229). It is important to note that no individual Weltanschauung is deemed to be true or false, right or wrong, or more important than any other, but all are equally valid.
Churchman’s endeavours took place at a time when prevailing perspectives of social inquiry were functionalist in nature and so focused on objectivity and the finding of solutions. Churchman (1982a, p. 119) rejected the notion of seeking ‘solutions’ in human situations because

“problem solving often appears to produce improvement, but the so-called 'solution' often makes matters worse in the larger system (e.g., the many food programs of the last quarter century may well have made world-wide starvation even worse than no food programs would have done.)”

He therefore advocated a full examination of the problematical solution, declaring that “the essence of the systems approach is the design of an inquiring system that is most capable of unfolding the relevant issues concerning the human condition” (Churchman, 1979b, p. 147). Churchman’s notion of a Singerian inquiring system is important in its relation to the selected Methodology of SSM which Checkland (1981, p. 264) describes as a “Singerian enquiring system whose mode of operation provides a formal means of initiating and consciously reflecting upon the social process of appreciation”.

**The Contribution of Sir Geoffrey Vickers**

Vicker’s contribution to this Framework of Ideas is the notion of Appreciation, a notion which is integral to this work (see Chapter 1, page 28). It leads on from Checkland’s view of SSM as a Singerian inquiring system “as a means of initiating and consciously reflecting upon the social process of appreciation” described above. I would also add that Vicker’s ideas of an Appreciative System not only underpin the development of SSM but also provide a basis for the design of the Framework for Practical Inquiry in this work (discussed in Chapter 8). I have briefly introduced the underpinning principles on page 74 and earlier suggested that Vickers’ ideas resonate strongly with other phenomenological
philosophers (page 124). Here, I provide a full account of these ideas and return to them more specifically in the following Chapter which is concerned with matters of methodology – i.e. SSM – and again in Chapter 8 which deals with the design of practical inquiry. The information provided here is taken from Day (2008), the full version of which is included at Appendix A.

Sir Geoffrey Vickers did not confess to be an academic (1983, p. xxvi) and yet his work has made a significant contribution to both Systems Thinking and Systems Practice. In particular, Vickers’ concepts of Appreciation and Appreciative Systems have been particularly influential in the work of many systems theorists and practitioners, particularly Checkland for whom they provide the underlying concepts of SSM. Vickers did not provide models and illustrations in his own work. However, since a basic premise of this work is that visual representations can break down barriers of linguistic communication, (discussed later in Section 8.5), I have provided illustrations of the various concepts to enrich and simplify the discussion.

**A brief interpretation of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation**

Based on his own life experience, Vickers seeks to explain how human beings make sense of the world in which they live. He sees the world as a two-stranded rope, an intertwining of events and ideas in history developed in mutual relation with each other (1965, p. 30) and yet does not consider there to be a single, definitive world in which all humans live. Rather, humans develop within “the far from consistent demands of three hard masters” (1987b, p. 92), the physical world which must be survived, the social world shared with other communicating humans and the inner, personal world constituted from experience:
“The inner world, in which men inescapably live, develops in intimate relationship with the physical world, yet according to its own laws and its own timescales. Human history can be understood only as the interaction of the two worlds. The inner world has its own realities, its own dynamism - and its own ecology. Like the life forms of the physical world, the dreams of men spread and colonise their inner world, clash, excite, modify and destroy each other, or preserve their stability by making strange accommodations with their rivals.” (1968, p. 59)

The inner world – or appreciated world - of humankind is structured by a readiness to see, value and respond to situations in particular ways (1968, p. 59) but only situations considered to be of interest are selected for notice, resulting in an incomplete world, a world both limited by and giving form to expectations (1970, p. 98). This is illustrated in Figure 27. Appreciation therefore seeks to provide a description of human understanding (Vickers, 1987b, p. 99; 1968, p. 142), interpretation (1968, p. 12), learning (1987b, p. 69) and communication(1983, p. 43). It is a mental activity (1983, p. 43), a circular process through which humans develop their own set of values and standards about the appreciated world which in turn modifies those standards and values (1987b, p. 20).
Vickers’ rejects the notion of humankind as teleological beings, arguing that “…most human behaviour … is norm-seeking and, as such, cannot be resolved into goal-seeking” (1968, p. 147) and that “…life consists in experiencing relations, rather than in seeking goals or ‘ends’” (1970, p. 128). Furthermore, he states that “The relations which a man, an organisation, a society is set to attain or preserve (and to escape or elude) are manifold …” (1968, p. 162). Thus, the underlying premise of appreciation is that humans, individually or collectively, do not seek goals but rather seek to attain, maintain, escape or elude relationships and that these relationships are what Vickers refers to as norms (1968, p. 162).

Whilst Vickers introduces the notion of appreciation through a description of a systems engineering model (1965, pp. 50-51), he emphasises that, whilst human systems share some similarities with the description of mechanical regulatory systems, there are important differences. Appreciation falls into two defined segments. In the first segment, relevant aspects of the actual course of affairs are compared with the norm and information is gathered about the relation between the two so that a set of problems in constantly defined. In the second segment a response will be chosen to provide a solution to the problem although those solutions may be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The major difference between human and mechanistic systems occurs in the first segment; whereas mechanistic systems are designed to maintain a particular relation through a given repertory of set responses, human systems have no set response but maintain relationships through the making of judgements. (1965, p. 52).

Judgements can be either reality judgements concerning what is or what is not the case, value judgements concerning what ought or ought not to be the case, or instrumental judgements concerning the best means available to reduce the mismatch between what is
the case and what ought to be the case. Reality and value judgements are inseparable constituents of appreciation with a close, mutual relationship since “…facts are relevant only in relation to some judgement of value, and judgements of value are operative only in relation to some configuration of fact” (1965, p. 54) so that “judgements of value give meaning to judgements of reality”. (1965, p. 55). For humankind, whether individually or collectively, appreciation is a mental process concerned with relationship maintenance; using reality judgements, humans select what is relevant and determination of the relevance is a value judgement.

Realism judgements are the skill of prediction, the ability to represent to oneself and others not only the present state of affairs and possible future course of relevant events, to comprehend complex situations whether real or hypothetical and to simplify without distorting by excluding the inessential. Value judgements assess the significance of the reality judgements by assessing what is against what ought to be based upon internal standards. These may include obligation, commitment, what can and cannot be done, what should and should not be done, what must and must not be done and preferences for what is or what is not wanted (1965, pp. 88-123).

Whilst reality and value judgements appear throughout Vickers various descriptions of appreciation, instrumental judgements, described as the skill of innovation (1965, p. 89), are explicitly described only in The Art of Judgement and yet provide a pivotal element in the understanding of appreciation and appreciative systems. Instrumental judgements concern the best means available to reduce the mismatch between what is the case and what ought to be the case by producing apt solutions by applying personal resources such as time, attention, intellect, passion, money or power. Therefore, all three forms of judgement are inextricably linked in the process which Vickers terms appreciation; the
following quotation makes explicit the importance of the less considered instrumental judgement whilst introducing a common interpretation of appreciation as being concerned with the taking of action in the world which, it is suggested, is an impoverished interpretation:

“For Vickers, human action (as distinct from reaction, instinct or reflex) inextricably entails all three forms of judgement; it is a product of judging what is, what ought to be, and what can be done to reduce the difference by selecting specific means from the set of actions at hand.” (Guy, 1995, p. xix)

Close examination of the various writings of Vickers reveals a recurring emphasis on appreciation as a mental construct almost entirely divorced from action and nowhere is this more forcefully stated than in:

“…the choice of action – is separable and may be irrelevant. Appreciation may or may not call for – and if it does, it may or may not invoke – action which may or may not abate an observed discrepancy, action which I call regulative action. There may be no observed discrepancy; match signals, no less than mismatch signals are important and ….informative. There may be nothing to be done.” (1968, p. 149)

Vickers stresses that the outcome of an appreciation is firstly and more critically a classification of a situation as something that can be accepted or enjoyed (1983, p. 55). Alternatively, a problem may be identified for which solutions may be sought;, but even in this scenario, there is no certainty of the outcome being action. As Vickers states:
“I labour this point because our technological culture, dominated by ‘problem solving’, tends to take problem setting for granted.” (1983, p. 55)

Action, far from being the default outcome of appreciation, is rather the rarer case.

Vickers refers to the current state of the appreciative system at any point in time as its appreciative setting (1965, p. 83). The flux of events and ideas in history represents the physical and communicated worlds which a human shares with fellow humans; the appreciated world is a human being’s inner world from which only some of all possible events and ideas are selected subject to that human being’s interests and concerns and readinesses to see and value. Judgements and decisions, therefore, may have an effect on the flux of events and ideas in the lifeworld in which others participate but will certainly, without exception, affect the appreciative system (1968, p. 158).

Vickers’ asserts that appreciation is concerned with describing, analysing and understanding “the process of judgement and decision” (1965, p. 30). The decision making process attempts to reduce the mismatch between what is the case and what ought to be the case. In many instances, it will be judged that there is nothing to be done, that the situation is “one that must be accepted or simply enjoyed; match signals are as potent as mismatch signals and still, happily, more frequent though less noticed.” (1983, p. 55). If however, a mismatch signal indicates that there is a discrepancy between what is and what ought to be, “then – and only then – the concerned mind devises possible responses and evaluates them with the aid of criteria set by other concerns. A ‘problem’ begins to emerge. ‘Solutions’ are sought. Action may or may not follow.” (1983, p. 55). From this, it is possible to unpack the decision-making process to create a model of appreciation through examination of Vickers’ work as shown below.
The basic interactions of an appreciative system occur between the mutually related reality judgements and value judgements (1965, p. 54) which contain standards of fact and standards of value (1987b, p. 85) as in Figure 28. Standards are implicit within those judgements (1987b, p. 86) that the norm represents the “ought to be” of the relationship being attained, preserved, escaped or eluded (1968, p. 168). “Values are general and explicit. Norms are specific and static. Yet each affects the other and both change in the course of the process already illustrated…” (Vickers, 1973, p. 175).

Figure 28 - the interaction of reality and value judgements

Reality judgements provide information on what is the case whilst value judgements provide information on what ought to be the case and a signal is generated to determine the level of match or mismatch between “is” and “ought” to be. Instrumental judgements consider the level of match or mismatch and provide alternatives on the best means available to reduce the gap between “is” and “ought” calling on all available personal resources (1965, p. 69). These basic interactions are illustrated in Figure 29 below.
Individuals exist in an appreciated world constituted by previous experience, expectations, standards, values and norms and thus only certain events or ideas are selected for judgement from the whole range of possible events and ideas available; thus, each person’s appreciated world is limited to those events and ideas selected not only by their interests but also by their readiness to see and select such events and ideas (1970, pp. 97-98). Whilst interests are based upon our value system, readinesses to notice emerge from our reality system (1987b, pp. 69-70) and, in circular process, what is noticed for judgement may in turn modify standards of both value and reality (1970, p. 95). The basic
interactions of an appreciative system can now be expanded into a richer model shown at Figure 30.

The result of appreciation is the decision on how to attain, preserve, escape or elude desired relationships (1968, p. 161); this may or may not require action and, even if action is suggested, may not result in action (1968, p. 149). Therefore, the resulting decision may fall into one of two categories; either no action is deemed necessary or appropriate, or action is required. These distinctions are not as simple as may at first sight appear; there is no guarantee that a “no action decision” is the result of a match between “is” and “ought” or that an mismatch between “is” and “ought” results in an “action decision” as illustrated in Figure 31.
Rather than concentrating on the type of decision made, it is best perhaps to investigate the possibilities a match or mismatch signal may generate.

**Match signals and no action decisions**

Taking first the match signal which signifies that there is no significant disparity between what is and what ought to be, the first alternative is, as Vickers says, that the situation should be “accepted or simply enjoyed” (1983, p. 55) which would result in a no action decision. For example, I may have the television tuned into a particular channel and when the programme I am watching has finished, I discover that the next programme is one I would also like to watch; in order to do so, I need take no action but simply enjoy the programme when it starts. In scrutinising my bank accounts, I may discover that there are sufficient funds in my current account to cover all my predicted outgoings and I need, therefore, take no action to transfer funds from other accounts which represents a course of action I may have considered if the current funds had been proven to be insufficient. Thus, I merely enjoy the first situation and accept the second.
Match signals and action decisions

The second alternative response to a match signal is to decide to take some action; for example, if I receive an invitation to an event I judge to be one I would like to attend, I will make a decision to accept the invitation. In order to accept the invitation, I know that I must take some action to pen the acceptance, address and stamp an envelope, place the acceptance into the envelope and finally to post the acceptance back to the person or body who sent the original invitation. At this point, only a decision has been made to take these actions but no action has yet been taken.

Mismatch signals and no action decisions.

Life is such that humans are often presented with situations in which a mismatch between what is and what ought to be is detected and, although action to change the situation to reduce the disparity is desired, there is full and certain understanding of one’s powerlessness over the situation. For example, a pay agreement for one’s employment may generate a disparity between what one will be paid and what one believes one should be paid for the work in hand but, if the agreement has been accepted by the union or by the organisation in general, one is individually powerless to change the situation. This is not a situation which can be accepted with equanimity. It will generate resentment and may lead to further judgements on whether to remain in that employment or to look for a different job with a higher salary; this time the judgement will consider all other aspects of the current employment including convenience, working relationships and conditions, job satisfaction and a whole host of other elements. If the final decision is to remain in the current post, despite the mismatch signal, a decision on no action will be the result but this
time, rather than enjoyment and acceptance, there will be feelings of resentment and powerlessness.

Mismatch signals and action decisions

Taking the example above, if after all elements have been considered it is decided that one will seek new employment, an action decision is made to change the current situation to one which reduces the disparity between what is and what ought to be. Again, at this point only the decision to seek new employment has been made but no steps to do so have yet been taken nor may they ever be.

The effect of decisions

The argument presented here suggests that each decision and its related outcomes equally affect the course of history whether or not action is taken. As Vickers points out, the options a human being has to influence his relationships are to either alter the course of affairs, to alter his/her own course or to reorganise his/her appreciative system to bring within his view a wider or different set of possible responses (1965, p. 105); thus, the decision itself will influence the relationship whether or not action is taken and this remains true even when an action decision has been made and no action actually occurs.

Inaction decisions

In the situation where a decision has been made to simply accept or enjoy a situation, although it may appear that nothing changes, what is actually happening is that we are being reassured “that our appreciated world is sufficiently in accord with the real world to be serviceable.” (Vickers, 1970, p. 98). In other words, norms and standards are reinforced. There are no reorganisations of the appreciative system to make, no shifting of
values, merely a reinforcing of those standards and values already present. There may, of course, be a mismatch signal generated during the course of enjoyment or acceptance in that what actually is does not accord with the expectation of what ought to be – this, however, will lead to a separate appreciation and a shifting of standards and values.

In situations where it is deemed impossible, undesirable or infeasible to take action, no such reinforcement of the current appreciative setting will occur. Instead, feelings of resentment, powerlessness, hate, jealousy, anger or other negative may be aroused and, as Vickers points out, “a mismatch signal makes a difference even though no action follows. And among human beings its initial effect is usually to start debate which often endures for years before action results.” (Vickers, 1987b, p. 87). The debate generated may be external in shared communication with fellow human beings, or it may be internal, resulting in a disruption of the inner world and a colouring of the appreciated world in general.

The importance of inaction decisions lies in the feelings generated as a result; these, whether negative or positive, will colour the future, influencing one’s readinesses to see and value those things of interest and concern. They will always affect the appreciative setting but may or may not influence the general flux of events and ideas in history.

**Action decisions**

The most important fact to recognise is that action decisions remain only decisions and do not in any way presuppose that action will be taken. Therefore, the results of an action decision can be that all action is actually taken as intended, some action is taken as intended or no action is taken as intended and it is the action which is not taken which is as important as the action which is taken.
Bateson offers a lucid explanation of the effect of intended actions not taken:

“The letter that you do not write, the apology you do not offer, the food that you do not put out for the cat – all these can be sufficient and effective messages because zero, in context, can be meaningful…” (Bateson, 1979, p. 43)

Inaction arising from intended action can influence the course of events as profoundly, if not more so, than the taking of intended action. An intended apology not offered can destroy a relationship one intended to preserve and a letter not written can break a relationship one intended to attain. Desired relationships affected in this way can have unintended and perhaps irrevocable consequences through missed opportunity. Writing the letter or offering the apology at least provides the possibility of the desired relationship enduring; not writing the letter or offering the apology may provide an end point for the desired relationship.

The outcome of decisions can now be illustrated in Figure 32 which shows that only in some cases will action result from a particular cycle of the Appreciative System.
Action itself is not part of the appreciative system; it is not in itself a mental construct but only arises as its outcome and therefore lies outside the system boundary. Indeed, the actual taking of action may not occur as a result of the particular cycle which deems it necessary but of a separate and future appreciation. Every decision will result not only readjustment or reinforcement of the appreciative system in its current setting but may affect the general flux of events and ideas in history; likewise, each action taken will have the same effects. A full model of Appreciation based upon this interpretation is illustrated at Figure 33.

Application of a rich model of appreciation

Vickers’ considers appreciation to apply to individuals, societies, subcultures, institutions and nations equally (1987b, p. 25). Checkland believes Vickers’ notion of appreciation constitutes “an epistemology for making sense of the (groundless) social process” (2005, p. 28). Central to any form of social inquiry is an understanding of the events and ideas which humans, individually or collectively, choose to select for attention from the whole range of possible events and ideas available at a particular time in history. This interpretation of appreciation makes explicit both the readinesses to see and value, and the concerns and interests through which events and ideas are selected for seeing and valuing. Understanding the extent of the readinesses and the particular interests or concerns can contribute to the appreciation of the selection of particular events and ideas and, as importantly, the neglect of others.
Figure 33 - A model of the appreciative system.
In interpretative social inquiry, factors such as motivation, opinion, emotion, fear, expectation and sense of obligation are as important to understanding and learning about a situation as the actions taken or not taken as the case may be. In particular, the not taking of intended actions can be as illuminating as the taking of action. Through this interpretation of appreciation, such factors can be rigorously investigated and analysed, providing an expanded opportunity for understanding and learning about the situation under investigation.

4.6. Summary

In Chapter 1 (page 29), I considered Soft Systems Thinking to be useful for making sense of the complexities of the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education policy which is the Area of Interest (A) for this work. I therefore declared Soft Systems Thinking as the intellectual Framework of Ideas (F) which would be used in the Methodology (M) to investigate the Area of Interest (A) in following Checkland’s notion of F,M,A (see pages 36 to 40) to ensure this Action Learning Project is recoverable.

In Chapter 2, I used the principles of Soft Systems Thinking to systemically explore the complex problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education. In Chapter 3, I then moved on to considering the philosophical concepts from phenomenology, hermeneutics and other relevant voices underpinning Soft Systems Thinking to provide a basis for the discussions in this Chapter.

In this Chapter, I have concentrate on the Framework of Ideas, namely that of Systems Thinking in general and Soft Systems Thinking in particular. The brief history of the early Systems Movement demonstrates that the underlying ethos of the original and all
subsequent Systemists is to provide tools and language for holistic inquiry across all traditional subject disciplines. Later developments illustrate a separation between two schools of thought, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ systems. This distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches is shown to be contested but I argue that the separation is most often thought of in methodological terms (e.g. a particular methodology such as Systems Dynamics is said to be ‘hard’). I do not use the separation in this way but rather use it as a useful device to distinguish between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ in ontological/epistemological terms as relevant to this Framework of Ideas. ‘Hard’ systems approaches use the notion of ‘system’ ontologically, viewing the world as comprised of systems which can be defined, engineered and problems solved. ‘Soft’ approaches, on the other hand, use the notion of ‘system’ as an epistemological device for structuring investigations into the complexities of the real world. It does not seek to find solutions, concentrating instead on processes of learning.

I have previously demonstrated the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education to be both ill-defined and highly complex. I use the categories of problems defined by Ackoff (1974) to illustrate how it the situation can be conceived of as a ‘social mess’. In doing so, I orient the work towards a Soft Systems approach which necessarily falls within the interpretive paradigm (as illustrated in the Chapter 3).

Elucidation of the Framework of Ideas is then completed by considering the contributions of C. West Churchman and Sir Geoffrey Vickers who have exerted significant influence on soft Systems Thinking. Churchman’s contribution includes the ideas of Weltanschauung, boundary, environment and appropriate design of an inquiring system. The notion of Appreciation from Vickers offers an insight into how individuals systemically construct their realities, a notion that underpins the underlying concepts of
SSM, the Action Learning Methodology adapted for use in this project, which is outlined in the next Chapter.
Chapter 5. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)

“The research needed for social practice can best be characterised as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice”

Lewin (1948, pp. 202-203)

5.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 (pages 20 to 28), the success of Widening Participation in Higher Education policy (the Area of Interest (A) for this work) was demonstrated to be important to the well-being of the nation through its potential contributions to alleviating other interrelated social and economic problems. It was also described as a complex problematical situation and Soft Systems Thinking was considered useful for making sense of the complexity. Soft Systems Thinking was therefore declared as the intellectual Framework of Idea (F) which would be used in Checkland’s Soft Systems Methdology (M) for inquiry into the Area of Interest (A) in keeping with the guiding notion of F, M, A (see pages 36 -40) to ensure this Action Learning Project is recoverable.

Chapter 2 commenced by contextualising the inquiry through teasing out the complex, interrelated issues of the Widening Participation Policy in its wide problem space significant to the progress of the research through systemic consideration of its wide problem space.

In order to fully appreciate the ideas encapsulated in the Soft Systems Thinking, Chapter 3 then examined the philosophical background to this intellectual framework of ideas. The
Typology of Paradigms for the analysis of social inquiry developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979) provided the framework for positioning the work in the interpretive paradigm. Ideas from schools of sociological thought, specifically phenomenology and hermeneutics, were then explored to elucidate the substantive arguments underpinning the interpretive inquiry. Other interpretive thinkers relevant to the intellectual Framework of Ideas were also investigated, specifically the notion of the social construction of reality offered by Berger and Luckman (1967), Rousseau’s social contract theory and Foucault’s (1998, 1991, 1982, 1980) conception of power.

Following on from this, the intellectual Framework of Ideas of Soft Systems Thinking was discussed in Chapter 4. A brief history of Systems Thinking was first offered to highlight the general ethos of systemic thought and practice. Later developments in the Systems Movement then demonstrated the separation between two schools of thought, ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ Systems Thinking. Linking back to Chapter 3 which positioned the work in the interpretive paradigm, the theoretical basis of Soft Systems Thinking was then discussed. Contributions to the field were also examined, including Churchman’s boundary, environment and Weltanschauung and Vickers’ notion of Appreciation which are all utilised in Checkland’s Soft Systems Methodology (SSM).

The purpose of this Chapter is two-fold. The first objective is to present Checkland’s SSM as the idiopathic methodology adopted in this inquiry. As already outlined in Section , the learning achieved from use of SSM in the early stages of the project led to the emergence of the research questions rather than pre-determined assumptions leading the process of inquiry. The second objective is, therefore, to outline the process of SSM through which the main research questions were formulated. A rationale for selecting SSM is firstly presented to demonstrate its appropriateness as a Methodology (M) congruent with the
intellectual Framework of Ideas (F) for inquiring into the Area of Interest (A). The development of SSM as an Action Learning methodology is then outlined to lead into a discussion of the various modes in which the methodology may be used. Actual modes of SSM employed within the inquiry are presented to allow the interested observer to understand the process of the research activity.

Having established the foundational principles for adoption of SSM, the implications of Action Learning are briefly considered. This is followed by demonstration of my use of SSM to provide a robust framework for the progress of the inquiry, effectively producing a roadmap of the intertwining of action and learning throughout. For practical inquiry into the main research question within the Action Learning Cycle for this work (see Figure 1, page 32), the lack of prescriptive research method within SSM is highlighted as an area of tension. This is revisited in Chapter 8 as a Research Design issue for resolution.

5.2. Matters of methodology versus method

I have demonstrated the importance of explicitly declaring Framework of Idea (F), Methodology (M), Area of Interest (A) at the commencement of an interpretive social inquiry to elucidate what counts as ‘knowledge’ within the inquiry in Chapter 1 (pages 36 to 40). Within this, it is vital that methodology selected is not only appropriate for researching into the area of interest, but also congruent with the philosophical ideas underpinning the framework of intellectual ideas.

As with many intellectual ideas in the literature, there is no single definitive definition of methodology which can be pointed to in order to substantiate claims of appropriateness of this or that methodology to a process of inquiry. However, what is very clear is that a
distinction between *method* and *methodology* must be explicit within the research. This overcomes criticisms that researchers often refer to *method* when purporting to discuss *methodology*, or they simply use the two terms interchangeably without discrimination (see, for example, criticisms offered by Kaplan, 1998, pp. 18-19; Waring, 1996, p. 6; Van Manen, 1990, p. 27).

Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 1) position *methodology* within the set of interacting ideas of F,M,A as “the way in which one attempts to investigate and obtain ‘knowledge’ about the real world”. The aim of methodology, according to Kaplan (1998, p. 12), should be to aid understanding of the process of inquiry, rather than of its products.

Checkland (1989, p. 162) provides a clear and coherent description of *methodology* which is adopted here as the explicit declaration of what is understood by the term:

“I take methodology to be intermediate in status between a philosophy, using that word in a general rather than a professional sense, and a technique or method. A philosophy will be a broad, non-specific guideline for action … At the other end of the extreme, a technique is a precise, specific programme of action which will produce a standard result …. A methodology will lack the precision of a technique but will be a firmer guide to action than a philosophy. Where a technique tells you ‘how’ and a philosophy tells you ‘what’, a methodology will contain elements of both ‘what’ and ‘how’.

By adopting this definition of methodology, not only can the philosophical ‘what’ be elucidated but also the more technical ‘how’ described through the application of the framework for guiding the process of inquiry.
5.3. **Rationale for adoption of SSM**

Burrell and Morgan’s Typology indicates that an *idiopathic* methodology would be the most appropriate within this interpretive inquiry (see page 115). The term ‘idiopathic’ originates from the field of medicine where it is defined as a “disease having no known cause” (SOED, 2007, p. 1320). In methodological terms, an idiopathic approach starts from a position of ‘no knowledge’ and remains *agnostic* to the outcomes of the research throughout. The nature of an independent ‘reality’ is questioned and ‘social facts’ are treated as being socially and symbolically constructed by individuals (Douglas, 1971, p. 12). The overriding concern of idiopathic inquiry is to gain a greater appreciation of the ways in which individuals interpret the world (S. Clarke, 2001). Inquirers, therefore, cannot make assumptions about how these may unfold although they will necessarily take what Gummerson (2000, p. 57) terms “pre-understandings” with them. These will include the researcher’s own ideas of, for example, people’s knowledge, insights and experience that they have built up through their own interpretations of the world.

Whereas positivist research presupposes that the inquirer is detached, neutral and objective and therefore incapable of influencing the behaviour of the experiment taking place (Pettman, 2005, p. 7), interpretivist methodologies reject the notion of ‘value-free’ research. Interpretive inquirers become part of the research and are incapable of ‘unknowing’ the pre-understandings they carry into the process. Complete objectivity, detachment and neutrality are consequently considered to be impossible. Interpretive methodologies therefore acknowledge that they will always be value-laden and “glossed with the meanings and purposes” of the inquirer (Cohen et al., 2000). This creates a particular tension for interpretive inquirers who must defend the value-laden outcomes and
knowledge gained through such practices. Guidelines for resolving this difficulty can be seen to be highly desirable when considering the most appropriate idiopathic methodology.

It has already been established that the chosen methodology must remain ‘faithful’ to the interpretive foundations of the work, but practical considerations are considered to be of equal importance. Part One of this thesis is concerned with ensuring the validity of the research through explicit declaration of Framework of Ideas (F), Methodology (M), Area of Interest (A) (see Chapter 1, pages 36-40). Within this, M must be shown to not only be congruent with F, but also capable of investigating A in such a way as to provide recoverability. It must be capable, therefore, of providing a robust framework for both guiding the process of inquiry and also allowing an outside observer to fully follow and understand this process.

In considering the most appropriate methodology based upon the issues discussed above, I initially placed SSM at the top of the most likely candidates. In particular, I felt that the nature of social ‘reality’ encapsulated in SSM supports a “phenomenological account” (Checkland, 1981, pp. 277-285) and so would be congruent with F. Methodological guidelines provide a robust framework for guiding the process of inquiry such that recoverability can be achieved. SSM also allows for explicit declaration of researcher values, aspirations and ethics. The methodology, although developed in the context of organisational management, is flexible enough for adaption to any social situation. Indeed, my own experience includes SSM use in studies as diverse as teaching and learning in HE, therapeutic analysis of personal problems, recovery from alcoholism, and organisational consultancy (see, for example, Day, 2009; Day writing as Akers-Smith, 2005; 2004, 2002).
Having noted the potential of SSM, I carried out an evaluation of a number of other candidate methodologies from an interpretive and systemic tradition. Total Systems Intervention (Flood, 1995) was discounted at an early stage as it is designed to be useful mainly in organisational contexts. Grounded Theory (GT) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) were the considered. They deserved consideration as they are both idiopathic and capable of forming a foundation for systemic inquiry. However, I found them to be incompatible with systemic interpretation. This is due to their practice of reducing data collected from participants into themes. Within IPA, for example, inquirers are urged to “reduce the complexity” of their overall project into more manageable components (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Similar GT practice is intended to produce “objective data” through eradication of inquirer interpretations which are seen to be an “unwarranted intrusion” (Glaser, 2002, 2001). Grounded Theory, as the name suggests, is designed to support development of theory incrementally through successive stages of interpretation by the inquirer. This would have inherent disadvantages for this inquiry, since the purpose is no theory-building but an attempt to surface member interpretations of their own lifeworlds. There could be a danger in this approach that the interpretations of the inquiry would take precedence over those of the research members. Furthermore, GT involves analysis through coding and labelling of transcripts from interviews or other data gathering processes, yielding textual results. In the case of the current inquiry, effective feedback of preliminary results to members is crucial. I considered that this would be best communicated using visual rather than textual display, preserving member views as coherently as possible into the later stages of analysis. A full description of the visual representation of member data is provided later in Section 8.5.
All researchers must make informed decisions on exactly how they intend to collect their research data. For qualitative research, common methods of data collection involve either interviewing or observing individuals and/or groups. An underpinning principle of this inquiry is that individuals construct their *own* realities as a result of their lived experience in interaction with others. Although they may construct shared meanings, the essence of their interpretation of those meanings is unique. A decision was therefore made to work with individual research participants rather than groups. Methodologies such as Actor Network Theory (ANT), Ethnography and Strategic Assumption Surface Testing (SAST) were therefore rejected due to their focus on groups rather than individuals (see, for example, Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008; Levin and Knutstad, 2003; Keys, 1991).

Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) (Ulrich, 2005) was give more serious consideration as an appropriate choice, as it is both idiopathic and within the tradition of Soft Systems Thinking. However, it is suggested to lack “methodological guidelines” (Flood and Jackson, 2003, p. 219). In order to provide the robust framework deemed essential for ensuring the recoverability of this work, CSH would have required the development of such guidelines. Since methodological guidelines are made explicit in SSM, and many examples of its use, both published (Checkland and Scholes, 1990) and personal, I saw this as a distinct disadvantage to CSH. However, (Ulrich, 2005, p. 11) does provide clear guidance on clarification of boundaries, which can be used to good effect as a complement to SSM.

My conclusion from this evaluation was that Checkland’s SSM remained the most appropriate methodology for this project. In finally deciding to adopt SSM, however, two significant issues needed to be resolved. The first issue was that the methodology does not prescribe a particular *method* for conducting the practical inquiry with research
participants. Instead, provision is made for application of “other” Systems Thinking tools and techniques as appropriate. This lacuna is dealt with in Chapter 8 as a Research Design issue.

The second issue revolved around addressing criticism which has been levelled at SSM with regard to the nature of the inquiry. However, before discussing these criticisms and their implications for this work, I feel it is useful to firstly outline the development and shape of SSM to provide the necessary background for a full appreciation of the nature of the criticisms.

5.4. The development and shape of SSM

SSM was developed experientially as a result of Checkland’s exploration of whether systems engineering methods could be extended to also tackle organisational management problems (Checkland, 1995, p. 2). From the beginning, he accepted that such an endeavour could only be achieved through conducting systems studies into real-world situations. This entailed the application of “hard” systems engineering approaches to “soft” problem situations encountered in organisational management. In such situations, problems are perceived to exist by individuals but the problems themselves are “fuzzy” and ill-defined with obscure goals (Checkland, 1981, p. 154). The application, and subsequent failures, of “hard systems” approaches to these real-world problematical situations led to a programme of Action Learning for the development of a methodology capable of addressing “‘soft’, ill structured problems.
Action Learning in the development of SSM

Action Learning, (also widely known as Action Research), is generally accepted to have its roots in the work of psychologist Kurt Lewin. His overriding concern in social inquiry was the integration of theory and practice (Kolb, 1984, p. 9) in which “there can be no learning without action and no action without learning” (Revans, 1998, p. 83). Consequently, AL should proceed “in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1948, p. 206) as illustrated in Figure 34.
From these early roots, a number of different perspectives on Action Learning have emerged (see, for example, Somekh, 1995; Foote-Whyte, 1991; Grundy, 1987; Wilson, 1984; Susman and Evered, 1978; Rapoport, 1970). Based upon Lewin’s work, Susman and Evered (1978, p. 588) provide a more comprehensive and holistic account of Action Learning as illustrated in Figure 35 which is the model adopted in this work.

Figure 35 – Susman and Evered’s cyclical process of AR


**Development of SSM as Action Learning through Action Learning**

It was during the adoption of the Action Learning model that Checkland and his fellow researchers became aware of what they perceived to be serious deficiencies in the literature on Action Learning. These deficiencies revolved around the means by which validity of Action Learning could be established and led to the F,M,A guiding principles for establishing the analytical framework of SSM (see pages 36-40 for full discussion). The learning cycle through which SSM was developed and now promotes is illustrated at Figure 36 below.

Vickers’ notion of an Appreciative Systems (see pages 155-170) and Churchman’s definitions of Weltanschaung, environment and boundary (see pages 153-155) represent important underpinning ideas for SSM. Checkland (1995) describes two particular difficulties associated with inquiring into ill-structured “soft” problematical situations in
management. The first difficulty arises from the common denominator between all situations - they all contain people who “in the face of ambiguity, uncertainty, disagreement and conflict are trying to take *purposeful action*” (Checkland, 1995, p. 8). Checkland terms these as ‘human activity systems’. Unlike the well-defined problems faced by the “hard” systems engineer, there can be no complete account as to what the problem actually is in human activity systems. Individuals hold differing, and often conflicting, worldviews, or *Weltenschauungen*, about what the purposeful activity should be. For example, one observer may consider a prison to be for the rehabilitation of offenders whilst another may hold its purpose to be punishment for crimes committed. Such worldviews needed to be accounted for in the methodology. The shift in thinking of moving from the ‘hard’ systems approach to the ‘soft’ to take account of worldviews is illustrated below in Figure 37.

![Figure 37 - The shift in thinking from 'hard' to 'soft' systems (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2007, p. 19)](image-url)
In the face of differing and often conflicting Weltenschauungen, the possibility of arriving at an objective and complete account of the actual problem to be addressed is obscure. This leads to the second difficulty in ill-defined problematical situations in which, not only what to do, but also how it should be done, remains unclear.

To address these difficulties, SSM was developed as an inquiry system based on building models of purposeful activity. The models themselves are built on declared explicit points of view and used to structure debate about the situation. Checkland acknowledges that such debate is unlikely to achieve consensus about either the nature of the problem or what should be done about it and how, but this is not the primary objective. Instead, the purpose of debate is to achieve what Checkland calls ‘accomodations’ which can lead to improvements being made through the taking of purposeful action as illustrated in Figure 38.

Figure 38 - the relationship between consensus and accommodation in meaningful debate (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2007, p. 57)
The Action Learning project through which SSM was developed incorporated “a few hundred experiences” (Checkland and Poulter, 2007, p. 19). During the development process, a set of principles were incorporated into a generic (Learning for a User by Methodology-informed Approach to a Situation) model as illustrated below in Figure 39.

These principles are incorporated into SSM which prioritise user learning. To read the model correctly, start with the user U element from, and into which, all other elements flow.

Figure 39 - the generic LUMAS model underpinning SSM (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2007, p. 20)
5.5. **SSM in practice**

The end result of Checkland’s experiential development was SSM, a “Singerian enquiring system whose mode of operation provides a formal means of initiating and consciously reflecting upon the social process of appreciation” (Checkland, 1981, p. 264). Checkland (1981) originally presented SSM as a 7-stage methodology, but 10 years later felt that this was no longer capable of capturing the more flexible use to which it was being put (Checkland, 1999, p. A14). Accordingly, a new representation of the methodology was published (Checkland and Scholes, 1990) which became known as the ‘developed form of SSM’.

SSM originally appeared as a 7-stage methodology but has since been developed into a more mature and flexible methodology. As an SSM practitioner, I believe that it is difficult to employ the developed form without firstly having had experience of using the original version. Therefore, in order to allow an outside observer to fully appreciate the mature form of SSM, it is considered worthwhile to firstly outline the original version. This also explains elements which are common to both versions but which are more easily understood in the context of the 7-stage version.

**The original form of SSM**

The original version of SSM is illustrated in Figure 40 below. The presentation of the methodology as 7 discrete stages may suggest that SSM represents a chronological sequence which the researcher should follow in practice. It is important to stress that this is not the case. Rather than using the framework as a “cookery book recipe” (Checkland, 1981, p. 162), an inquiry can start commence at any stage. Backtracking and iteration
through the various stages are essential and, indeed, almost impossible to avoid if the methodology is employed correctly.

**Stages 1 and 2** are concerned with learning as much about the problematical situation as possible for later meaningful debate to take place. In **Stage 1**, “the richest possible picture, not of the ‘problem’ but of the *situation* in which there is perceived to be a problem” (Checkland, 1981, p. 163) is built up. This becomes the input to **Stage 2**, the output of which is a “Rich Picture”, an informal, cartoon-like representation to express what appears to be relevant problem themes” (Checkland, 1981, p. 85) from which later debate can be
structured. Rich pictures overcome the limitations and assumptions that abound in language and avoid imposing a particular structure on the overall view of the problem situation.

In Stage 3, elements of the overall problem situation which are deemed to be relevant for further analysis are selected and named from which Root Definitions are developed. These are descriptions of each of the Relevant Systems, (of which there may be many), and incorporate a particular viewpoint, or Weltanschauung, and a Transformation Process, both of which must be made explicit. A CATWOE analysis is then performed to check that the Root Definition is well-formed.

CATWOE, illustrated in Figure 41 below, describes the elements which are considered to be useful for building models of purposeful activity. The concept is that purposeful activity is defined by both a Worldview (W) and a Transformation Process (T). It will require people (A) to perform the activities comprising T and will affect people (C) who will be either beneficiaries or victims of those activities. The activity will be constrained by the environment (E) and can be stopped or changed by some person(s) who are regarded as ‘owners’ (O) of the activity.

Checkland provides a ‘PQR’ formula, Figure 42, to assist in incorporating the CATWOE analysis into the model building process. The model itself is an ‘activity system’ and, in order to be useful, the model should describe not only what the system does (P), but also how (Q) and why (R) it should be done. The Root Definition should capture all the CATWOE elements to facilitate model building incorporating PQR.
Measures of performance by which the operation of the activity system would be judged are defined by the ‘3 Es’:

- **Efficacy**: criteria to judge whether T is producing its intended outcome;
- **Efficiency**: criteria to judge whether T is being produced with the minimum of resources; and
- **Effectiveness**: criteria to judge whether T is helping achieve some higher-level or longer-term aim.

Figure 42 - PQR guidelines for building models of purposeful activity (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2007, p. 40)

Checkland and Poulter (2007, p. 43) also suggest that criteria for elegance – i.e. whether T is “beautiful” – and ethicality - i.e. whether T is morally correct – may also be considered.
In Stage 4, Conceptual Models are developed from each of the Root Definitions of the relevant systems named in the previous stage. These are models of the activities deemed necessary to accomplish the transformation process that has been defined in root definition. The Root Definition is an account of what the system is whereas the Conceptual Model is an account of the activities which the system must do in order to be the system named in the definition (Checkland, 1981, p. 169). It is important that the Conceptual Model is purely conceptual rather than a description of what is or what should be. It should also describe what logically needs to happen in order for the transformation expressed in the Root Definition to take place.

It is important to note that a distinction is made between the real world and systems thinking about the real world. The distinction is illustrated in Figure 40 on page 191 above by different colours to make absolutely clear the fact that Stages 3 and 4 take place in the world of ‘Systems Thinking’ rather than in the ‘real world’. Checkland (1981, p. 170) points out that a major ‘error’ in application of SSM is the tendency to model what is perceived to exist in the real world as opposed to what is described in the Root Definition. This leads to a comparison of “like with like” in the following stage, so defeating the object of the use of the methodology. The Root Definition and Conceptual Model stages provide comparison between the various, and maybe conflicting, worldviews of the problematical situation (developed and made explicit through the use of Systems Thinking) with what is perceived to be the ‘real-world’ problematical situation. Stage 4 also allows for use of Checkland’s Formal Systems Model, which is a model of the concept ‘human activity system’, as defined in Figure 43 below, to ensure the Conceptual Model is ‘valid’. This stage also allows for application of other systems thinking tools, techniques and methods as required.
### THE FORMAL SYSTEMS MODEL
A model of the concept ‘human activity system’

| (i)   | S has an ongoing purpose or mission. | In the case of a ‘soft’ system, this might be a continuing pursuit of something which can never be achieved – something such as ‘maintaining relationships’ … Families, and many organisations do not have objectives in this sense, but they do have missions which serve to cohere and link their activities. |
| (ii)  | S has a measure of performance       | This is the measure which signals progress or regress in pursuing purposes or trying to achieve objectives. |
| (iii) | S contains a decision-making process | This is notionally a ‘decision taker’, as long as this is taken to be not a person but a role which many people in a given system may occupy. Via the decision-taking process, the system may take regulatory action in the light of (ii) and (i) |
| (iv)  | S has components which are themselves systems having all the properties of S |
| (v)   | S has components which interact, which show a degree of connectivity, such that effects and actions can be transmitted through the system. |
| (vi)  | S exists in a wider system and/or environments with which it interacts |
| (vii) | S has a boundary, separating it from (vi) | This is formally defined as the area within which the decision-taking process has power to cause action to be taken as opposed to influencing the environment |
| (viii) | S has resources, physical, and through human participants, abstract which are at the disposal of the decision-taking process |
| (ix)  | S has some guarantee of continuity  | It should not be ephemeral but have long-term stability and will recover stability after some degree of disturbance from either outside or within the system. |

Figure 43 - The Formal System Model (adapted from Checkland, 1981, pp. 173-174)

The main purpose of Stage 5 is to provide an opportunity for debate and discussion which may lead to greater appreciation of the problematic situation. The perceived ‘reality’ as expressed at Stage 2 is compared with the activities described in Conceptual Models. Checkland describes 4 different approaches for making these comparisons which have arisen from his experience of this stage of the methodology:
i. Conceptual model are used as “a base for ordered questioning” about the problem situation

ii. What has happened in the past with may be compared with what would have happened if the relevant conceptual model had been implemented

iii. The difference between present activities may be compared with those activities that are shown in the conceptual model, and

iv. The ‘model overlay’ method may be used, whereby the conceptual model is overlaid with a model of ‘what exists’ to encourage identification of any mismatch which then becomes the “source of discussion of change”

(Checkland, 1981, p. 179)

In **Stage 6**, changes which are perceived to be both feasible and desirable by those involved and which are deemed likely to help alleviate the problem situation are identified and discussed. Changes of 3 possible types may emerge; changes in structure; changes in procedure, and; changes in attitude (Checkland, 1981, p. 180). The practical nature of changes of structure and procedure are “easy to specify and relatively easy to implement” (Checkland, 1981, p. 180). Changes of attitude, on the other hand, are not so easy to define, recognise and implement but represent change that may, perhaps, create greater ‘learning’ for those involved in SSM as an inquiring system.

In **Stage 7**, any changes deemed to be both feasible and desirable are implemented; this will necessarily change the original problematical situation and may signal the start of a new cycle of SSM.

**The developed form of SSM**

The developed form of SSM is illustrated in Figure 44 below. Those not familiar with SSM may be forgiven for believing the developed form will be a significantly different methodology to the original version, so different is the visual representations offered by
Checkland. Whilst this might appear to be the case, I have not found it to be so in practice.

Whilst I am convinced that Checkland would disagree strongly with this opinion, I feel that the developed form is fundamentally an extended version of the original form. I
qualify this statement by saying that every use of SSM is unique to each individual inquiry and social inquirer. With every use comes further learning about the methodology, including how to deal with issues which have proved problematic in practice. As a reflexive practitioner, I feed such learning forward into future use, resulting in what I believe to be increasingly mature and sophisticated uses of the methodology as is likely to be the case with any inquirer who has experience of any other methodology. The point here is that my view of SSM is predicated upon my experience of it and is therefore likely to differ from the views of other practitioners, including Checkland.

Far from this being a personal view, though, Checkland himself appears to demonstrate this to be the case. Prior to explaining this, it is necessary to understand something of the discussion on ‘modes of SSM’ as mentioned above.

**Modes of SSM**

The two modes of SSM do not correlate to versions of SSM as some commentators claim (see, for example, Flood, 2000, p. 729) but rather to two ideal types of methodology *use*. In the outline below, it can be seen the origin of the confusion is most likely to have arisen due to Checkland’s claims of which version tends to be used by inquirers operating in the separate modes which are illustrated below at Figure 45.

**Mode 1** is methodology-driven and focused on intervention in the problematical situation. Checkland (1999, p. A38) claims that users in Mode 1 most frequently adopt the original sequential, stage-by-stage application of SSM.
Mode 2, on the other hand, is focused on interaction with and learning about the problematical situation. In this mode, SSM itself is taken as the framework of ideas and incorporates conscious reflections upon the flux of event and ideas as the methodology. The focus of enquiry is on the “process of learning’s one way to purposeful improvement of problem situations” and users in this mode will tend to use the developed form of SSM (Checkland and Scholes, 1990, p. 283).

**SSM(p) and SSM(c)**

A further complication into understanding SSM was introduced by a further discourse on how SSM may be employed (Checkland and Poulter, 2007; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). Firstly, it can be used for structuring the investigation itself and secondly, it can be used to inquire into the content of the problematical situation. The two uses are termed SSM(p)
and SSM(c) (illustrated in Figure 46 below) and can be roughly equated to Mode 2 and Mode 1 respectively.

In SSM(p), Checkland offers what he calls a “System to use SSM” which is essentially a framework for inquiry as illustrated at Figure 47 on p202. Even those not entirely familiar with SSM are likely to note that SSM(p) appears to be a ‘new and improved’ version of the original form of the methodology.

**How SSM will be used in this inquiry**

The model of SSM(p) illustrated at Figure 47 below represents the basic shape of SSM to be employed in this inquiry. As such, it can be defined as the developed form of SSM employed in Mode 2 or a use of SSM(p) as described in the above Activity Model. However it is defined, any use of SSM will be unique to the inquiry in which it is employed. It would, therefore, be more correct to state that Figure 47 represents the basic shape of my expression of SSM to be used in this inquiry which is the Action Learning Cycle for this inquiry.
Figure 47 - Checkland's activity model for SSM(p)
The majority of the subsystems within the model are contained within the original model and require no further discussion. However, subsystems 2 and 3 were introduced as part of the developed form and require some elucidation here. Part of Checkland’s rationale of introducing the developed form of SSM was to address a number of identified shortcomings. In particular, he felt that the original form could not provide adequate means for making judgements of how accommodations of differing Weltenschauungen could be achieved for purposeful action to be taken. Additionally, the original version did not include specific means for the analysis of the politics and power which may exist within a problematic situation. Two separate streams of analysis were embodied in the developed form, a cultural stream and a political stream, to allow these issues to be more adequately analysed. In effect, these are represented by the three analyses specified in subsystems 2 (Analysis One and Analysis Two) and 3 (Analysis 3) as described below.

**Analysis One**, illustrated at Figure 48, is an analysis of the intervention itself and is concerned with examining the people in the situation in terms of roles rather than individuals. Key roles which could be examined are those of: the ‘client’ who caused the intervention to happen; the ‘practitioner’ who would conduct the investigation; and, ‘owners of the issues addressed’ who are defined as those affected by the intervention. Practitioners are urged to include themselves in the list of ‘issue owners’.
Analysis Two is concerned with investigating the culture of the situation under examination. The meaning of ‘culture’ is defined as the “social texture of a human situation” and is seen to involve the interaction of Roles, Norms and Values of those within the situation as illustrated in Figure 49.
Roles are social positions which mark the differences between the individuals or groups within the situation. They can be either formal or informally recognised. Norms are the expected behaviours associated with a particular role which help to define the role itself. Values are the standards, or criteria, by which the behaviour-in-role of the individual or group is judged. Over time, each is created and recreated by the other. Analysis Two is important in determining at a later stage in the methodology whether proposed changes are deemed to be culturally feasible.

Analysis Three, illustrated in Figure 50, is concerned with commodities of power in the situation, how they are exercised and how they may be contained. The interaction of roles, norms and values is also utilised in this analysis. Understanding the disposition of power is important since power-holders will be responsible for accommodating the different interests of those involved in the situation. It is also an important element in determining what is culturally feasible to implement in the latter stages.
5.6. Considering criticisms of SSM

Having declared SSM as the most appropriate methodology for this inquiry, I deem it essential that criticisms relevant to the way in which it is being employed are examined to ensure that ‘gaps’ do not exist. Although SSM has been widely adopted, it has certainly not been immune to criticism. Checkland and Poulter (2007, pp. 149-155) are at pains to address some of these, persuasively arguing that their critics have misunderstood the true nature of the underlying philosophy and concepts of the methodology. Misunderstandings basically revolve around the important distinction between a systemic ontology and a systemic epistemology as discussed in the previous Chapter. Their arguments are persuasive and these issues are not considered here. Other criticisms, on the other hand, require a fuller deliberation.

Flood (2003, p. 189; 2000, p. 729) offers a particular criticism that cannot be so easily brushed off. He argues that SSM cannot properly address issues of conflict or coercion which may exist within a problematic situation. Consequently, he claims it is unable take account of the difficulties experienced in achieving open and meaningful debate, particularly in the way that knowledge-power distorts the outcome of such debate. He acknowledges that the developed form of SSM goes some way to address this. Nevertheless, he still maintains that, whilst political systems analysis is recommended, “this may not penetrate to knowledge-power and social transformation”, the idea of which “seems, perhaps, difficult to capture in Checkland’s concern for feasible changes, given the history, dominant attitudes, and power structures of a problem situation” (Flood, 2000, p. 729).
This deficit of SSM is convincingly argued by Flood. The notion of power is a significant element of this work, having been previously discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to Governmental power in the Widening Participation policy. It is important, therefore, that this declared deficit of SSM is fully addressed to ensure that this significant element is not neglected due to any methodological inadequacy.

A major issue arises from the lack of definition of what is meant by the term ‘power’ in Flood’s argument. Whilst there is no explicit definition, the term “power structures” suggests an implicit leaning towards the traditional view of power which is earlier described in this work as something concentrated in and possessed by people and institutions. In this view, power is generally seen to be a negative influence, something which is centred in the ‘powerful’ and exercised upon the relatively ‘powerless’ in a one-way transmission.

If this is the case, Flood’s notion runs contrary to the one underpinning this inquiry which emanates from Foucault’s work as discussed in Section 3.5. Rather than being something exercised by the powerful upon the powerless, Foucault sees it as a set of actions which can be performed upon another’s actions or reactions. In other words, the notions of powerful and powerless in the traditional sense do not apply. All people possess power and, as such, authority and power are somewhat divorced. Authority is vested in roles, not individuals; within institutional contexts, the power exercised as a result of the role is generally accepted as legitimate. It is this legitimacy that permits the exercise of power. Where authority is not accepted as legitimate, other institutions, groups and individuals will ‘push back’ in an exercise of their own power.
In Chapter 2, I explored the notion of power in relation to the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education, particularly how Governmental power may be used to coerce or persuade young disadvantaged people to participate in Higher Education. I concluded that, whilst Governmental power could be used to in an attempt to coerce the engagement of the socially disadvantage to comply with the initiative through the use of sanctions, no such sanctions were possible for non-participation. Consequently, the government were effectively powerless to enforce widened participation since the individuals who could make it possible remained free to choose their own destinies without fear of reprisal. In effect, the nominally ‘powerless’ socially disadvantage held greater power that the Government in that the Government had no power to force the socially disadvantage to make the policy succeed but the ‘target WP individuals’ collectively had the power to make the policy fail.

Flood’s argument appears to centre mainly around issues of authority rather power as viewed in this work. “Power structures” seem to correlate more readily with hierarchical structures such as those in organisations where directors have more authority than middle managers who in turn have more authority than operational workers. In such a situation, there is perhaps some merit in believing that accommodations between different levels of the hierarchy may be difficult to find predicated on a belief that lower levels may be afraid to fully articulate their views due to the threat of possible sanctions. Whilst I do not feel this to be relevant to this particular inquiry, I consider it worthwhile to mention that organisational authority was a major issue in a previous SSM consultancy project carried out by the author (Day, writing as Akers-Smith, 2002). The major area of tension uncovered in the project was the abuse of authority by a Managing Director who had also
commissioned the consultancy activity. In this case, SSM was found to be fully capable of exposing the issues for meaningful debate about them to occur.

This is an important point in addressing this criticism. As discussed previously, any use of SSM is unique to the individual inquiry in which it is employed. Through rigorous examination of F,M,A, it becomes possible to ensure that the framework for inquiry based upon SSM is flexible enough to address the issues uncovered, including those of power and authority. Indeed, I take this further to state that it is not the methodology per se but the inquirer who makes possible the uncovering of issues of power and authority. My conclusion is that, whilst Flood proffers an interesting criticism, I have found it to be groundless in previous practice and consider it to be inapplicable to this particular inquiry.

5.7. A lacuna of method in SSM

Whilst SSM provides robust guidelines for the process of inquiry and learning about the problematical situation, practitioners engaging in practical research activity are faced with a particular lacuna which requires resolution. This is lacuna of research method by which I mean there are no particular guidelines to suggest how the researcher should gather research data. On one hand, this is a ‘good thing’ insofar as it maintains the flexibility of the methodology for application in any social context, leaving the inquirer free to adapt their method as required. On the other, it is a ‘bad thing’ insofar as the inquirer must determine a suitable method for eliciting information from research participants.

For this particular inquiry, the lacuna was dealt with as a Research Design issue and is fully addressed in Chapter 8 where an appropriate Framework for Practical Inquiry is defined.
5.8. Learning the way to the research questions

Non-users of SSM may find the practice of embarking upon a major research project without knowing in advance exactly what is being inquired into or how it will be done somewhat disconcerting. This may be especially true for functionalist researchers who start out with a hypothesis they then work to disprove. Many interpretive inquirers, whilst not embarking upon a hypothesis-testing exercise, may nevertheless commence with a good idea of what it is they wish to find out. SSM practitioners, on the other hand, embrace uncertainty in the initial stages of inquiry as they learn their way to ‘knowing what they want to know’. Beyond commencing with a broad objective to gain a greater appreciation of the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education, I had no specific objectives for research at the commencement of this project. The Stages described below are contained in the research framework illustrated at Figure 47 (page 202).

Iteration of Stages 2, 3, and 4 achieved the learning which is summarised in Chapter 2. Throughout this activity, I continually revisited and refined Stage 1 and the Monitoring and Control Stages (10, 11 and 12). There is no prescribed point at which it is possible to state that learning about the problematical situation is ‘complete’ for moving into the Stage 5 of the framework. Indeed, there is invariably a fear that something significant may have been missed and the temptation to continue in perpetuum must be resisted. Experience and intuition are invaluable for recognising that continued learning activity is giving only diminished returns, at which point the learning can be judged to be ‘adequate’. The information in Chapter 2, therefore, represents the point at which I made this judgement.
Issues of particular interest were identified in Stage 5 and defined as *Relevant Systems* capable of providing further insight into the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education. These represent the two main research questions emerging as the outcomes of this technical work. The CATWOE Analyses, Root Definitions and Conceptual models for the two Relevant Systems are contained in Appendix B.

### 5.9. Conclusion

SSM has been declared as the methodology I consider most suitable for this interpretive inquiry to apply a systemic lens to inquiry underpinned by the intellectual Framework of Ideas of Soft Systems Thinking outlined in the previous Chapter.

In this Chapter, I have shown exactly how the methodology will be used. This was achieved through an unravelling of confusion between version, modes and uses of SSM to arrive at a comprehensible and rigorous framework for inquiry. A number of ‘technical’ stages exist within the methodology, including definition of Relevant Systems, CATWOE analysis, formulation of Root Definitions, and Analyses One, Two and Three.

At the commencement of the research, I had no predefined research objectives. The defined SSM framework was used in the early stages of the inquiry to ‘learn’ a way to the main research questions. This process is briefly described in Chapter1 (pages 30 to 31) and the research questions themselves are contained in Section 1.3.

This Chapter concludes Part One of this thesis which has been concerned with the necessary learning required for effective action to be taken. As interpretive inquiry, it is
not possible to provide the same repeatability of results as scientific research is able to do. Due to this, interpretive research is often criticised for a lack of rigour. To overcome the possibility of such criticism, the rigour of the research needs to be established more overtly and a major objective of Part One has been to establish such rigour through explicit declaration of Framework (F), Methodology (M), Action (A) (presented as A, F, M for greater clarity). This Chapter has therefore concluded this Part through full discussion of M, the Methodology to be used underpinned by F, the intellectual Framework of Ideas appropriate for adequately addressing A, the Area of Interest.

In Chapter 1 (pages 28-30), I highlighted the fact that the absence of Higher Education non-participants in the majority of current research studies suggesting explanatory factors for the lack of widened participation. I also stated my intention to address this lacunae by engaging a number of HE non-participants in practical inquiry in an attempt to elucidate their reasons for HE non-participation as possible explanatory factors to add to the current body of knowledge. I also demonstrated the importance of ensuring that an Action Learning project such as this needs to be rigorous in order to be recoverable through explicit declaration of F, M, A as described above. It has, therefore, been necessary to be thorough in this stage of the project to ensure that any outcomes may be viewed as being worthwhile and academically sound. Part One has now established all the required elements and I now turn attention to the action taken as a result of this Learning in Part Two.

Part Two of this thesis is primarily concerned with the development and conduct of practical inquiry with a number of HE non-participants. This includes the establishment of an ethical framework for inquiry, arrangements for the involvement of research members,
the design of a framework for practical inquiry to address the lacuna of method extant in SSM and, finally, an account of the practical inquiry itself.
Part Two: From Learning Into Action
Chapter 6. The Ethical Journey

“...the social sciences exist for the sake of furnishing the raw material for ethics. They all lead up to, and are in a sense sub-ordinate to, ethics, though this is not saying that ethics should dictate their methods or state their problems...”

(Ellwood, 1910, p. 322)

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 (pages 20-28), I described Widening Participation in Higher Education as a ‘failed’ policy initiative, despite high Government expenditure on policy actions and development to encourage greater numbers of young, disadvantaged individuals to participate in a University education. I also stated that such policy developments were largely based on research studies aimed at identifying ‘HE barriers’ but that the tendency to engage WP students who had already elected to participate in HE (as though their opinions could be representative of those who did not participate) created a significant gap in understanding. I also suggested that a lack of systemic research into the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education created a second significant gap in understanding since the interrelated social and economic factors which the policy intended to help alleviate remain largely unexplored as possible explanatory factors for lack of widened participation.

As a result of this, I also stated my intention to address both lacunae by engaging a number of HE non-participants in systemic inquiry in an attempt to elucidate their reasons for HE non-participation to add to the current body of knowledge of what is known about possible explanatory factors for a lack of widened participation. However, declaring the inquiry as an Action Learning project involved firstly addressing the criticisms which are levelled
against such studies to ensure that the whole process is recoverable and to show what counts as knowledge in this research. This has been carried out in Part One of this thesis, following Checkland’s Framework of Ideas (F), Methodology (M), Area Interest (A) notion (discussed in Chapter 1, pages 36 to 40) presented in the order A, F, M for clarity. This first part of the thesis has been primarily involved with the Learning stage of the Action Learning Cycle (see Figure 1 on page 32) framed through my expression of SSM for this work.

Chapter 2 firstly contextualised the study and teased out issues significant to the progress of the work through a systemic exploration of the complex problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education which is the Area of Interest (A) for this study. Chapters 3 and 4 then respectively explored the philosophical concepts and ideas contained in Soft Systems Thinking, the intellectual Framework of Ideas (F). Vickers’ notion of an Appreciative System was highlighted as a significant theme integral to the work and these ideas also underpin Soft Systems Methodology, the Methodology (M) adapted for inquiry.

In Part Two of this thesis, I move into the Action phase of the Action Learning Cycle. This part of the thesis is primarily concerned with the development and conduct of practical inquiry into Widening Participation in Higher Education with a number of HE non-participants. This includes the establishment of an ethical framework for inquiry (this Chapter), arrangements for the involvement of research members (Chpater 7), the design of a framework for practical inquiry to address the lacuna of method extant in SSM (Chapter 8) and, finally, an account of the conduct of the practical inquiry itself (Chapter 9).

In Chapter 1, (see page 31), I identified the primary research question to be addressed in the practical inquiry as “Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the
opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?”. In examining complexities of Widening Participation policy, I showed how governmental ambition for increased rates of HE participation of the socially disadvantaged had not been realised (see page 65). What I intend to achieve through examination of the primary research question is to gain some appreciation of why these ambitions failed.

The inadequacies of existing research endeavours to address the why question has been a recurring theme throughout. In particular, the majority of researchers have previously attempted to address the question through inquiry with young people targeted by the Widening Participation policy who had chosen to participate in HE, a tendency which has been heavily criticised (Gorard, Smith, H., et al., 2006; Watson, 2006a). Consequently, there is a lacuna in current research through the neglect of young people targeted by the Widening Participation policy who have never participated in HE, which I intend to address in this social inquiry.

In addressing this lacuna, I reveal an obvious ethical dilemma. As interpretive social research, ethics is naturally a concern which must be considered and addressed. However, the intention to recruit research members on the basis of social disadvantage creates an added dimension of ethical difficulty.

I consider issues relating to recruiting young people targeted by the Widening Participation who are already participating in HE to be different to those which need to be explored here. Researchers working with ‘WP students’ enjoy a distinct advantage in that their research members have already been identified as socially disadvantaged through HEI admission processes. They are, therefore, exempt from any requirement to firstly establish the social disadvantage ‘credentials’ of their research members prior to conducting the
practical inquiry. Few research studies in the field explicitly declare their ethical basis and how they have dealt with the ethical issues of conducting research on the basis of social class so it is difficult to comment on their processes. In this study, however, I am faced with the necessity of establishing social disadvantage ‘credentials’ prior to conducting practical inquiry which renders this particular work one of social class. Ethical considerations are therefore crucial to protect the research members. It is consequently evident that proper consideration of research ethics is a step to be undertaken prior to any research design activity as was identified in the SSM Framework (Activity 3 in Figure 51 below).
Miller and Bell (2002, p. 55) point out that “decisions taken around access are closely bound up with questions of ethics” which I have found to be the case here. Whilst this ethical journey is offered as a Chapter in its own right, I find it difficult to separate matters of ethics from matters of profiling research membership, and indeed matters of research design, as these three issues are irrevocably intertwined. Once again, I fear that the tension between conducting systemic inquiry and the necessity for systematic reporting of that inquiry may result in an impoverished appreciation of the issues involved. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of this Chapter is to discuss the ethical issues encountered and how these are dealt with in relation to theoretical perspectives from the literature. However, in doing so, there may be repetitions between this and the following Chapters which deal with profiling the research membership, arrangements for access and research design.

### 6.2. A note on terminology

In many reports of social inquiry, individuals who are accessed to participate in the research are often referred to as ‘subjects’ or ‘participants’. I have chosen to refer to them as ‘members’ since I hold the view that ‘subjects’ infers primacy of the researcher whilst ‘participants’ infers a lessening of the role the researched play. Any interpretive social inquiry depends not only upon the participation of individuals but also upon their engagement and honesty for meaningful outcomes. The individuals who agree to take part are therefore the only means by which the researcher can gain any appreciation of the primary research question. They are, therefore, equal partners in the research process which leads me to consistently refer to them as ‘members’.
6.3. Ethics defined

The field of ethics is wide and attracts a vast array of literature. It is not my intention here to review the field of ethics per se, but merely examine what is relevant to the development of a robust Framework of Research Ethics for this inquiry. Straughan (1998, pp. 5-6) points out that the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morals’ are often used interchangeably but researchers should recognise an important difference.

The word ‘Ethics’ is derived from Greek ‘ethos’ which means “the character of an individual as represented by his or her values or beliefs” (SOED, 2007, p. 870). The word ‘morals’, derived from the Latin ‘mos’ (plural ‘moris’), has broadly the same meaning but was shaped into its current emphasis by Cicero who “played a seminal role in the formation of morality and virtue in Western Europe” (Scheck, 2012, pp. 405-406). Purtilo and Criss (2009) find that there is no absolute definition of ‘morality’ but that experts appear to agree on certain themes. This leads to a useful definition of morality as “everyday behaviours that allows individuals to live successfully with each other, including concepts such as values (what we cherish) and duties (what we are required to do)” (Purtilo and Criss, 2005). Morals, therefore, can be seen as the views, beliefs and concerns which underlie individuals’ conceptions of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. These can be related to the bases upon which value judgements are made as discussed on page 158. Purtilo and Criss (2005) further suggest that morality can be categorised as:

- **Personal** morality relates to the values and duties an individual holds independently of others;
• *Social* morality is influenced by culture, geography, religion and legislation and relates to the values and duties that individuals reasonably expect from each other to allow for a secure and peaceful society.

• *Group* morality relates to the values and duties which are often codified in subgroups which arise from the wider society in the previous category.

It is generally accepted that whilst morals refer to underlying belief systems, ethical concerns are a narrower concept concerned with ways in which moral problems may be examined through the application of a systematic and theory-based process (Purtilo and Criss, 2005). Ethics in this view refers to branch of philosophy which tries to analyse and clarify arguments that are used when moral questions are discussed and to probe justifications that are offered for moral claims. Straughan (1998, pp. 4-5) suggests that to call something a *moral* concerns does not necessarily mean that it is of much *ethical* significance. He bases this argument on the fact that moral concerns are felt about what is right or wrong whilst ethical concerns are about the reasons and justifications for judging those things to be right or wrong.

There are multiple perspectives on ethics in the literature, the most relevant of which I examine here. Firstly, I will examine two prevailing perspectives on research ethics followed by three significant categories of research ethics.

*Prevailing perspectives of research ethics.*

Edwards and Mauthner (2002, p. 14) define ethics as “the morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process.” Such moral deliberation, choice and accountability will largely emanate from which of the two prevailing perspectives of
research ethics a researcher ascribes to. These perspectives are concerned with how actions related to researcher may be analysed and considered ‘ethical’.

**The Consequential or utilitarian perspective**

The *Consequential* or *Utilitarian* perspective is based on the works of Mill (1863) who maintained that action can be considered morally right if it will produce greatest balance of good over evil. Mill’s principle that “an individual ought to do that act that promotes the greatest good, happiness or satisfaction to most people” is taken as the founding principle (Kimmel, 1988, p. 45). The moral status of action is therefore based upon an evaluation of the balance between good and bad consequences (T. I. White, 1988; Holden, 1979; Reynolds, 1979). Actions are deemed to be ethical if they are likely to result in greater benefit than harm, provide the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people and have positive consequences. Merit is determined by the consequences of action taken by researchers, not their underlying intent or motivation. Thus, a good outcome based upon an ‘immoral’ value would be considered ethical in this perspective. Since the perspective predicates that researchers must know *a priori* what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, it is suggested to be impractical due to the inability of researchers to evaluate consequences of every act for every person for all time (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2003).

**The Deontological perspective**

A *deontological approach* is associated with work of Kant, most especially *The Moral Law: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 2005). The major precept here is that human obligations do not emerge from the consequences of actions. Rather, there is a fundamental expectation that individual obligations are predicated on mutual action consistent with human dignity and worth. The emphasis of the deontological perspective
is on adherence to notions of moral behaviour regardless of consequences of actions. Frankena (1979, p. 14) maintains that adherents to this perspective

“...deny what teleological theories affirm. They deny the right, the obligatory and the morally good are wholly ... a function of what is normally good or of what promotes the greatest balance of good over evil for self.”

He also states that the deontological approach holds that moral principles such as “do not tell a lie” and “always keep your promises” are paramount and must be adhered to at all times. This perspective holds that, for example, research involving deception or withholding information is unethical, even if the benefits greatly outweigh potential costs to research members.

**The view from within**

Gregory (2003, p. 3) believes that “others cannot make moral decisions on a researcher’s behalf”, a statement which resonates with the interpretivist stance I have taken in this work. Schlenker and Forsyth (1977, p. 35) suggest what is considered ethical in conducting research will depend upon which philosophy is followed. Since ethics is concerned with evaluating actions predicated on morals, some decision on how morals will be conceived must be taken. Whilst I do not argue that there are certain codes of conduct and values which underpin various modes of being such as cultural, religious, institutional, organisational and societal, and that these may be conceived of as a collective ‘morality’, the interpretivist view implies that the primacy of morality must rest with the individual. Vicker’s notion of Appreciation (pages 156 to 168) demonstrates how individuals construct their own realities, including their values and hence their morality. The work of Berger and Luckman (1967) (see pages 132 to 134) further proposes that realities constructed in primary socialisation will have primacy over adjustments made in secondary socialisation.
In this view, morals constructed in primary socialisation will generally take precedence over any values and duties required to be harnessed as a result of secondary socialisation.

The relevance of these arguments to this work is significant. Taking the interpretivist viewpoint, I maintain that morality is personally constructed. Accordingly, the morals underpinning this work are the values, duties and obligations I cherish. This leads me to a view of ethics which rejects a Consequentialist perspective as being immoral. For example, if the contribution to knowledge of this work was to be seen externally as having great benefits for a great number of people, the consequence of publishing would be seen by consequentialist as of being ethically correct regardless of any moral decision underpinning the publication. Consequently, if research members were to be guaranteed anonymity and publishing rested upon breaking such anonymity, the outcome would be considered ethical irrespective of the moral disgrace committed. For this reason, I concur with the deontological perspective that the end does not justify the means and moral considerations are paramount. As Talbott (2005) states, general rules may not be applicable in every situation so that principles or rules applied by individuals should acknowledge particular situations. This leads to a further definition of the ethical stance taken in this work.

Categorisation of research ethics

There are 3 categories of research ethics which are relevant to this work as discussed below.

Metaethics

Metaethics is concerned with the analysis of the logic of moral concepts (Nino, 1998; Proctor, 1998) and the exploration of the meaning of the function, nature and justification
of moral judgements (Jorgensen, 1971). The fundamental objective is not to construct any systematic theory of ethics but with the analysis of moral concepts (Kimmel, 1998). It is involved with analysing notions such as ‘right’, ‘obligation’ and ‘virtue with a view to gaining a greater understanding of these concepts. The intention is not to determine how ethical judgements may be justified.

**Normative ethics**

The primary objective of normative ethics is to suggest moral norms which can guide behaviour in a particular situation. It is concerned with providing frameworks which allow individuals to judge whether the actions of both themselves and others can be judged as morally ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Frankena (1973, p. 12) describes the purpose of normative ethics as guiding “how may or should we decide or determine what is morally right for a certain agent ….to do, or what he morally ought to do, in a certain situation”. This creates an evident difficulty in the deontological perspective since criteria for judgement is not only variable and often contradictory but will also be personally constructed.

**Applied ethics**

Applied ethics is concerned with investigating how normative ethics may be applied to specific issues or particular circumstances (Singer, 2011). In other words, applied ethics is about operationalizing normative ethics. An additional element here is the widening of ethical considerations to include particular obligations which may be imposed as a result of a researcher’s affiliation to, for example, an organisation or institution. Davis (2002) points out that researchers who hold such affiliations may be constrained by special ethical
obligations beyond what the law and ordinary morality require. These special obligations are stated in codes of ethics that many professions, firms and government agencies publish.

Categorising the Ethical Framework

The Ethical Framework for this work can be categorised as falling within Applied Ethics. It will, therefore, require an investigation of normative ethics allied with a plan for operationalizing these for practical inquiry. The following section reviews the literature of normative ethics for social research with a view to developing an Ethical Framework for the inquiry. As Davis (2002) suggests above, other special obligations arising from my affiliation with my employing HEI also need to be considered which I include later on pages 244 to 245.

6.4. A Brief Review of Ethical Considerations for Social Research

At the beginning of the 20th Century, debates on the ethical aspects of sociological research were already well underway. Ellwood (1910, p. 314 quoting Cooley (1909, p21)) based his influential discourse on the premise that "we live in a system, and to achieve right ends, or any rational ends whatever, we must learn to understand that system." The system that interested Cooley (1909, p. 3) was that of the human mind:

“MIND is an organic whole made up of cooperating individualities, in somewhat the same way that the music of an orchestra is made up of divergent but related sounds. No one would think it necessary or reasonable to divide the music into two kinds, that made by the whole and that of particular instruments, and no more are there two kinds of mind, the social mind and the individual mind. When we study the social mind we merely fix our attention on larger aspects and relations rather than on the narrower ones of ordinary psychology.”
From the systemic perspective of both the individual and social mind, Ellwood (1910) believed that rather than being guided by ethics, the social sciences should be subordinate to ethical considerations. This view ran contrary to the prevailing view of the time that ethics should essentially remain independent of the social sciences. Developments in social research have solidified the expectation that ethical considerations are crucial.

Coontz (1999, p. 4) traces current debates on ethical research to the atrocities of the Nazis during the Second World War. He demonstrates how the Nuremberg trials revealed countless abuses by doctors and scientists on human subjects, resulting in the 1949 Nuremberg Code. This concerns the treatment of human research subjects, mainly in the field of medical experimentation about which it set out moral, ethical and legal obligations. It also established the notion of ‘informed consent’ and has served as model for ethical practices in the social sciences.

Between 2002 and 2004, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded a project to investigate informed consent and research methods as part of a Research Methods Programme. One useful output from this project is the review of Wiles, Heath, Crow and Charles (2004) which investigates the current regulatory, ethical and legal context for informed consent in social research and how it is operationalised in practice. They illustrate the continuing close alliance between social and medical research ethics, but find that many social researchers feel the approaches of medical research methods do not translate well into the social research arena. They point to widespread debate about the debate for ethics in social research, including:

- a commitment to participants’ rights (e.g., the protection of privacy);

- a commitment to ‘respect’ for participants;
• a commitment to knowledge (or the right for others to know e.g., how specific organisations operate);

• a commitment to the promotion of respect for social science (i.e., to avoid ‘spoiling the field’); and,

• protecting the researcher (e.g. from litigation)

In my own research into recent discourses on research ethics, I uncovered a broad spectrum of perspectives (see, for example, Gerhart, 2009; Myers and Newman, 2007; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson, 2002). Some discourses are in-depth whilst others are less so, and the individual perspectives vary widely in what should or should not be included in an ethical consideration of social research. Common to most, though, is the view that “ethical considerations are paramount in all research from its design to its conclusion” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723).

There is, of course, a legal context within which all researchers must work. Wiles et al. (2004) highlight the most important legislation for social researchers to be Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which protects the right to respect for private and family life, and the Data Protection Act 1998, which protects the data about research members. There are some very specific and complex laws in relation to using children as research members which also relates to adults who lack ‘capacity’ to provide their own informed consent.

Outside the boundaries of Ethics Committees and the legal context, there is no specific system of ethical governance or review and no sanctions can be applied to those who “discredit our profession” (SRA, 2003, p. 5). This means that the responsibility for conducting ethical research lies with individual researchers, a responsibility I have been
keen to shoulder in the conduct of this research. The discussion given here demonstrates the attempt for my ethical practice to be ‘the best that it can be’.

After comprehensive review of the literature, I found the guidelines offered by both the Social Research Association (SRA, 2003) and the ESRC (2010)\(^7\) to be the most comprehensive and are consequently used to guide this social inquiry.

### 6.5. Towards a foundation of a Framework of Ethics

The Research Ethics Framework (REF) of the ESRC (2010) has 6 guiding principles which highlight the primacy of research members:

- Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality;

- Researchers and members must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Variation of this principle is allowed only in very specific and exceptional research contexts;

- The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected;

- Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion;

- Harm to research participants must be avoided; and,

---

\(^7\) The REF cited here is the latest version of the ethical framework which is updated every 4 years by ESRC. The actual framework used was the 2006 REF which is no longer available since it has been replaced by the updated version.
• The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.

The SRA (2003) offers 4 slightly different principles which widens the field considerably. These are listed below with some commentary:

1. *Obligations to society* which requires social researchers to conduct their work responsibly and in light of the moral and legal order of the society in which they practice. By doing so, they can ensure that their work remains of benefit to society and the individuals and groups within it. Researchers have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in methods employed in the collection and analysis of data and the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings.

2. *Obligations to funders and employers* which requires researchers to maintain clear and balanced relationships with funders and/or employers. These should not compromise a commitment to morality and to the law and to the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity.

3. *Obligations to colleagues* which requires methods, procedures and findings to be open to collegial review without compromising obligations to society, funders/employers and research members. It also requires researchers to maintain concern for the safety and security of colleagues when conducting research in the field.

4. *Obligations to research subjects* which requires researchers to protect members from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This necessitates ensuring participation is both voluntary and as fully informed as
possible and no group should be disadvantaged by being excluded from consideration.

Whilst the ESRC principles are clear and unambiguous, the SRA guidelines are less so. In particular, the notion of ‘the morals of society’ gives rise to uncertainty as to exactly what this means and how it can be operationalised. Elsewhere, the SRA (2003, p. 10) suggest that ‘morals’ are individually constructed which aligns with the interpretive view adopted in this work:

“Even within the same branch and setting of social research, individuals may have different moral precepts that guide their work. Thus, no declaration could successfully impose a set of rules to which social researchers everywhere should be expected to adhere”.

This being the case, the idea of societal ‘morals’ is a non-sequitur. Even interpreting it as ‘societal norms’ cannot resolve the dilemma, since the boundaries of ‘society’ itself must then be defined – i.e. is society seen as residing at a national, cultural or local community level? At a national level, morality is bounded by a legal context – for example, wilfully killing a healthy animal is an illegal act, held by many to be morally wrong. However, some cultures (often underpinned by religious beliefs) believe sacrificing animals to be morally right.

I highlight the dilemma of ‘societal morals’ as being of consequence, since this inquiry has already been declared to be a matter of social class and recent research suggests that different social classes hold different moral values (see, for example, Piff, Stancato, Cote, Mendoza-Denton and Keltner, 2012; Svallfors, 2006; A. Sayer, 2005). From the outset, I am aware that my own social class is, and always has been, different from those who I wish to conduct research with. This consequently means that our moral bases will differ
and, if what the research suggests is actually the case, I have no access to understanding
the moral norms of the socially disadvantaged. To infer what these may be from the
literature I consider to be morally wrong and perhaps even dangerous, leading as it may to
preconception and perhaps prior negative judgement. If this were to be the case, I would
then compromise a personal moral boundary. From this discussion, I concluded that this
was an ethical dilemma which would need to be resolved. The issues are fully examined
below in Section 6.7.

A second difficulty with the SRA guidelines is the leaning toward quantitative social
research as implied by the phrase “scientific standards” regarding the collection and
analysis of data. As interpretive research which is not underpinned by the scientific
method, this is not applicable to this inquiry in the sense in which it is meant. However,
the notion of recoverability for qualitative research does apply since it seeks to achieve a
similar outcome. Therefore, the F.M.A strategy adopted in this work for recoverability (see
Chapter 1 pages 36 to 40) is seen to be relevant here.

6.6. The Ethical Framework

The Ethical Framework developed for this inquiry is based upon the combination of the
ESRC and SRA guidelines, as shown below. These will fall into 4 separate categories as
suggested by the SRA guidelines.

1) Societal ethics

   a) Ensure that legal boundaries are adhered to. This entails ensuring that Section 8
   of the Human Rights Act, 1998 is complied with by ensuring that the privacy of
   research members is protected. Adherence to the requirements of the Data
   Protection Act 1998 would be ensured through the instituted procedures for the
anonymity and confidentiality of research member data/information at 3h and 3i below.

b) *Investigate matters of class to ensure moral boundaries are not compromised.*
   This would entail a full examination of issues which may arise as a result of working with a particular social class and institution of procedures to deal with them. This is discussed in detail in Section 6.7.

c) *Ensure that recoverability of the research is possible* through full disclosure of F,M,A and all processes of research design, data collection, analysis and findings. This requires that the thesis be carefully checked to ensure that all relevant information is included.

d) *Explicitly declare any interests, partiality and conflicts which may arise during the conduct of the research.* At this stage there were no such matters arising but the situation would be constantly under review.

2) **Collegial ethics**

   a) *Ensure professional behaviour at all times during the conduct of the study.* There is no definitive Code of Conduct published within my employing HE Institution although there are several individual documents dealing with, for example, codes of racial and sexual harassment and ethics. The Ethics policy merely requires “ethical and responsible” behaviour from academic staff (UoP, 2011, p. 4) but does not define what is meant by this. Therefore, in the light of a lack of institutional guidance, I can only ensure that I behave in a manner which does not compromise my own professional and ethical standards to comply with this requirement.

   b) *Allow collegial review of all aspects of the work at any time whilst ensuring that the anonymity of research members is always protected.* The work was, of course,
open to supervisors at all times, but would also be made available to any colleagues wishing to review it. Further collegial review of the progress of the work was made through conference presentations.

c) *Ensure the safety of any researcher involved in conducting research in the field.* Since I was the lone researcher for this inquiry, this particular requirement initially appeared to have a limited applicability. In practice, though, my safety was compromised during my first attempt to conduct field research which resulted in a potentially dangerous situation. However, treating the experience as an Action Learning element of the Research Design, reflection upon the issues involved led to a modification in the strategy for research member access rather than a modification of the Ethical Framework. The situation is therefore discussed in detail on in the next Chapter 8 (pages 285 to 287) where it is more relevant. The procedures instituted as a result of this experience were: firstly, to ensure that ‘informal gatekeepers’ facilitated access to research members; secondly, to ensure all incentives would take place in ‘safe’ place; and thirdly, to ensure a third person was always aware of the details of the research activity.

3) **Research member ethics**

   a) *Ensure that all research members are fully informed of the purpose of the research, the methods to be employed and the use of the research as a doctoral study.* A guiding ‘script’ would be created to be used on first introduction to the potential members who would then be able to make an informed decision as to whether they wish to participate.

   b) *Ensure that research members are fully aware of what their participation in the research entails* in terms of interviews, meetings, likely time to be spent on the
process and how to contact the researcher. This would be included in the introductory ‘script’ mentioned above.

c) *Ensure that participation is voluntary and has not been coerced in any way.* No inducements for participation would be considered. This means that research members should not be coerced into participation by either me or any third party, nor should sanctions be applied to any potential member either not wishing to participate or later terminating participation. Inducements in terms of money or gifts should not be offered as payment for participation but this did not preclude the offer of ‘treats’ such as refreshments and food to members. However, ‘treats’ would not be linked to participation; potential members who do not wish to participate would not be excluded.

d) *Ensure that all research members are aware of any risks arising from participation in the research.* The risks foreseen were those arising from social class distinctions. These are discussed in detail in section 6.7.

e) *Ensure that explicit consent for participation in the research has been given, including consent for the data to be included in the work upon completion of the interview process.* Written consent would be obtained but would be protected from external view in order to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

f) *Allow research members to withdraw consent at any time and ensure that all data/information regarding that member is removed from the study.* Whilst consent to participate would be written, withdrawal of consent given verbally would be accepted. Upon any member withdrawing consent, all electronic records, data and information would be deleted from the study and any written materials destroyed.
g) *Ensure that all research members are protected from harm as a consequence of participating in the study.* The nature of the study suggested that the research could potentially cause harm to research members as it is centralised on social class. This is fully considered in Section 6.7. Further harm could be occasioned by any breach of anonymity or confidentiality, procedures for protecting which are outlined below.

h) *Ensure the anonymity of all research members is protected at all times, including from each other through the implementation of rigorous procedures.* This would entail ensuring that all original records which could identify members were stored separately and not on a hard drive of any computer which could be stolen or accessed by anyone other than the researcher. A separate storage device would be used for electronic records and stored in a locked container which only the researcher could access, along with any written records. Written records included in the final thesis would either have all identifying information expunged or be rewritten in a faithful copy of the original with identifying information omitted. At no time, and under no circumstances, would any documents or information capable of identifying individual research members be made available to a third person.

i) *Institute rigorous procedures to maintain the confidentiality of information supplied by the research members.* This would entail assigning a pseudonym to members for the reporting of the research in addition to the procedures for anonymity described above.

4) **Institutional ethics**

   a) *Comply with the ethics procedures of the employing HE Institution,* ensuring that approval for the research was gained from the Ethics Review Committee prior to
engaging with research members. This procedure and the outcomes are discussed in more detail in section 6.9.

6.7. Class – a sensitive issue

As suggested earlier, the centralisation of ‘class’ within this work requires investigation in order to ensure that the Ethical Framework does not compromise any moral boundaries which may be implied. Having already stated that morality is viewed here as a personal construct, I qualify this section by returning to the societal moral distinction drawn by Purtilo and Criss (2005). I have evidenced earlier (see pages 231 to 232) that research identifies some differences in moral perspective between social classes and this is not contrary to the underpinning interpretive stance taken here. The primary socialisation described by Berger and Luckman (1967) can be taken to form the basis for the construction of values through Appreciation (Vickers, 1987a, 1987b, 1983, 1970, 1965). However, the significant others through which that primary socialisation occurs will have affiliations to the local community and culture in which they reside and hold values which will have been constructed similarly. Thus, class values can be seen to be a significant influence on the construction of individual morals through inheritance. Therefore, whilst personal morals hold primacy over those occurring as a result of secondary socialisation, I maintain that shared values within a local community or class are inevitable.

The moral dilemma to be resolved here revolves around such matters of social class since the fundamental ethos of the Widening Participation policy is one of social class, an issue which Medhurst (2000, p. 21) defines as an “emotional business” Whilst some believe that class distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred (Frean, 2006; Lawson, Jones and Moores, 2000), Lacey (2000, p. 37) notes that “although social class has gone out of
theoretical fashion, it is still being talked about”. Social class is found to be “alive” (Grossmann and Huynh, 2013, p. 117), it is important (Nayak, 2003, p. 320) and individuals continue to adhere to it for social identity (Nayak, 2006, p. 828; G. Marshall, Rose, Newby and Vogler, 2005; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Indeed, there is a body of well-documented evidence demonstrating not only 21st century conceptions of class but also ongoing antagonisms between social classes (see, for example, J. Miller and Glassner, 2004; Eder and Nenga, 2003; Stryker and Vryna, 2003; Bhopal, 2001).

Balmforth (2009) identified tensions in social class between “middle-class” counsellors and “working-class” clients, both of whom emanate from a “very different class and habitus” (Slack, 2003) This suggests that similar problematic differences in social class between a “middle class”, well-educated researcher and the less socially advantaged researched could exist. Not explicitly acknowledging these social class differences could lead to the “academic consequences” highlighted by Reay (2000, p. 161) whereby “middle-class empathies in the field are seldom revealed as problematic, despite the affectivity of all class identifications and dis-identifications between researcher and researched”. Certain characteristics, such as accent and mode of speech, are outward identifiers of class. It was likely, therefore, that research members would be immediately aware of the social status of the researcher, leading to tensions which could impact upon the creating of necessary rapport. I return to this issue in Chapter 9 (please see page 301).

Research involving issues of social class is sensitive in nature (Sieber and Stanley, 1988, p. 55). Sensitive research involves issues which participants either do not like or find difficult to discuss, especially when they evoke deep emotions, or are regarded as ‘private’ (Saunders and Reinisch, 1998; Dunne et al., 1997). It was therefore necessary firstly to
consider the nature of the sensitivity of the research and how it might be dealt with as Becker and Bryman (2004, p. 15) advise:

“What in one case may be unproblematic will be sensitive in another. It is for this reason that researchers will often give considerable thought in the planning and design stage to what might be sensitive about their research, since it affects all stages, including identifying a topic and sample, negotiating access, data collection and publication of the results.”

Lee (1993) offers a useful framework for assessing potential research sensitivity by considering the threat it poses to members. *Intrusive threat* relates to research which explores areas that are private, stressful or sacred to the participants; *threat of sanction* relates to studies of deviance and involves the possibility that research may reveal information that is stigmatizing or incriminating in some way; and *Power threat* refers to those situations researchers may trespass into areas that involve some sort of social conflict due to the power vested in certain individuals in society. He also stated that research participants from low income groups may fear “exploitation or derogation” by taking part.

From this framework, it was apparent all three categories could potentially apply to the practical inquiry. *Intrusive threat*, the least damaging to members, could arise through discussion of social class, family and educational background. Governmental views of non-participation as deviance (see page 72), allied with obvious class differences between researcher and researched, may pose a *threat of sanction* through perceptions of derogation and stigmatisation. Whilst it was less likely that a *power threat* existed, it was also possible members may see the research as a matter of social conflict and could not be entirely discounted. A major consideration for the development of the research framework was how these threats could be mitigated by careful consideration of orientation of questions asked and how the study would be described to the members, as reported in
Chapter 8. The sensitivity of the research was considered as a significant factor in both member profiling and designing the framework for practical inquiry.

Recruiting research members *always* presents challenges to researchers but the process is made more arduous when the research being undertaken is sensitive (Goodrum and Keys, 2007; Kavanaugh, Moro, Savage and Mehendale, 2006). Class differences between researcher and researched have been highlighted above and were foreseen as problematical to member recruitment. Class derogation can arise early for many socially disadvantaged children who are often treated with a “patronising and middle-class attitude” by their teachers. (Burn, 2001, p. 90). This leads to working-class children perceiving an individual as ‘posh’ as the main signifier of unacceptable class difference so they consequently become patently aware of middle-class condescension, often responding to it with antagonism (Reay, 2000, p. 158). Screening membership through overt investigation of family background, parental education and general living conditions was highly likely to not only stigmatise but also antagonise potential members and was therefore discounted.

A second option was to simply recruit members and allow social class issues to emerge during the course of the research process. Inclusion of member experiences would then be based upon a judgement of whether the individual could be classed as ‘socially disadvantaged’. Whilst the possibility of stigmatising or antagonising members would be mitigated through taking this option, the time-bound nature of the research rendered it impractical. It was essential that the research was efficient, utilising minimum resources. Embarking upon a lengthy process with a research member who was likely to be later rejected was inefficient and may compromise the ability to meet the objective of the practical inquiry.
The final, and also the most efficient and ethical, option would be to design the research membership profile in such a way that possibilities for stigmatisation and inefficiency were minimised. Such an ambition, however, was complicated by the lack of clarity in the Widening Participation policy itself as to how these parameters could be determined as discussed in section 7.2. Whilst I envisaged that the careful development of a member profile could reduce the tensions discussed here to some extent, I was aware that no process could definitively ensure that members met the profile without overt questioning on matters of social class. As mentioned above, I rejected overt investigation into social background as being unethical in its potential for stigmatising members. From the outset, therefore, I acknowledged that a compromise between ethical considerations and efficient resource utilisation would have to be made. Since I placed ethical considerations above efficiency, I realised that I may have to take some members through the interview process in order to allow some issues to emerge, at which point I could then either accept or reject the outcomes based on member fit with the profile specifications. In order to do this sensitively and ethically, I decided that I would make plain in the initial conversations with participants that, although I was involving as many people as possible in the process, it may not be practicable to analyse all the results in the final outcome. By dealing with the issue in this way, members would be aware that their contributions may or may not be included in the final product.

This section commenced with an ethical dilemma related to not compromising moral boundaries of research members from a particular social class. It has concluded with a strategy for research design to mitigate tensions between the researcher and the members due to differences in social class. As such, I recognise that it does not fully resolve the moral issue. This, I feel, is something that cannot be resolved satisfactorily beyond the measures included here and so must remain a largely unresolved issue.
6.8. Matters of Deception

In considering how matters of class could be dealt with both ethically and sensitively within the research, I considered how the practical inquiry could be designed to reduce the difficulties identified (see page 239 above). In developing the Framework for Practical Inquiry which is discussed in detail in Chapter 8, I revealed another tension which could be potentially viewed as deception.

The issue revolved around the nature of the research. In pursuing the primary objective of attempting to gain a greater appreciation of why more socially disadvantaged young people were not embracing the opportunity to participate in HE as extended by the Widening Participation policy, I used Vickers’ notion of Appreciation to investigate lived experience (please see Section 8.4). In this view, only things which are of sufficient interest to individuals are selected from the environment to become worthy of notice. Conversely, if something is not of interest, it will simply never enter into consciousness. It became clear to me during this analysis that the issue was not whether the research members had ever considered Higher Education as an option but whether the issue of Higher Education had ever been of sufficient interest to be worthy of deliberation. This oriented the practical inquiry away from Higher Education to a large extent and onto the life trajectories members had followed upon leaving compulsory education. How they had been influenced by previous experiences, internal values and other individuals (or groups or institutions) would be important in gaining a greater appreciation of whether they had considered HE to be of sufficient interest to be worthy of notice and further consideration.

It was also clear that some mention of Higher Education would have to be made in the practical inquiry but it was equally important that the members did not focus on Higher Education prior to discussing their life trajectories. Fox (2009, pp. 5-6) highlights the
importance of question ordering in well-planned semi-structured interviews and researchers in many disciplines also acknowledge that the framing of questions can influence research member responses (see, for example, Moxey, O'Connell, Treloar, Han and Henry, 2005; Manning, 2004; Baxter, 2003). For this reason, I decided to place the question of whether members had ever considered Higher Education as an option as the last one in the interview.

The ordering of questions was not the only dilemma. Roth and Mehta (2002) further suggest that the purpose of the research as explained may also influence the context of member responses. This raised the question of how the research could be explained to the members without becoming involved in deception if any mention of Higher Education was not to be included to reduce influence and bias. Although the primary objective was to gain a greater appreciation of why the Widening Participation initiative had failed to meet its ambitions, the path to gaining this appreciation was more focussed on life trajectories after compulsory education as mentioned above. A script to introduce the study was developed to resolve this dilemma as:

“The Government has strong views on what it feels young people should do with their lives after leaving school. I am looking at what real people actually do in order to gain a greater understanding of why more people are not doing the things the Government believe they should be doing.”

In introducing the research in this way, I felt that the ethos of the study was clearly explained without focussing attention on the issue of participation in Higher Education. I did, on the other hand, retain a feeling of disquiet that this may be deceptive to some extent. In order to ensure that I would not introduce deception into the inquiry, I requested some guidance from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee prior to submitting a request for ethical approval of the work. This is discussed below.
6.9. Institutional Affiliation and the effect on the Ethical Framework

As mentioned above, I am employed by a Higher Education Institution which requires adherence to particular research ethics standards. As suggested by Davis (2002), there are specific ethical considerations to be taken into account requiring the completion of an Ethical Checklist. This Checklist must then be submitted to an Ethics Review Committee (ERC) for approval to be given prior to commencing upon field work in practical inquiry.

In order to fully assess the various requirements of the Institutional Ethical Review, I completed the initial investigations as detailed above. The Ethical Checklist was then completed and submitted for review. Prior to submission, various points were checked with the ERC to determine how they should be viewed and described in the Checklist which is included at Appendix C.

The first point of note is that the review of ethics required by the institution for a work of this nature was the same as that required of an undergraduate student. There was, therefore, a somewhat surface approach to ethics taken at that time although the procedures have since been revised and become more rigorous. Indeed, my own development of an Ethical Framework was far more in depth than that required by the Institution.

At the commencement of practical inquiry, a single Checklist was required to be completed and approved. To gain the initial approval, I queried several points. Once gained, the approval was extant for the life of the inquiry, regardless of the number of individual field studies to be carried out. Further approval needed to be sought only where changes occurred during the progress of the research, and I queried whether further ethics
approval was required for each change I made. The discussion below includes all communications with the Ethics Review Committee.

I identified the research as being sensitive in nature due to differences in social class and questioned the necessity to indicate the work was sensitive. The Ethics Review Committee did not require this to be done since it was not ‘particularly’ sensitive in that it did not revolve around issues such as race, disability, sexual themes or sexual orientation. At the time of developing the Ethical Framework, I had not considered access to the research members through gatekeepers but, as reported in Chapter 8 (see page 286) this was later revised to include the use ‘informal’ gatekeepers. The Ethics Review Committee, however, was only interested in the involvement of ‘formal’ gatekeepers. As mentioned above, I was concerned that some form of deception may be practices in the way I was introducing the work but was informed by the Ethics Review Committee that my proposed method did not constitute deception as such.

Overall, the institutional approach to ethics at this time appeared to be ‘light touch’ rather than an in-depth guide to developing a rigorous framework of ethics for researchers.

6.10. Conclusion

In this Chapter, the ethical journey undertaken for this work has been examined. I have discussed ethical issues relevant to the inquiry and developed a comprehensive Ethical Framework based upon an amalgamation of guidelines from the ESRC and SRA.

In considering the nature of the inquiry as centralised on social disadvantage, I uncovered an emerging moral dilemma arising differences in social class between researcher and researched. Although some commentators feel that social class is less important that it used to be, research is used to evidence the fact that it is more likely that differences in
both moral values and worldviews between classes remains strong. Through examination of these matters, the inquiry was revealed as sensitive in nature which gives rise to potential harm for the research members. Whilst I have instituted various procedures for reducing this potential within the Ethical Framework itself, a number of other issues remain outstanding which I feel can be addressed through careful research member profiling and research design. However, whilst risks to potential harm can be ethically resolved, I acknowledge that the moral dilemma which sparked the investigation into differences in social class remains unresolved to a degree.

I have also examined the primary research question and how this may be operationalised within the practical inquiry. Although I am concerned with gaining a greater appreciation of why more young socially disadvantaged individuals have not embraced the opportunity to take advantage of the Widening Participation policy, I conclude that the central issue does not revolve around conceptions of Higher Education per se. Based upon Vickers’ notion of Appreciation, I use the concept that only matters deemed to be sufficiently worthy of notice will be selected by an individual notice and further consideration. Based upon this, the issue is not whether such a ‘target WP individual’ made choices around HE participation, but whether he or she considered Higher Education participation to be of sufficient interest to consider in the first place. The Appreciative System is harnessed in Chapter 8 as the basis for development of the Framework for Practical Inquiry, but it has particular relevance to the Ethical Framework.

Selecting elements from the environment as being of sufficient interest for notice is predicated on lived experience as articulated through the operation of the Appreciative System. As such, the practical inquiry is more concerned with gaining a greater appreciation of the life trajectories of research members which may in turn provide a
deeper understanding of the underlying reasons why Higher Education participation is or is not considered as an option. Despite this, it is obvious that some mention of Higher Education will need to be included in the Framework for Practical Inquiry. However, it will be important that research members are not led into putting focus on Higher Education at too early a stage in the inquiry to prevent constraining possible responses. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the research topic can also influence member responses. On this basis, I suggest a particular script for introducing the research which maintains the ethos of the research but omits mention of Higher Education. I also intend to include Higher Education as the final question in the interview process.

As a result of this strategy, I reveal my disquiet that some deception may be being practiced. However, in my discussion of compliance with Institutional Research policies, this disquiet was seen to be unnecessary by the Ethics Review Committee from whom ethics approval was sought. I then discuss other issues queried with the Institutional Ethics Review Committee, concluding that the ethics review procedure was surface rather than in-depth, devoid of useful guidance for the inquirer. This appears to have been rectified in new ethical procedures implemented in the HE Institution.

This Chapter has revealed some ethical issues, particularly the need to minimise the possibility of harm arising from the sensitivity of matters of social class. These issues impact on both how and from where members are recruited into the research study and how interview conversations are conducted to ensure that the impact of sensitivity is minimised as far as possible. The issues are carried forward for further exploration, firstly in Chapter 7 which deals with profiling and accessing research members in such a way that issues of social class are not overtly centralised with research members. Chapter 8 then details the process of the development of a Framework for Practical Inquiry, including
procedures to ensure that social class distinctions are not explicit within the conversations and other processes involving research members.
Chapter 7.  Profiling research membership

“…. it was difficult to say who was being ‘excluded from HE, who ‘ought to be participating’”
(Gorard, Smith, H., et al., 2006)

7.1.  Introduction

In the previous Chapter, I outlined the development of an Ethical Framework for Inquiry, highlighting some ethical dilemmas, particularly the sensitivity of issues surrounding social class, which could be resolved through careful research member profiling and research design. In this Chapter, I discuss issues relevant to profiling research members and how this may lead to minimisation of those dilemmas and Chapter 8 considers how the practical inquiry may be structured to further this.

The research member profile was constructed first in order to determine how the ethical issues could be addressed so that any residual issues could then be considered in the research design. In completing these steps, it became evident that the creation of a suitable research member profile was rather more complicated than at first appeared due to a lack of clarity in the Widening Participation policy as to who it intended to target. This resulted in membership profiling being a much larger parcel of work than had originally been envisaged, and as such it is reported here as a topic in its own right. However, as the complexities were revealed, iterations between constructing the member profile and developing the framework for practical inquiry were frequently made. Neither the decisions made in this Chapter, nor the decisions made in Chapter 8, were made in isolation but rather occurred as a result of iterating through the Action Learning Cycle actions for this portion of the work (see Figure 51 on page 218 in Chapter 6).
Profiling research membership is often referred to in the literature as ‘sampling’ and the strategies by which such sampling should be carried out receive much attention. The term ‘profiling’ is used in this work to avoid the historical connotations that research ‘samples’ have with quantitative studies, although it is retained when required for sense-making. However, the various perspectives in this area have implications for specifying research membership for this practical inquiry.

Profiling research participants is considered by Richards and Morse (2006, p. 4) as a crucial part in scoping a project, declaring:

“The scope of a study is never just a question of how many, but always includes who, where and which settings will be studied, in what ways, by whom, and for how long they will be studied; and what can be asked and answered.”

The by whom part of the declaration was set from the outset since I was the lone researcher for the study. This Chapter deals with the how many, who, where, which settings and how for how long whilst the in what ways, what can be asked and what can be answered is covered in the next Chapter.

Ensuring that this stage of a project is rigorous is essential to establishing the credibility of the findings (Peshkin, 2001; Kuzel, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1989). Morse and Field (1995) assert that there are two key considerations to take into account when profiling research membership, those of appropriateness and adequacy. Appropriateness refers to selecting individuals who are perceived to be able to best inform the research question and is demonstrated though the specification of appropriate parameters for research membership.

The objective of this practical inquiry was to address the main research question (see Chapter 1, page 31) of “Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the
opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?” in order to explore explanatory factors for lack of widened participation gathered from the under-represented Higher Education non-participants. To appropriately address this question, the strategy was to recruit the previously neglected young disadvantaged non-participants in Higher Education who would have been classed as ‘WP students’ had they done so. The purpose of any qualitative research should be to develop shared understandings of a particular group (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 4) by selecting members who could provide insights through provision of rich information (Kuzel, 1992). As such, recruiting these members employed a purposive strategy to “enhance understanding of selected individuals’ or groups’ experiences or for developing theories” (N. M. Marshall, 1996, p. 552) in that the general nature of the population was defined but all members had an equal chance of selection.

In principle, determining who should take part in the research appeared relatively simple. In practice, specifying parameters for research membership was highly complicated, mainly due to the vagueness of definition of exactly whom the Widening Participation policy intended to target. The problems encountered, the decisions made and the rationale for each decision is explained in the Chapter.

Adequacy of qualitative research (Morse and Field, 1995) involves ensuring that there has been an adequate sampling of sources such as people, places, events and types of data, to ensure that both the question is addressed and a full description of the phenomena being studied can be developed. Chapter 2 demonstrates sufficient sampling of published data and information, relevant places (whether concrete or abstract such as institutions) and events. Adequacy of people essentially refers to the size of the research population. But there are a number of conflicting perspectives on optimum size of research membership.
These are explored culminating in a strategy for membership population along with identification of constraints and foreseen barriers to research objectives.

### 7.2. A lack of clarity in defining ‘social disadvantage’

The lack of clear definition of exactly what was meant by ‘widening participation’ was consistently criticised (see, for example, City University London, 2009; Gorard, Smith, May, et al., 2006, p. 117; Higher Education Consultancy Group and the National Centre for Social Research, 2003, p. 4). HEFCE (2004b, p. 5) defended this position by stating that “non-traditional groups” varied between institutional, temporal and cultural context although broad groups had been identified. These included lower socio-economic groups, those with non-traditional qualifications for Higher Education, the disabled and certain ethnic minority groups.

This work concentrates only on the first category, disadvantaged young people upon whom the greatest focus was placed by the Widening Participation policy. The problems associated with identifying ‘WP students’ from these backgrounds using traditional socio-economic schemes has already been discussed in Section 2.4 (pages 61 to 64), leading to the introduction of geodemographic techniques through use of the POLAR system. The POLAR system categorised areas based upon average rate of Higher Education participation which was deemed to correlate to social disadvantage – i.e. the lower the rate of HE participation, the greater the social disadvantage. The Widening Participation policy was aimed at encouraging more young people from quintiles 1, 2 and 3 to participate in HE where quintile 1 correlated to the lowest rate of neighbourhood participation and hence the greatest social disadvantage. I consequently considered member residence in a
quintile 1, 2 or 3 neighbourhood as a useful initial parameter for determining ‘social disadvantage’.

It was not envisaged that this course of action would be ‘perfect’ by any means. Simply because a member currently resided in a particular quintile, there was no guarantee that they had grown up in the same, or similar, neighbourhood. However, it could reduce the possibility of stigmatising members through discussion of social class background (discussed previously in Section 6.7) since current residence would be predetermined and the question of where they had grown up could be allowed to emerge naturally as a result of the research process. This, of course, could mean that some members had to be disregarded at a later stage but, considering the main objectives here were minimise potential threat, it was more efficient than any other option.

7.3. The age factor

Although the Widening Participation policy was aimed at “non-traditional” disadvantaged individuals between the ages of 18 and 21, mature part-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds were also included. Theoretically, individuals of any age could theoretically be included in the research so long as they met all other parameters. However, Widening Participation performance indicators mainly revolved around full-time young undergraduates and it was decided to concentrate only on those who could have entered Higher Education between the ages of 18 and 21. I also decided that individuals should not be in compulsory full-time education as there could be no guarantee they would not actually participate in Higher Education upon leaving school. I consequently needed to determine a specific age range for research membership.
The Widening Participation policy was introduced in 1998. At this point, individuals would have had to be between 18 and 21 in order to be classed as a ‘WP student’. The earliest year of birth to meet this criteria was therefore 1977. Since the research commenced in 2009, this specified an upper age limit of 32.

The minimum age range was not quite so simple to determine. Obviously, if an individual was 18 years old, they would be eligible to be classed as a ‘WP student’. On the other hand, Aimhigher had been established to raise aspirations of those still in compulsory education. Any young person leaving school at 16 and not pursuing Higher Education qualifications through any other route could be assumed to have no current aspiration to participate in Higher Education. I decided to use a minimum age limit of 17 to ensure they had left compulsory education, but only those not currently pursuing Higher Education qualifications in post-compulsory education.

7.4. A lack of clarity in who should be included in the research

Initially, the notion of determining who could be classed as a non-participant in Higher Education seemed relatively simple but this was not the case. Firstly, an individual currently not participating may have previously participated or may participate in the future, so becoming a mature ‘WP student’. Previous participation was relatively easy to determine but future participation far less so. Even if the individual was not actively considering going to university at a later stage, there could be no guarantee that this would not change over coming years. Conversely, they may currently hold an aspiration to attend university at a later stage, but may not ever participate. The most sensible option for the second parameter appeared to be an individual who had not yet participated in Higher Education.
Secondly, provision of opportunity to all those who have the potential to participate in Higher Education underpins the ethos of the Widening Participation policy. Traditionally, such potential was measured by prior educational or vocational achievement but NCIHE (1997, Report 6) stressed that many from lower socio-economic backgrounds did not have the opportunity for high attainment at school. On this basis, making a judgement of demonstrable potential for Higher Education participation would be impossible. An assumption could be made, though, that every individual may theoretically possess a latent potential they had not, for any number of reasons, been able or willing to demonstrate to date but may do so in the future. That this could hold true can be witnessed in the large number of mature ‘WP students’ successfully attaining Foundation Degrees with few traditional academic qualifications.

Finally, I felt that employment status (including worklessness and ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET)) was irrelevant in the inquiry since a variety of life trajectories could provide a richer insight into the issue under consideration.

7.5. Choice of Area for Participant Research

As discussed earlier (see page 252), the lack of precision in definition of who Widening Participation intended to target was due to variations between institutional, cultural and temporal contexts, implying some geographical variations reinforced by the introduction of geodemographic techniques. To minimise the impact of such variations, I decided to constrain the inquiry to a narrow geographical location. It has been evidenced that a large proportion of working class and non-traditional students attend a local university (Holdsworth, 2009; Pugsley, 1998), suggesting that the location should be within easy travelling distance of a local University. More pragmatically, it also needed to be easily
accessible and convenient to me to maximise efficient use of limited resources. The nearest Higher Education Institution was the University of Portsmouth on the south coast of Hampshire and potential suitable locations included Portsmouth, Havant and Gosport. Each of these was investigated and I selected Gosport on the outcomes of the investigation.

Gosport is a town located in South Hampshire on a peninsula surrounded on 3 sides by The Solent and Portsmouth Harbour with almost 39 kilometres of coastline as shown in Figure 52 below. It offers easy access to Portsmouth University via a 3 minute ferry ride with bus stations directly opposite the ferry terminals on both sides.

![Figure 52 - Gosport, South Hampshire](image)

Despite its location on the South Coast, Gosport is not a booming tourist town but rather defined as a Priority Area for Regeneration for South Hampshire (GBC, 2006, p. 8). Historically, the town was developed as a support base for the Royal Navy. A large proportion of the population were previously employed in either local Ministry of Defence
(MoD) establishments or in Portsmouth Naval Base and other Portsmouth harbour-based military establishments. However, the decline in the UK armed forces since the 1970s has had a significant impact upon the area in general. Employment at the Naval Base in Portsmouth has declined and several of the MoD bases have closed.

The following statistics represent the latest information available from Gosport Borough Council (GBC, 2012, 2009) and Hampshire County Council (HCC, 2011, 2010). With 80,100 people living in 36,563 dwellings, Gosport is one of the most densely populated areas in the South East Region. It is also the second most deprived district in Hampshire with 5% of the population living in 20% of the most deprived areas in England. Indices of deprivation include high crime rates and fear of crime, poor health, low education and skill levels, low incomes and poor employment prospects. Social inclusion is a priority area for action to reduce disparities.

The Borough has “significant pockets of deprivation, which experience higher rates of economic activity, lower skill levels and qualifications than Gosport as a whole, and national and regional averages” (GBC, 2009, p. 105). Approximately 30% of residents are either unemployed or economically inactive with 10.8% living in workless households. Of those in employment, around 60% are in NS-SEC 3-7, with 15% in “elementary occupations” (i.e. NS-SEC 7). In particular, deficiencies in basic skills and academic and vocational attainment are identified as one of the main problems in the Borough. Indeed, 33% of all working age adults from Gosport had no or very low qualifications in 2004, and 66.67% of young people did not stay in education after the age of 17 (ONS, nd).

Higher Education participation is very low in Gosport as illustrated in Figure 53 on page 259. Of the 17 wards, eight are in POLAR quintile 1, four in quintile 2 and one in quintile 3. Individuals from these wards would be considered ‘WP students’ if they chose to
participate in HE. Two wards, (indicated on the map in brown), are in the town of Lee-on-the-Solent (although it is located in the wider Borough boundaries), leaving only 1 Gosport ward which would not be classed as an area of social disadvantage. This greatly reduced the possibility of including members in the research who did not reside in an appropriate area.

7.6. Adequacy of research membership

Specifying the optimum size for research membership is deemed to be a significant element in ensuring research adequacy and important for establishing the credibility of the findings. However, the literature offers conflicting perspectives on what the optimum population should be for qualitative research. Whilst Fossey et al. (2002, p. 726) believe there is no fixed minimum requirement (since even one member may provide insight into a particular issue), others believe that members should continue to be recruited until no new information emerges from the process (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey, 2005; Macdougall and Fudge, 2001; Kuzel, 1992). This is known as data saturation which is often claimed by qualitative researchers who are rarely able to prove it or document what is meant by it (Bowen, 2008; Morse, 1995). Such practices compromise the credibility of the findings.

A number of commentators offer views on actual optimal sizes, although again these are conflicting. Numbers include an estimate 6 for a highly homogenous population, otherwise 15 would be required (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). Green and Thorgood (2009, p. 12, emphasis added) assert that most qualitative researchers find that sufficient information can be gleaned from 20 members, whilst Charmaz (2006, p. 114) states 25 would be the minimum for a smaller project. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003, p. 84) are
somewhat vague in their assessment that qualitative samples often “lie under 50”. This guidance appears groundless, giving an impression of randomness rather than rigour.
There *are* no grounds on which to guide decisions on sampling adequacy in qualitative research (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001, p. 525). N. M. Marshall (1996, p. 525) appears to offer useful guidance in his belief that the optimum size of research membership is that which would enable valid inferences to be made about the wider group under consideration. This proposes that members continue to be recruited until the researcher can make a subjective judgement of the validity of the inferences made. The strategy adopted was therefore to continue the research until such a point could be reached.

### 7.7. Duration

Due to the overall nature of the interpretive social inquiry, time was an important consideration and is considered further in discussion of barriers and constraints (see section 7.8). Previous experience suggested that a duration of twelve months from design to completion would be sufficient, with the proviso that progress would be assessed throughout. Documentation and interpretation would be ongoing throughout the entire process. This may mean that the duration would be shorter or longer depending upon the assessment made and the time constraints imposed.

### 7.8. Barriers and constraints

Pragmatically, the research would be constrained by time and resource which are acknowledged to be major constraints on duration and membership (Mack et al., 2005). As Richards and Morse (2006, p. 78) state: “the importance of knowing a budget and timeline can easily overtake the requirement of growing a project informed by the data”. The project needed to be carefully managed to ensure that the objectives could be achieved and sufficient members recruited for meaningful information to be gathered within these constraints.
Locating and accessing research members was identified as a potential barrier to the satisfactory achievement of the stated objective. A reason for the predominance of using ‘WP students’ in the Widening Participation ‘barriers’ review was ascribed to the difficulties of locating and accessing suitable ,HE non-participants’ (Gorard, Smith, May, et al., 2006, p. 147). Sufficient time needed to be built into the design process to locate and secure access to potential members since they would not be “waiting for you like apples to be plucked from a tree” (Richards and Morse, 2006, p. 83). At this stage, I had little personal access to individuals within the specified parameters but had social contacts with others who had more ready access. Using social networks is an acceptable practice for entry to unfamiliar groups (Denvers and Frankel, 2000, p. 266). Consequently, whilst the other design activities were ongoing, social networks were also accessed to negotiate entry to research members.

Finally, differences in social class between researcher and researched was not only a sensitive issue as revealed in the ethical considerations (see Chapter 6, pages 237 to 242) but also a potential barrier to recruitment as discussed earlier. Use of social networks for access to members could potentially assist in overcoming both the ethical problem and the potential barrier to research member recruitment, but could offer no guarantees.

7.9. **Research setting**

At this point, it was impossible to predict where interviews would take place since locating research members was an ongoing process. This being the case, it was decided to rely upon the in-depth knowledge of potential members offered by social contacts who could negotiate entry to advise on the most appropriate setting for the individuals selected.
7.10. Conclusion

This Chapter has profiled membership for the research. Chapter 6 identified the nature of the study as being potentially sensitive to members on a number of counts with attendant implications for ethics, profiling membership and development of the research framework. Some of these issues have been addressed here, particularly minimising potential harms arising from a need to discuss social class background by selecting an area most likely to access members from POLAR quintiles 1, 2 and 3 and also using social networks for introduction to members who most likely met the full member profile. I also felt that the design of the framework may mitigate some of the risks involved and further ethical considerations would be made at that stage as discussed in Chapter 8.

In this Chapter, a purposive sampling strategy was decided. This entailed creating a profile to define parameters for ensuring members would be capable of enhancing appreciation of why more young disadvantaged individuals did not participate in Higher Education. This suggested that recruiting individuals who did not participate in Higher Education but who would have been classed as ‘WP students’ had they done so would be most purposive. Within these broad parameters, a random sample would be recruited. Specifying parameters for membership was found to be problematic due to lack of clarity in definition of who the Widening Participation intended to target. The issues were examined and resolved. ‘Social disadvantage’ would be determined through current residence in a POLAR quintile 1, 2 or 3 neighbourhood. This would avoid harm being caused to, or offence being taken by, members by overtly discussing issues of social class as discussed in the previous Chapter (see pages 237 to 242) as a precursor to membership. Age parameters were determined on whether members would have been, or still would be,
eligible to be classed as ‘WP students’ since the inception of the Widening Participation policy in 1998.

Difficulties of defining ‘non-participant’ were explored and a parameter specified that a member should not yet have participated in Higher Education since future trajectories could not be determined. Prior educational attainment was discounted as a parameter since it can be argued that all individuals possess a latent potential which they have not yet, for a number of reasons, demonstrated. Employment status was likewise discounted since a variety of life trajectories following compulsory education could merely enhance the richness of the information gathered.

The project was constrained to a specific local area, partly on the grounds that many WP students attend their nearest local university. It also had to be accessible to the researcher to take into account the time-bound nature of the overall interpretive social inquiry. The nearest University was identified as Portsmouth University and Gosport selected as the most suitable geographical local due to the current predominance of wards in POLAR quintiles 1, 2 and 3. This completed the specification of the parameters constituting suitability for research membership which are summarised in Figure 54.

Perspectives of adequacy of membership were explored culminating in a strategy to continue recruitment until either a subjective judgement of the validity of the inferences could be made or resources dictated that no further recruitment would be possible. Time and resource were seen to be a major constraint but a particular barrier was identified as being locating and accessing research members with whom the author could not claim association. To circumvent this, it was decided to use existing social networks of individuals who did have easy access to potential members to negotiate entry, a packet of work which was ongoing at the same time as other research design activities. Using other
individuals for access may help reduce the potential barrier arising from social class differences between researcher and researched. Since it was not known at this stage exactly who would take part or where the study would take place, research settings could not be specified. A duration of eighteen months was tentatively specified on the proviso that the progress of the study would be monitored closely to determine how effectively the objective was being met. This meant that the duration could be greater or lesser depending upon the progress made.

Having completed profiling research membership, I now turn attention in Chapter 8 to developing a suitable framework for practical inquiry to address SSM’s lacuna of method identified in Section 5.7. Alongside this, I further consider how the development of the framework for practical inquiry may also help to mitigate the ethical issues uncovered in Chapter 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research member profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Resident in a Gosport quintile 1, 2 or 3 ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Aged between 17 and 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Not in compulsory education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Had not, to date, participated in HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Of any employment status, including unemployed, workless and NEET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Prior educational attainment was not a consideration for membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 54- Parameters for research member profile
Chapter 8. The Framework for Practical Inquiry

“The research needed for social practice can best be characterised as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice”

Lewin (1948, pp. 202-203)

8.1. Introduction

The previous Chapter dealt with the first part of the research design, that of determining parameters for research membership. In this Chapter, I move to considering the most appropriate method for achieving the objective of gaining a greater appreciation of why more young disadvantaged people did not take the opportunity to participate in Higher Education.

Issues of sensitivity were discussed in Chapter 6 and were significant to both the ethics and operationalization of the inquiry. I determined that the design of the Framework for Practical Inquiry may assist in reducing potential threats to members, and these ethical issues are carried forward into the practical design for inquiry. The question of exactly what was to be discovered and how this should be done also surfaced in Chapter 6 (pages 242-244). In Chapter 2 (pages 73-74), I used Vickers’ notion of Appreciation to arrive at the conclusion that, although the main research question is aimed at gaining a greater appreciation of why more young socially disadvantaged people had not embraced the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended by the Widening Participation initiative, the route to gaining such an appreciation lies in gaining a greater appreciation whether Higher Education was actually deemed important enough for individuals to notice.
for further deliberation. Investigating life trajectories, which in turn can help provide appreciation of factors underlying what is or what is not selected for notice, provides the outline for the design of practical inquiry.

In Chapter 5 (pages 209 to 210), I identified a lack of prescriptive method for conducting practical inquiry within SSM. This Chapter is concerned with deciding upon the most appropriate method for incorporation into a suitable Framework for Practical Inquiry. Developing such a Framework does not involve only selecting methods for data gathering, but also specifying a process through which my interpretation of the data could be agreed with research members. This is deemed to be essential for ensuring the credibility of the findings.

It is important that the principles underpinning the research design are both interpretive and systemic to synergise with the framework of ideas of Soft Systems Thinking described in Chapter 4. I therefore explore qualitative research methods to ensure the soundness of the development process.

The development process described here was carried out as Action Learning. I discuss this first to provide the foundations for discussions in the rest of the Chapter.

8.2. Designing the Framework of Practical Inquiry: An Action Learning Project

The fundamental ethos of Action Learning is discussed earlier in Section 5.4 and development of the Framework for Practical Inquiry was carried out as an Action Learning project. Framework development involved a number of tasks conducted in an Action Learning Cycle (see Figure 51 on page 218) to ensure that the interplay of each individual element constituted a coherent whole. The report below describes the tasks in a particular
order but this is not necessarily the order in which they were carried out since many
iterations were involved in the overall project.

Incorporating prior learning into the research design as Action Learning

I have earlier discussed reflexive practice as being one in which previous learning about
social inquiry is fed into future projects (see page 199). Indeed, the Action Learning
Cycle for the research process (Figure 47 on page 202) includes a number of elements to
ensure that this is rigorously carried out. My first task in designing the Framework for
Practical Inquiry was consequently to consider how lessons learned in previous practical
social inquiry could be incorporated into this present social inquiry.

As discussed earlier (page 182), I made an early decision to conduct research with
individuals rather than groups. Qualitative researchers predominantly use either interview,
observation or a combination of both as the appropriate method, although some researchers
rely upon members’ written narrative accounts (Keats, 2009). I assessed both observation
and written narratives as being ineffective for achieving the objectives of the inquiry.
Consequently, data would be elicited from research members through interview. I rejected
the idea of conducting structured interviews as being more functionalist in nature and
incongruent with the underlying intellectual Framework of Ideas. I therefore needed to
make a decision between conducting unstructured or semi-structured interviews. Neither
initially appeared to offer obvious advantages over the other since both, if conducted
correctly, are capable of eliciting individual accounts of lived experience from research
members.

Sanders (1980) discusses in detail the “rope burns” most researchers suffer when “learning
the ropes” of interpretive inquiry. Prior to this particular inquiry, I had had a less than
satisfactory experience of unstructured interviews. According to Fossey et al. (2002, p. 723), the quality of qualitative research rests upon whether members’ perspectives are authentically represented and interpreted from data gathered.

Ensuring an authentic representation of members’ perspectives is crucial to this work. In a previous study framed through SSM conducted with a number of alcoholics (Day writing as Akers-Smith, 2004), I had used unstructured interviews in order to elicit authentic experiences from research members. In reflecting upon the outcomes, though, it appeared that I had occasionally ‘contaminated’ this authenticity by imposing my own values onto the interview process. Whilst the instances of this were few and the impact on the overall outcomes of the study minimal, it was important to ensure that the outcomes of this particular inquiry was not compromised by a similar occurrence.

Interviews are more than technique but the technique must be learned and internalised (Graham, 2000, p. 4). The essential skill for a research is the ability to gather information without controlling it (May and Sidur, 1998). Based upon my learning from this previous study, I made overt efforts to increase my skill and technique in unstructured interviews by setting up a preliminary Field Study for this purpose.

A preliminary Field Study for Action Learning

Preliminary field studies are designed to test ideas and methods (Maxwell, 2009, p. 227) and such field work should be considered a design stage in itself (Richards and Morse, 2006, p. 79). These ideas from the literature constitute the underlying ethos of the Field Study carried out.

Since my interest here was to increase skill and technique in a particular area, I deliberately divorced the area of interest for the Field Study from Widening Participation.
On the other hand, I wanted to maintain a similar thread of appreciation and so identified an objective for the Study as to gain a greater appreciation of the factors affecting choice and consumption of tea and coffee. Four members agreed to participate and three unstructured interviews were conducted with each member over a period of five weeks. In reflecting on the outcomes of this Study, I had managed to overcome the previous problem of imposing my own values on members’ experiences. Instead, a slightly different problem was detected in that I had, on two occasions, unwittingly carried the experiences of one member into conversation with another member. This only became apparent through reflexive practice and such an occurrence in this inquiry would be unacceptable.

At this point, I deliberated whether further skill in unstructured interviews should be developed through conducting more preparatory Field Studies or whether semi-structured interviews offered a ‘safer’ option. Since the original Field Study had taken 12 weeks from inception to interpretation and documentation, there were very real practical implications bearing in mind the time-bound nature of this project.

Although I have had a wide experience of conducting semi-structured interviews in a variety of situations, I needed to ensure that semi-structured interviews would, in practice, provide adequate means of achieving the objective of this research. I therefore decided to continue designing the Framework for Practical Inquiry as semi-structured interview, trial it in a Field Study and then compare the outcomes with the outcomes of the unstructured interview Field Study.

Testing the Framework for Practical Inquiry through Action Learning

The Framework for Practical Inquiry was developed as discussed in the next section of this Chapter. Of interest here is the outcome of preliminary Field work carried out to compare
outcomes of the semi-structured interview process employed against the outcomes of the structured interview process work reported above.

In developing the Framework, I employed the services of several acquaintances and friends until it was sufficiently refined for testing in a ‘formal’ preliminary Field Study. In this instance, it was impossible to divorce the Study from Widening Participation in Higher Education since the Framework for Practical Inquiry into this was being tested. In the previous Chapter, I also identified that accessing suitable research members could be problematic (see page 261) so, for the purposes of testing the outcomes of semi-structured interviews only, a cohort of mature ‘WP students’ participated. The Field Study took almost 4 weeks from inception to documentation and the outcomes suggested that semi-structured interviews offered distinct advantages over unstructured. In reflecting upon the outcomes, I found that the Framework provided the greatest ability to guide members into discussing elements of lived experience most relevant to addressing the primary research question without compromising the authenticity of their perspectives.

The next section describes the Framework of Practical Inquiry developed and instituted as a result of this Action Learning work in the design process.

8.3. Gaining a greater appreciation of what?

Whilst the overall objective of the practical inquiry was to gain a greater appreciation of why more disadvantaged young people did not participate in Higher Education, it was considered inappropriate to centralise HE non-participation in the framework. A strategy for finding a way to address the central research question was based upon the work of Vickers.
A full account of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation is provided in Chapter 4 (see pages 155 - 156). Nonetheless, I feel it is worthwhile to reiterate the most important issues to provide the underlying precepts incorporated into the Framework for Practical Inquiry.

**Vickers’ notion of an Appreciative System revisited**

Underlying Appreciation is the fundamental idea that individuals are not teleological beings but are rather motivated by the maintenance, avoidance or modification of relationships with both self and others. At the heart of the Appreciative System is a two-stranded rope, an intertwining of events and ideas in history developed in mutual relation with each other (Vickers, 1965, p. 30). Individuals exist in 3 spheres: the physical world which must be survived; the social world shared with other communicating humans; and the inner, personal world constituted from experience of living within the other 2 spheres (Vickers, 1987a, p. 92). The inner – or appreciated – world of humankind is structured by a readiness to see, value and respond to situations in particular ways (Vickers, 1968, p. 59). However, individuals also have interests and concerns which will determine what they select for notice from the vast array of events and ideas available (Vickers, 1970, p. 98). Pragmatically this means that each individual will select only a small portion of ideas and events, dictated through the combination of experiences and interests as illustrated in Figure 55 below.

For this inquiry then, the issue is not why a member chose not to participate in HE and why, but whether they considered HE to be of sufficient interest for notice. Equally important is gaining an appreciation of both the experiences influencing the readiness to notice and the interests influencing what they selected for notice.
Figure 55 - The inner world limited by past experiences and interests

Figure 56 below provides an illustrative account of the full content of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation which goes much deeper than interests and experiences. At any particular time, an individual has an appreciative setting. This is basically their current situation, incorporating all previous and present events, ideas, individuals, groups, institutions, society, religion and culture in their history. Their experiences will be influenced by reality judgements. These are described as the skill of prediction, an ability to represent to oneself not only the present state of affairs, but also the possible future course of relevant events; complexity is reduced without distortion by excluding the inessential. Interests and concerns are influenced by value judgements. These assess what is as determined through reality judgements against judgements of what ought to be based upon internal values. Very often a mismatch between reality and value judgements exist, in which case an instrumental judgement is made to reduce the mismatch through application of personal resource such as time, attention, intellect, passion money or power. All three judgements, experiences and interests intertwine to reinforce or modify themselves or each other during each cycle of appreciation.
Although Vickers was neither an academic nor a philosopher, the ideas underpinning Appreciation are interpretive in nature. Many of the philosophical ideas discussed in Chapter 3 of this work are reflected in the Appreciative System. As also discussed in Chapter 4, Vickers work provided the basis upon which Checkland’s SSM was developed. Appreciation can be seen to provide a systemic account of lived experience which does not compromise the intellectual Framework of Ideas of Soft Systems Thinking in this work, making it suitable for adoption as the basis for developing the framework for practical inquiry.

8.4. Operationalizing Vickers’ notion of Appreciation for information gathering

The basic shape of the guidelines

Whilst Vickers’ ideas provide a convincing and holistic account of lived experience, it was obvious that operationalizing them into an effective framework for practical inquiry posed a number of challenges. The purpose of the framework would be to provide a flexible
guide for semi-structured interview rather than a list of set questions as would be used in structured interviews. The members should be allowed to articulate their lived experience without being ‘led’ into predetermined arenas, a balance difficult to achieve in semi-structured interviews. It was also important to consider the educational levels of research members which were not likely to be high, an issue which is returned to in more depth in Section 8.5. This dictated that the framework should be carefully constructed, easy to understand and simple to respond to.

The first task was to examine the model at Figure 56 to establish which elements could be easily articulated by members. Life situations (including past and present), experiences, interests and decisions were considered to be elements an individual could easily discuss, but reality, value and instrumental judgements less so. Reality judgements perceived what is the case of events and ideas, value judgements apply internally held standards to determine what ought to be the case, and instrumental judgements act to reduce the mismatch between the two. Pragmatically, it can be seen that an individual will attempt to move towards the ought to be through application of personal values, which can be articulated as attitudes and values.

The fundamental notion of relationship maintenance underpinning Appreciation shows how individuals are influenced in their lived experience by others who they encounter in the social world. Such relationships and how an individual is influenced by them are also easily articulated. A holistic representation of the basic shape of the framework for inquiry is shown at Figure 57 below.
Exploring vital elements

Revisiting Section 8.3, the framework could not centralise issues of Higher Education non-participation since Vickers’ notion of Appreciation illustrates that the option of participation in HE may never have been of sufficient interest to be considered. Determining whether this was the case would, of course, be important to the findings, but of greater interest was the life trajectories members had followed upon leaving compulsory education. How they had been influenced by previous experiences, internal values and other individuals (or groups or institutions) would also be important in gaining a greater appreciation of why they had not participated in HE.

The order in which questions are asked in well-planned semi-structured interviews is important and should be adhered to (Fox, 2009, pp. 5-6). It was important to determine whether members had considered Higher Education as an option and the reasons for that, but it was equally important to not lead them into thinking about HE early in the interview.
process since this was not the primary focus. It was therefore decided to cover HE consideration as the last item on the interview guide.

**Structuring the guidelines for information gathering**

Several attempts of structuring suitable guidelines for information gathering, iteratively tested against other design activities, culminated in the final proposal as illustrated in Figure 58. The guidelines were intended to be flexible, but the order in which the questions were asked was not. Additional questions could be asked by both researcher and member during the process and field notes taken to record responses.

**Conversation Guidelines**

1. What did you do when you left school?

2. What previous experiences do you think influenced you in making this decision?

3. What personal values or attitudes influenced your decision?

4. Who, or what, do you think were the most important influences on you at the time?

5. What were your personal circumstances at the time?

6. How have these changed since then?

7. Did you at any time ever consider going to University as an option?
8.5. Issues of communication

In Chapter 3 (pages 126 to 131), I discussed hermeneutical concepts of communication and the difficulties individuals experience in communicating in language. Communication is acknowledged to be generally problematical in all interpretive research since:

“ Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we report or code the answers” (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p. 645)

It was important for me to recognise that the potential levels of education of members may not be high. This was not a prejudicial judgement, since I also acknowledged that they may have engaged in Further Education or stayed at school beyond compulsory leaving age. However, I needed to ensure that those with a lower educational attainment could engage with the research and that the framework would be accessible for all members. This consideration was incorporated into the interview guidelines.

Difference in social class can be considered, to some extent, to be cultural in the respect that influences of local community will tend to be different. Cultural differences can also cause difficulties in communication (Sue and Sue, 2003). Information gathered in the interviews would represent the members’ interpretations of the world around them. I would then interpret these interpretations in considering the outcomes of the practical inquiry, resulting in what McAuley (2004, p. 192) refers to a “triple hermeneutic” (which also exists between the researcher and the reader). (Schutz, 1967) stressed the need for the researcher’s interpretations to be consistent with members’ interpretations since inconsistencies would result in a misunderstanding of the symbolic and constructed nature of social ‘reality’. It would, therefore, be essential to ensure that my interpretations
authentically represented the members’ lived experience. A means of achieving this was required to be incorporated into the Framework for Practical Inquiry.

Various options were available to ensure that I, as researcher, could achieve a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 302-306) with research members on our respective interpretations. A transcript could be prepared or a textual account constructed from the transcript and its authenticity established by the member with amendments made where possible. Essential to this process is understanding of each other, but understanding in language can be complicated, since “understanding …, is always a matter not only of interpretation but also of translation, since we can never assume we mean the same thing by our words that our partners in discussion mean.” (Davidson, 1984, pp. 431-432). This may be more marked in situations where social/cultural differences exist between partners in conversation.

Alternatively, a visual representation of members’ accounts could be developed and agreed as discussed below.

**Visual interpretations of members’ lived experiences**

I felt that it would be possible to negate the difficulties of textual interpretations described above by visually representing interpretations of members’ lived experience Not all knowledge is reducible to language (Eisner, 2008, p. 4) and visual representations can generally facilitate experiences that cannot easily be put into words (Gauntlet, 2007). Liebenberg (2009, pp. 444-445) argues that

“Experiences and meanings become tangible through visual representation and may be understood in ways that other conventional forms of communication do not necessarily allow. In this way, images may facilitate participant articulation of
lived realities in a manner that brings focus to research results better aligned with participant’s lives.”

The value of incorporating images in interviews as a device for creating greater depth to discussions and enhancing the quality of information gathered is widely evidenced (see, for example, Daniels, 2002; D. Harper, 2002; Pink, 2001; Gloor and Meier, 2000; Schwartz, 1989). They are also seen to be useful devices for highlighting individual’s values and expectations (Prosser, 1998; Kellerhear, 1993; Weisser, 1983). The evocative nature of images can allow access to different parts of human consciousness (Prosser and Loxley, 2008) and provide a more holistic method of communication making the “ordinary become extraordinary” (Weber, 2008, p. 45). A number of commentators have argued that exploring meanings communicated through visual rather than textual devices helps individuals to ‘see’ and think about what it is they are seeing, because images are argued to be visual representations of subjective experiences rather than objective statements (Grimshaw, 2001; Pink, 2001; Blyton, 1987; Beloff, 1985).

The potentially low levels of member educational levels was highlighted above, making this an attractive option since it could provide “adequate possibilities of expression” to those who have difficulty with written media (Niesyto, 2000, p. 139).

**Rich Pictures as a means of communication**

Rich Pictures were introduced in Chapter 5 (see page 191) as an integral component of SSM. Originally a metaphorical concept, Rich Pictures “quickly moved from being a metaphor to being a literal description of an account of the situation as a picture” (Checkland, 2007, p.25). They became “pictorial, cartoon-like representations of the problem situation that highlight the significant and contentious aspects in a manner most
likely to lead to original thinking” (Jackson, 2003, pp. 186-187). Their main purpose is to agree understanding and provoke debate between individuals in a situation.

Horan (2002, p. 728) considers the Rich Picture an excellent medium for communication and development of understanding due to the underlying ability to represent both concrete and abstract entities. They offer advantages over textual descriptions since complexity is retained, allowing all aspects to be processed in parallel whilst verbal descriptions can only be processed serially (Dallenbach, 1995, p. 49).

I experienced the power of Rich Pictures in both the ‘Alcoholic Study’ (Day, writing as Akers-Smith, 2004; Akers-Smith, 2003) and the preliminary Field Study reported above (see page 268). After each interview, a Rich Picture was developed to confirm mutual understanding between researcher and members. In both studies, 4 or 5 such Rich Pictures were developed, agreed and used as the basis of the following interview. Research members engaged deeply with the Rich Pictures and felt they had added value to the studies undertaken.

The advantages of Rich Pictures over textual descriptions led me to incorporate them into the framework as a device for communicating my interpretations of their lived experience to the members. However, a perceived weakness of the RP is its selectivity since it is the analyst who decides what is included (Flood and Jackson, 2003, p. 191; Waring, 1996, p. 48). For this inquiry, I, as researcher, would be responsible for selecting which elements of the member’s experience to include, leading to a danger of elements being added or neglected. In previous experience, I had managed to minimise the dangers of selectivity by taking care to incorporate all elements of information gathered, a strategy I intended to implement in this inquiry. Doing this thoroughly, however, involves protracted iterative negotiation between field notes and Rich Picture, making the process resource-intensive.
and thus potentially problematical for this resource-bound project. To simplify development of the Rich Pictures, I constructed a worksheet to summarise the details gathered in the research conversations to provide a holistic view as illustrated at Figure 59. The member would be requested to assist in the completion of this worksheet to ensure that the development of the Rich Picture was based upon member articulations of experience and to reduce selectivity as far as possible.

8.6. Determining the full research process

It was important to articulate the full research process for interaction with the research members; this is summarised in Figure 60 below.

An initial meeting would always take place for the research to be introduced and to allow me to become acquainted with the research member. This would provide opportunities for the prospective member to ask questions in addition to allowing me to ascertain that prospective members potentially met the membership profile. Following this, the prospective member would be asked if they still wished to participate in the research and if so, a meeting would be arranged for the research conversation to take place. The delay between initial meeting and conducting the conversation would also allow the member to re-evaluate their agreement to participate; it would also be made clear at every stage at the process that any member had the right to withdraw permission at any time.
Figure 59 - worksheet for incorporation in framework
8.7. Testing the waters and discovering sharks: an unintentional action learning cycle

In February 2009, an unintentional action learning phase of the inquiry occurred when what was originally conceived as being the first Field Study in the inquiry unfortunately became a prime example of what Sanders (1980) refers to as suffering the “rope burns” of
interpretive social inquiry. Having previously recognised the difficulties of accessing suitable members to participate in the inquiry, I decided to follow the advice of Irving (2006, p. 46) to “do it yourself”; whilst it may be necessary to use third parties to gain access to potential participants, Irving considers it best to use them as little as possible to actually make contact with potential participants since building the research relationship begins the moment the potential participant hears of the study.

At this time, the request for introductions to research members from the social network reaped its first recommendation from three friends, a policeman, a social worker and a community worker, These friends collectively recommended approaching a group of young people who, whilst known to be ‘rowdy’ were also stated to be ‘relatively good natured’; from the combined knowledge of the acquaintances, it appeared that they were likely to meet the member profile specification. Currently classed as Not In Employment or Education (NEET), the group of youths tended to “hang around” Gosport town centre together during work days and on Thursdays could always be found outside the unemployment office. Each of the acquaintances had mentioned the research project to the individuals in the group and they in turn had suggested they were amenable to taking part. Due to their various interactions with individuals in the group, none of the acquaintances deemed it appropriate to be involved by facilitating initial contact, so I decided to take a ‘cold access’ approach as suggested by Irving.

After observing the group for two weeks, I made a cold access approach in Gosport High Street at around 11:20 on 19th February 2009 with the intention of inviting them to participate in the research. The group consisted of 8 males and 6 females at the time of the approach. After introducing myself as a researcher from the University Portsmouth, I stated my reason for approaching them as being to invite them to participate in a research
project which I believed had already been mentioned to them. Unfortunately, I had failed to appreciate that the group had consumed significant quantities of alcohol prior to my approach so that, rather than being amenable to participation, they were aggressive and derisive. Initially taken by surprise by the personal derogatory remarks regarding my appearance, accent and supposed social class, I quickly sensed the mood of the group, hurriedly apologized for interrupting their day and attempted to extricate myself from the situation. By this time, though, the group had surrounded me and began pushing and trying to wrench my briefcase from my hand. At this point, a passing Community Support Officer intervened and I was able to escape what had become a difficult and potentially dangerous situation. The incident meant that the Field Study was over before it even began and any further activities had to be abandoned by necessity.

Learning the lessons for navigating dangerous waters

Whilst somewhat embarrassing to report, this initial attempt at serious interpretive inquiry generated valuable learning for conducting further Field Studies for the inquiry. It also necessitated a return to the Ethical Framework in which I had initially projected no risk to my own safety in conducting the research (see Chapter 6, page 235).

Certain arenas of research are deemed to be inherently dangerous, particularly criminology fieldwork where danger is seen as “an unavoidable part” due to the association of researchers with “high-risk people who are doing marginal things” (Jacobs, 2006, p. 157). Examples of dangerous situations abound such as: becoming involved in violent incidents whilst carrying out an ethnography of British Football hooligans (Armstrong, 1998); being caught up in aggravated assaults and bombings whilst researching the New York drug trade (Bourgois, 1995); and, narrowly avoiding entanglement in a dispute between street offenders (Wright and Decker, 1994). The most extreme example is that of Pryce who was
murdered in the course of research in Caribbean organised crime shortly after publication of his work on West Indian lifestyles in Britain (Pryce, 1979). From the outset, issues of inherent danger in conducting this particular inquiry were not considered to be relevant. In prospect, the research appeared to be innocuously harmless but this Field Study attempt revealed that this was not necessarily the case in practice. In retrospect, using a cold access approach towards an unknown group of individuals would always hold potential dangers for a researcher.

Jacobs (2006, p. 159) describes how he moved from a cold access to an interview-focussed approach as a result of being robbed at gunpoint when working with street-level drug dealers. His alternative strategy was to use third parties for introducing research participants to reduce the probability of dangerous situations arising. A similar approach appeared to be useful for this particular inquiry, leading me to reflect that following Irving’s advice had possibly been mistaken. For future studies, unless I had personal knowledge of suitable individuals, “informal” gatekeepers would be used to both identify and achieve access to potential members. It also seemed sensible to ensure that ‘safe’ locations were used for conducting meetings with previously unknown members. Although it was not possible to definitively state what constituted a ‘safe’ location, it was possible to state that this would not include a public street, town centre or outdoor venue (for example, a park or recreation area).

Finally, in order to safeguard my personal safety, no meetings would take place unless a third person had been informed of my whereabouts and the projected duration of the meeting.
8.8. Conclusion

Part One of this thesis was concerned with laying the groundwork for the addressing the research questions informing this inquiry. The primary research question emerged from initial investigations into the issue of Widening Participation in Higher Education as “Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?”. Part Two then proceeded to consider all the issues surrounding the mounting of practical social inquiry to address this question.

Chapter 6 firstly addressed ethical issues, revealing a major concern to be the risk of harm to research members arising from the centralisation of social class in Widening Participation. Whilst the Ethical Framework addressed many issues, possibilities for further minimising harm arose from careful development of both the research member profile, as discussed in Chapter 7, and the Framework for Practical Inquiry which has been detailed in this Chapter.

Figure 51 on page 218 illustrates the work carried out in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 as an iterative Action Learning Cycle. I have pointed out the difficulties in reporting the work involving frequent iterations between activities detailed in this part of the thesis to date; again, the tensions inherent in conducting Action Learning whilst being required to report the outcomes systematically so as to be understandable to the outside observer have been experienced here. Consequently, the complexities involved in this stage of the project are somewhat diluted in this Chapter.

Preliminary Field work was carried out through a number of studies designed to underpin the most appropriate choice between unstructured or semi-structured method of data
gathering. From this preparatory work, semi-structured interviews were found to be the most suitable method for addressing the requirements of the primary research question.

Vickers’ notion of Appreciation, which provided the initial guide to the direction the practical inquiry should take, was harnessed to guide the development of the Framework for Practical Inquiry. Issues of how a ‘fusion of horizons’ could be reached on authentic interpretation of data collected during the interview process with the research members were examined. The issue of class differences between researcher and researched has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis and it was seen as relevant again here. Educational differences were also highlighted as potentially problematic for coming to understanding in language. An alternative means for reaching a “fusion of horizons” which could largely eliminate language barriers was found in the technique of Rich Pictures. These will be used to represent members’ accounts of lived experience and agreed with member for authenticity.

Finally, I related how what should have been the first Field Study for the inquiry became an action learning stage which modified the means by which research members would be accessed. Whilst no risk to my personal safety had been foreseen prior to this Field Study, the cold access approach towards a number of potential research members resulted in a potentially dangerous situation. As a result of the learning achieved from this experience, I decided that no further cold access approaches would be made to potential research members but that ‘informal gatekeepers would be used instead.

Having developed an Ethical Framework (Chapter 6), a research member profile (Chapter 7) and a Framework for Practical Inquiry (this Chapter), the full research process was then articulated, including the activities and the order in which they should take place. Again, completion of interaction with research members would be through an Action Learning
Cycle, as illustrated in Figure 60 (page 283), until a satisfactory fusion of horizons on interpretation of authentic life experience could be reached. The remainder of Part Two of this thesis concerns the conducting of the research based upon the process and framework developed here.
Chapter 9. Taking the action for learning about the action

“Research is to see what everyone else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought”

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (1985, p. 14)

9.1. Introduction

The previous Chapters in Part Two of this Thesis have described the foundational work for the conducting of the practical inquiry. This included the formulation of an Ethical Framework (Chapter 6), arrangements for profiling and accessing research members (Chapter 7), determining the method of data gathering through preliminary Field Work, the development of a Framework for Practical Inquiry and articulating the full process of the practical work to be carried out (Chapter 8).

This Chapter is concerned with the actual research carried out, method of data analysis and the learning which occurred as a result of making sense of the research members’ authentic lived experiences. I firstly outline the difficulties experienced in accessing suitable members for participation in the research process. I had projected that this would be difficult in prospect, but in practice it was far more problematic that I had envisaged it would be. Following this, I provide details of the research members and the timeline over which the practical inquiry was conducted.

Whilst 48 research members actually took part in the practical inquiry, only 23 finally provided consent for their contributions to be included in the final product. These members were introduced as groups through informal gatekeepers and interviewed in three
separate Field Studies. I explain all aspects of the practical research, including preparations, interviews and interactions with both members and informal gatekeepers.

Having gathered all the data through the interviews and agree interpretations of lived experience with the research members through Rich Pictures, I was then faced with the difficulty of finding a suitable method of data analysis. The literature offered little guidance on how visual representations should be analysed so I explain the unique method developed for this inquiry. I conclude with demonstrating how this method was used for making sense of research members’ lived experiences.

9.2. Accessing and recruiting research members

Difficulties in accessing suitable individuals to participate in the research were foreseen during the design process and this proved to be the case in practice. Gorard, Smith, May, et al. (2006, p. 127) suggested that the reason many researchers selected existing ‘WP students’ to partake in research projects was due to the difficulties associated with accessing suitable ‘target WP’ individuals who are ‘HE non-participants’. As a result of this inquiry, I can empathise with this sentiment. Certainly, I had no problems in finding ‘WP students’ willing to engage with the preliminary Field Study (see page 269), but this was far from the case with the non-participants I wished to involve in the inquiry.

As a result of the abortive attempt at the first Field Study which resulted in a potentially dangerous situation (see Chapter 8, pages 283 -285), I made the decision to avoid similar incidents in the future by rejecting a cold access approach to potential participants. Instead, I resolved to use ‘informal gatekeepers’ culled from a wide social network as discussed previously (see page 288). The social network itself contained individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, in a wide range of employment situations and of a wide range
of educational attainments. In response to the initial appeal for assistance in the research, it appeared that I could potentially access a broad spectrum of individuals who would meet the member profile specification (outlined in Figure 54, page 264).

Despite this initial optimism, a period of waiting ensued during which these informal gatekeepers were attempting to engage potential members with the idea of participating in the inquiry. Finally, access to individuals and groups began to be offered by members of the social network and the first interview took place in April 2009 with an individual who later withdrew permission for inclusion in the research. Engagement of members who later withdrew from the project became a recurring theme throughout, usually at the point when the Rich Pictures had been developed for agreement. The most commonly cited reason for withdrawal was an unwillingness to reveal extremely private information in the published research, despite several assurances of anonymity. I return to this issue in Section 9.7 (see pages 304 to 306).

A total of 48 members participated in the research, introduced by informal gatekeepers as either individuals or in small groups. Of these, 18 withdrew and a further 7 were found to not meet the member profile specification during the research process. This resulted in 23 members being included in the final analysis. Although the withdrawal of such a high proportion of members resulted in a great deal of wasted effort in relation to gaining a greater understanding of the main research question, it also afforded opportunities for learning about the conduct of social inquiry and I discuss this further in Chapter 10.

Due to the member withdrawals, the total duration of the practical inquiry was protracted beyond the time first envisaged in the research planning phase. Use of resources in terms of time and money was also much heavier than originally foreseen, as new members needed to be accessed to fill the void created by the withdrawals. The final 23 members
included in the research were interviewed within 3 separate Field Studies as reported below.

Overall, the 3 Field Studies included in this work were completed with a total of 29 members, 23 of whom were considered ‘suitable’ for inclusion in the research where suitability is defined as meeting the member profile criteria. Although introductions were made to the members in a group situation, the actual research was conducted on an individual basis as decided early in the project (see page 182). During the initial group interactions, the groups were invited to choose a name by which the Field Study would be known and these names are used throughout to refer to each Study (the Builder Boys, the Yummy Mummies and the Shelf Stackers respectively).

9.3. The research members

The abortive Rowdy Crowd Study (name allocated by me) detailed in the previous Chapter was actually numbered as Study 1 but is not included here since it became part of the action learning cycle for research design rather than the research results. Consequently, the studies included are numbered from 2-4. The final membership comprised 12 males and 11 females between the ages of 17 and 29. 18 members resided in a Gosport Quintile 1 neighbourhood and 5 in Quintile 2, which are designated as the 2 most socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods targeted by the Widening Participation policy (see discussion on page 64). Other general attributes of the members are detailed below; for those considered unsuitable for inclusion in the final results, the element of their profile which did not meet the specified criteria is shown in red. The full member profiles according to the specification are contained below in Figure 61.
It was always my intention to identify research members by use of a pseudonym in the published research since I felt that identifying them by number had a dehumanizing undertone. However, during the progress of the practical inquiry, I could not know the names of all members whose contributions would be included in the final product. To overcome this difficulty, I allocated a number to each member according to the Field Study to which they belonged; number allocation was random to prevent other members being able to identify a peer through knowledge of the order in which interviews had taken place. Pseudonyms were then assigned after the entire research process was complete. A linkage between the number allocated on Rich Pictures and assigned pseudonym is included in the chart.

9.4. Timeline

Figure 62 (page 297) shows the timeline of the reported studies. During these periods, other research was also being carried out with members who later withdrew permission for their contributions to be included in the outcomes. The total duration of the practical inquiry as reported was approximately 17 months, some 5 months longer than projected in the design planning stage. The research available to be reported also commenced 3 months after the projected date, resulting in the practical inquiry finishing 8 months after the data assigned in the plan.
**Study 2**  
**The Builder Boys Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gosport Residence/ Quintile</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>In Compulsory Education?</th>
<th>Participation in HE?</th>
<th>Employed or NEET (E or N)</th>
<th>Suitable for inclusion?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>G/2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>G/2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>G/2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>G/3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>G/4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study 3**  
**The Yummy Mummies Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gosport Residence/ Quintile</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>In Compulsory Education?</th>
<th>Participation in HE?</th>
<th>Employed or NEET (E or N)</th>
<th>Suitable for inclusion?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Irana</td>
<td>G/4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Gosport Residence / Quintile</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>In Compulsory Education?</td>
<td>Participation in HE?</td>
<td>Employed or NEET (E or N)</td>
<td>Suitable for inclusion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>G/2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>G/1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>G/4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>WITHDREW PERMISSION FOR INCLUSION IN RESEARCH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 61 - profiles of members from the 3 field studies
Figure 62 - Timeline of reported studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prep 2</td>
<td>Conduct 2</td>
<td>Doc 2</td>
<td>Amal RP 2</td>
<td>Prep 3</td>
<td>Conduct 3</td>
<td>Doc 3</td>
<td>Amal RP 3</td>
<td>Prep 4</td>
<td>Conduct 4</td>
<td>Doc 4</td>
<td>Amal RP 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.5. Preparation for Field Studies

Access to members for each of the Field Studies was arranged by a contact from my social network acting as an ‘informal gatekeeper’. Ethical issues connected to this access strategy are discussed earlier in Chapter 6 (page 288). Agrosino (2007, p. 8) describes informal gatekeepers as “merely people who are already insiders and who agree to introduce researchers to the community and vouch for their trustworthiness and the value of the proposed research”, which is the role the contacts played in this inquiry. I structured the research to ensure that the informal gatekeepers did not coerce potential members to participate and that their own involvement in the inquiry did not extend beyond facilitating introductions. Despite this, an issue did emerge later as a result of gatekeeper involvement and, whilst I did not feel this compromised the fundamental ethicality of the inquiry, it is significant to the conduct of the inquiry as discussed later at on pages 301 to 302.

The practical inquiry commenced when an informal gatekeeper indicated that they had identified individuals potentially interested in participating in the research which triggered the necessary preparatory work. Firstly, I entered into conversation with the gatekeepers to reaffirm they were aware of the member profile criteria and that potential members were likely to meet the criteria. Initial meeting dates and locations were then arranged, although this tended to be a protracted process since finding a suitable date and time when all individuals who had expressed an interest in participating could be available proved to be somewhat difficult.

9.6. Building and maintaining rapport

The establishment of rapport is generally agreed to be essential in qualitative interviews (see, for example, Minichiello, 2008, p. 179; J. M. Miller and Tewkesbury, 2001, p. 55;
Oakley, 1982, p. 58). There are many definitions of what rapport is, or should be (see, for example, Waghmare, 2012, p. 28; Faranda and Clarke, 2004, p. 274; Sandal and Adams, 2001, p. 1; Maag, 1997, p. 115). From these various perspectives, rapport can be defined as the ability to build and maintain harmonious relationships with others in a climate of integrity and mutual trust and respect. Once established, it allows individuals to communicate with each other at a deep level (Waghmare, 2012, p. 28).

Despite differing perspectives on how rapport can be precisely defined, there is agreement that rapport is achieved through a number of stages (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; W. L. Miller and Crabtree, 1999; Spradley, 1979):

- **Apprehension** bis experienced by the interviewee in the initial stages of the interview process, due to the unfamiliarity of, for example, the research setting, the interviewer and even the research process itself.

- **Exploration** then occurs when the interviewee begins to engage in in-depth discussion.

- **Co-operation** develops as the interviewee becomes more comfortable and both interviewer and interviewee lose their fear of offending each other.

- Finally, the interviewee engages in participation, engaging fully in the research process as an equal partner.

It was important for this study that rapport could be established with the members in order to gain a deep insight into their lived experience. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 316) warn that, unless a protracted interaction with the research members is to occur through a series of interviews, rapport must be established quickly for in-depth interviews.
I consequently arranged initial meetings with members in groups rather than on an individual basis; by interacting in a social situation with the potential members in a group setting, I hoped to start building rapport to reduce the apprehension they might feel in the interview situation itself. I also felt that explaining the nature of the research and member involvement in a group situation was likely to elicit more questions than explaining it to potential members individually. This would mean they would have more information on which to base their informed consent at a later stage. A social setting would additionally allow me to gently probe the potentiality of individuals to meet the member profile criteria in advance to reduce the necessity of ‘weeding out’ non-suitable members at a later stage.

The informal gatekeepers were present for the beginning of these meetings. Irving (2006, p. 46) urges inquirers to avoid the use of gatekeepers whenever possible, believing they “seldom do justice to the nature of someone else’s study”. My experience of the informal gatekeepers who facilitated access to the potential members was directly opposite to this. I have highlighted the difficulties associated with accessing and recruiting socially disadvantaged individuals for participation in Widening Participation research several times throughout this thesis. Both Sixsmith, Boneham and Goldring (2003) and Cree, Kay and Tisdall (2002) agree that informal gatekeepers invariably play a role in assisting researchers to access members of socially disadvantaged groups. Indeed, Cree et al. (2002) believe that without the co-operation of informal gatekeepers “there can be no research” and this was my experience. This, however, is not the issue to which Irving (2006) is referring. In his statement, he is suggesting that gatekeepers cannot adequately communicate the ethos and importance of a researcher’s study to the potential research members. This, he believes, will jeopardise the researcher’s ability to recruit members to participate in the study and this is where my experience differs most greatly from his.
Reasons for an individual agreeing to participate in research are seen to include whether they: will gain from the process (Bloom, 1996); find the process interesting (Berg, 2001); believe their personal experiences will be validated (Hillier and Diluzio, 2004); or be enabled to altruistically help others (Lowes and Gill, 2006). Patel, Doku and Tennakoon (2003, p. 234), on the other hand, recognise that “few participants will take part in research unless they can identify with and understand its validity and relevance”. For a researcher embarking upon a practical inquiry, it can never be entirely clear to what extent potential research members will identify with the research or understand its validity and relevance to their own lives. This is especially likely to be the case if the research does not suggest it can result in some benefit for the members such as tangible improvement in their circumstances or the promise of financial reward for participation.

In contrast to Irving’s statement, the informal gatekeepers proved to be useful in not only providing initial access to the members but also in engaging the members with the idea of the research, although the method by which this was achieved was only revealed to me after the interactions with the members had been completed. Each of the informal gatekeepers was aware of difficult and sometimes harrowing circumstances I had experienced and how I had managed to turn my own life around. During discussions about the proposed research, potential members had been as interested in who the researcher was as in what the research was about. Whilst answering questions, the gatekeepers had selected portions of my life experience they considered the potential members would be able to relate to at a fundamental level. In extracting excerpts of my experience relevant to the potential members, rather than making the research relevant, they succeeded in making me as researcher relevant. According to the accounts of the gatekeepers, these revelations engendered an interest in participating in the project which hitherto had been somewhat lukewarm. They also acted to break down any tensions which could have arisen as a result
of social class differences between the researcher and researched (discussed earlier in Chapter 6, page 238).

This strategy of engaging the sympathies of the potential members in order to secure their participation in the inquiry carries with it some issues which initially caused me to question the ethicality of using information extracted under such conditions. Once again, I visited the literature to determine how other social inquirers had dealt with similar circumstances but could discover no guidance. Sixsmith et al. (2003), however, reported employing a strategy of using researchers with similar experiences to their socially disadvantaged research members to elicit sympathy/empathy and so establish rapport. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 76) find that rapport is established more quickly if members believe you are familiar with and sympathetic to their world. On reflection, I felt that the gatekeepers’ actions were no more unethical or duplicitous than Sixsmith’s strategy since both intended only to create familiarity between researcher and researched. Nevertheless, I am aware that the recruitment of research members cannot be declared to be entirely ‘clean’.

At the time of the first meetings, I was aware that the potential members behaved in a more familiar manner rather than maintaining a distance as I had anticipated. At the time, being unaware of the gatekeepers’ prior revelations, I attributed this to the gatekeepers’ participation in the initial socialisation but now believe that this was due to their earlier actions. The easy familiarity I enjoyed with the potential members as a result rendered the initial meetings both useful and animated. Once conversation had begun to flow, the gatekeepers (with the exception of the gatekeeper who also became a research member) removed themselves from further participation.
Whilst I did manage to introduce the research as planned, the conversation and questions asked in the initial group meetings was of a more personal nature. The potential members appeared to be more interested in getting to know me than understanding the research. Oakley (1982, p. 41) suggests that inquirers must be prepared to invest their own identity in the research process; to some extent, my identity had already been invested by the gatekeepers in advance of my physical presence. In answering the personal questions, I was aware I was establishing a deeper rapport at the expense of providing the potential members with more information about the inquiry for their informed consent. However, the personal nature of the conversation created a reciprocal opportunity for me to find out more about the individuals in the group. This meant I was able to ascertain which members of the group were less likely to meet the member profile specification and so reduce the necessity to ‘weed out’ members at a later stage.

The duration of the social interaction in the initial meetings varied according to the group. I spent a total of 5 hours talking and playing with the children with the Yummy Mummies, 3.5 hours with the Shelf Stackers but only 1 hour with the Builder Boys which had been allocated to coincide with the lunch period in a segregated area in the rather basic canteen. During this time, I collected names and contact numbers for arranging interviews with those who expressed an interest in participating and answered any questions, both personal and professional, the potential members asked. It was at this stage, with all the potential members together, that the names for the individual studies were decided.

Each interview commenced with further discussion regarding the nature of the research and, in most cases, general conversation to ensure that the member felt comfortable with the process. The process itself was also explained and the members provided with a copy of a blank conversation guide, a blank worksheet and a variety of examples of Rich
Pictures taken from similar interviews carried out in my previous research study with alcoholics (Day writing as Akers-Smith, 2004). The Rich Pictures invariable engendered some lively questions and I felt that this helped to relax the members prior to the interviews taking place. Once members were comfortable, the interviews followed the guidelines (illustrated in Figure 58 on page 276). In many cases, the wording expressed in the guidelines was modified or elaborated on to assist the understanding of the members.

Although it is generally the case that members experience the apprehension stage during the early stages of interview, I found that the majority appeared to have entered into the exploration stage by this time, and moved quickly into the co-operation stage. Conversation tended to flow easily and the members divulged personal experiences which were very personal in nature.

9.7. “Concerned of Gosport”

Anonymity was a particular issue for nearly all of the members throughout the research process. I gave consistent reassurance that this would be protected and outlined the procedures I had set out in the Ethical Framework to show how it would be protected. It became evident that, whilst members were concerned about anonymity from the outset, the issue became more significant to them at the point where the Rich Pictures were agreed. According to West and Byrne (2009, p. 313), it is commonly understood that participants in research interviews will often reveal more than they intended to, and this appeared to be the reason for the greater concern towards the end of the research process rather than the beginning. Members openly revealed experiences of a sensitive and sometimes potentially incriminating nature during interviews and some members appeared to later regret this openness, the depth of which only became apparent to them during the construction of the Rich Pictures. It was at this stage of the research that the majority of the withdrawals
occurred; whereas members had been content to reveal sensitive information during interview, they appeared to be surprised by the amount of information they had actually revealed when confronted with a draft Rich Picture. Those who withdrew at this stage expressed concern that they could be identified from the information given despite the mechanisms in place for protecting anonymity and confidentiality.

Of particular significance here is the participation of members as part of a group, which caused the greatest degree of concern. Despite the mechanisms put into place such as random numbering and use of pseudonym to ensure that group members were less likely to be able to identify each other from the Rich Pictures, members were aware that their peers probably knew enough about them to be able to infer their identity. It became clear that some members had revealed information to me that they had not previously made available to others and did not want to be uncovered as a result of the research. Stacey (1991) suggests that the exposing of experiences in qualitative research creates an actual potential for harm towards members and that was the case here, leading to the withdrawal of several members from the inquiry.

The reason for the majority of withdrawals from the research acted as a salutary lesson for me as social inquirer. Whilst I believed I had considered all aspects of anonymity and confidentiality that were likely to arise, I had neglected to acknowledge the particular issue of individual participation as part of a group. For the remainder of the participants who were concerned about anonymity, I felt I had no choice but to inform them of the reason why others had withdrawn. I was greatly relieved that 23 members agreed to be included in the outcomes of the inquiry despite this obvious problem.
9.8. Analysing the data

Having collected the data from the members who were willing to be included, I was confronted with the issue of how it should be analysed and interpreted to remain congruent with the underlying ethos of recoverability of the research. Whilst it has been my concern in Part One of this thesis (pages 36 to 40) to establish the appropriateness of F (Framework of Ideas) to inquire into A (Area of Interest) whilst remaining congruent with M (Methodology), I found the grounds on which to do the same with this stage of the inquiry somewhat more difficult to navigate.

For more ‘traditional’ quantitative studies, where the collected data is in the form of narrative accounts, the choice of data analysis methods is wide. A common strategy is a coding strategy, whereby data are collated into categories or themes which are seen to recur through the data. Data collection and analysis will usually be undertaken simultaneously (Suter, 2012, p. 346) with a view to firstly coding data into topics then classifying the topics to develop them into categories. From this patterns are sought. This is the general premise of Grounded Theory which was rejected as a method for this study (see Chapter 5, page 181). Coding categories are a means of sorting the data collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data”(Bogdan and Bicklen, 2003, p. 161), a technique known as ‘fracturing the data’ (Strauss, 1987). The searching for patterns in coding strategies, cannot reconstitute diverse contextual connections which are lost in original categorization (Tesch, 1993, p. 303). This means that the strategy as a whole will “obscure that nebulous quality called ‘context’” (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, pp. 134-135).

The maintenance of context, the set of relationships and phenomena which are interrelated in both time and space, is a vital element in systemic analysis and interpretation. An
alternative strategy which preserves context is a *connecting* strategy. According to B. Miller (2012), the main method of data analysis used here is a narrative approach involving the construction of a detailed story from the raw data. This assumes that the raw data is in a textual format, which is not the case in this inquiry where the raw data is presented visually in Rich Pictures, making such an approach both inappropriate and nonsensical.

Fuenmayor (2001, p. 19) stated that “reason is thus conceived by Kant as holistic thinking, compelled by the need to provide systemic accounts”. In this systemic inquiry, the issue was how to provide such a systemic account from the Rich Pictures representing the raw data. Tufte (1983, p. 191) maintains that what is looked for in visual display of information is a clear portrayal of complexity to provide visual access to the subtle and the difficult. As Marguiles and Maal (2002, p. 134) state, “visual processes are a powerful way of bringing to the surface that which we know, but we don’t realize we know!”.

This echoes my previous experience of using Rich Pictures in systemic studies (Bednar and Day, 2009).

Konecki (2011, p. 134) acknowledges that the interpretation of pictures and visual data has been difficult to elaborate. For this study, extensive review of the literature to identify potentially suitable approach for the analysis and interpretation of Rich Pictures uncovered methods such as *Visual Mapping Strategy* which is more concerned with representing analysed textual data in visual diagrams, the converse of what was required here. Apart from analysis of pictures as used in art appreciation, for example, data analysis methods relevant to this study appeared not to exist.

In the absence of useful guidance from the literature, I took the initiative to develop a data analysis method specific to this inquiry which would remain faithful to both M and F,
ensure that holism and context were retained, taking into account the advice of Salmon (1992., p. 84):

“Methodological decisions entail coming to terms not only with one’s personal situation, values and beliefs, but also with the whole intellectual ethos which pervades research … one aspect of this involves standing up inwardly to conventional research assumptions and ceasing to be intimidated by ‘big name’ researchers.”

9.9. Negotiating the data analysis gap

Bell and Morse (2007, p. 105) use Rich Pictures widely in the arena of sustainable development, stating:

“…we can imagine an ‘holistic’ project as the exact opposite of the conventional and this would certainly constitute the discovery of an alternative and acroamatic story as opposed to the conventional, dominant project narrative.”

Conventional narratives often involve researchers recounting portions of interviews to demonstrate sensemaking of the research data. To do so here would compromise the original rationale to circumvent barriers of language by using Rich Pictures as discussed in Section 8.5. It would also negate the systemic lens applied to the inquiry. Rather than examine individual accounts of lived experience, I was more concerned with gaining a holistic overview of the totality of the members’ combined experiences. I therefore adopted a strategy similar to that adopted during exploration of the wider problematic situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education as contained in Chapter 2; this involved exploring significant themes and presenting each in individual Rich Pictures which were then amalgamated at the end of the Chapter to provide a holistic Rich Picture representation of the whole problem space. My intention was to develop a Rich Picture to represent the amalgamated experiences of research members. In practice, creating a single
unifying Rich Picture from 23 individual Rich Pictures was a daunting task. Upon completion of a first draft, it was unclear whether all issues, elements and relationship had been included and whether the relationships had been configured correctly. To improve the quality of data analysis, I regressed this stage of the method to include an interim stage during which an amalgamated Rich Picture was developed for each of the Field Studies. To illustrate this process, I have included selected Rich Pictures from each Field Study followed by the associated amalgamated Rich Picture (see Figure 63 to Figure 71).

Using these amalgamated Rich Pictures, I then created a first-cut ‘amalgamated amalgamated Rich Picture’ which I compared against the first draft of the overall Rich Picture as described above. The final holistic representation of the data collected in the practical inquiry was developed through a constant renegotiation between the individual Rich Pictures, the amalgamated Rich Pictures and the two drafts created from the two methods employed. Appendix D contains Rich Pictures and associate worksheets for all Field Studies. The final Rich Picture from which the data analysis was performed is illustrated at Figure 72.
Figure 65 - The Builder Boy's Study amalgamated RP
Figure 68 - The Yummy Mummy Study amalgamated RP
Figure 69 - Pete's RP

Figure 70 - Lucy's RP
Figure 71 - The Shelf Stackers Study amalgamated RP
Figure 72 - The Holistic Representation of the Practical Inquiry
The data analysis method and interpretation strategy was then adapted from Stage 3 of SSM (outlined on pages 192 to 194). In Stage 3, Relevant Systems, or issues deemed to be relevant for further consideration, are selected from the overall situation represented in the Rich Picture from which Root Definitions and CATWOE analyses are developed. An exact mirroring of the tools and techniques employed in SSM Stage 3 for making sense of the members’ experiences was not possible; the main objective of defining a Relevant System is to uncover a particular issue for debate and possible change. In analysing this data, I was examining ‘what was’ in the experience of the members rather than ‘what could have been’ or ‘what could be’. Retrospective transformation of lived experience is an obvious impossibility.

For this reason, I created a notion of a Relevant Issue with an associated MA(T)WO(E) analysis adapted from the original Stage 3 techniques of Relevant Systems and CATWOE Analysis as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATWOE Analysis</th>
<th>MA(T)WO(E) analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong> Customer – Beneficiary of Victim of the system</td>
<td><strong>M</strong> This will always be the member plus any other members who could benefit or be a victim of the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> Actors in the situation</td>
<td><strong>A</strong> Actors in the situation (no change from CATWOE). Those people who were involved in making this issue an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> Transformation Process the system could achieve based upon the worldview rendering the system relevant</td>
<td><strong>T</strong> will always be the transformation of a research member Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W</strong> Weltanschauung; the worldview that makes the system relevant</td>
<td><strong>W</strong> Weltanschauung (no change from CATWOE) – the worldview that makes this issue relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O</strong> Owner of the system – who could make it happen, modify it or stop it from happening</td>
<td><strong>O</strong> Owner of the issue. This defines all those who could have changed the issue or prevented the issue from being such</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong> Environmental constraints</td>
<td><strong>E</strong> the constraints will always be the lived experience of the member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My treatment of the T (transformation process) perhaps requires some further explanation. Each research member is considered a potential participant in Higher Education (see Chapter 7, page 255). They are currently non-participants in Higher Education. The T
describes the contribution of the Relevant Issue which has transformed the members from potential Higher Education participants to current Higher Education non-participants as illustrated in Figure 73.

9.10. A brief example of the subtle difference between a Relevant System and a Relevant Issue and the construction of a Root Definition

To elucidate the subtle differences between a Relevant System and attendant CATWOE and a Relevant Issue with associated MA(T)WO(E), it is useful to consider the first Relevant Issue identified. This was defined as:

**Relevant Issue 1 - HE: an issue not worthy of notice.**

It is evident from the holistic representation of the members’ experiences that the majority did not deem Higher Education not an issue worthy of notice from the environment. As such, HE participation could not enter into their consciousness and become any part of their decision-making process after leaving compulsory education. This is highly relevant to the main objective of the research which is to gain a greater appreciation of why more young, socially disadvantaged individuals did not take advantage of the opportunity to participate in HE as afforded by the Widening Participation initiative.
Mirroring SSM Stage 3 through the identification of Relevant Systems presents two options of how such Relevant Systems could be conceptualised. In the first option, all issues identified as Relevant Systems would be conceived as problematic and the CATWOE analysis used to theorise how improvement could be made through transformation. The Weltanschauung would specify the viewpoint which makes the system relevant – for example, although the Government would undoubtedly consider the issue of Higher Education not being deemed worthy of notice as problematical, the members did not. Using such an analysis strategy would decentralise the lived experience of the members by giving primacy to those who would consider their experiences problematical, regardless of the members’ Weltenschauungen. Not only would this undermine the objective of gaining a greater appreciation of the members’ lived experience, it would also present a real danger of subscribing to a Moral Underclass Discourse of non-participation (discussed in great detail on pages 83 to 86).

The second option would be to adopt a research perspective by defining the Relevant System as A system to gain a greater appreciation of why members did not consider Higher Education worthy of notice. Such an approach would again decentralise the member by moving focus onto the researcher and so undermine the objective of gaining a greater appreciation of the members’ lived experience.

To illustrate the possible approaches, I have constructed dual conceptions of how Stage 3 could conceptualise Relevant Systems from the two perspectives described as opposed to using a strategy of identifying Relevant Issues. Root Definitions developed from the CATWOE/MA(T)WO(E) analyses are included as shown below in Figure 74.
### Relevant System:
A system to ensure young socially disadvantaged individuals deem HE worthy of notice in order to take advantage of the Widening Participation policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>Member; Government; HE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; HE; Schools; Aimhigher; Member’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>HE: an issue not worthy of notice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relevant System:
A system to gain a greater appreciation of why members did not deem HE worthy of notice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue not worthy of notice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member; government; HE;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### HE: an issue worthy of notice

> Holistic representation of members’ lived experience can provide the researcher with a means of gaining a greater appreciation of why members did not deem HE worthy of notice.

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue worthy of notice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O</th>
<th>Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Representation of members’ lived experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue not worthy of notice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>This transformation will always be as follows and is therefore not expressed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue worthy of notice

| W | Making a choice of whether to participate in HE or not can only take place if an individual deems the issue worthy of notice for further consideration which was not the case for 21 of 23 research members. Therefore, only 2 members were sufficiently interested by the issue to deem it worthy of further notice to enable decision-making around HE participation to occur. There were no consistent reasons which could be attributed for members not considering HE worthy of notice outside the totality of their lived experience. |

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue not worthy of notice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O</th>
<th>Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Results of aspiration raising efforts of Aimhigher and other HE-related bodies and activities including schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relevant Issue:
HE: an issue worthy of notice

| W | The constraint will always be the total lived experience of the research member and is therefore not expressed. |

320
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Relevant System:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relevant System:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relevant Issue:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A system to ensure young socially disadvantaged individuals deem HE worthy of notice in order to take advantage of the Widening Participation policy</td>
<td>A system to gain a greater appreciation of why members did not deem HE worthy of notice</td>
<td>HE: an issue not worthy of notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Root Definition:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Root Definition:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Root Definition:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A system for ensuring that young, socially disadvantaged research members deem HE an issue worthy of notice in the view that those who do not deem HE worthy of notice possess low aspirations which much be raised in order for them to consider participation in HE and so fulfill their responsibilities in regard to the rights afforded to them by the WP in HE policy. The system is owned by the Government and operated by the research member, the Government, Aimhigher, HE, schools and the member’s parents for the benefit of the member, the Government and HE. It is constrained only by the Results of aspiration raising efforts of Aimhigher and other HE-related bodies and activities including schools.</td>
<td>A system owned and operated by the researcher for the benefit of the researcher to gain a greater appreciation of why members did not deem HE worthy of notice in the view that holistic representation of members’ lived experience can provide the researcher with a means of gaining such a greater appreciation The system is constrained by the representation of the members’ lived experiences</td>
<td>An issue owned by the research member which acts to victimise both the Government and HE in the view that making a choice of whether to participate in HE or not can only take place if an individual deems the issue worthy of notice for further consideration which was not the case for 21 of 23 research members. Therefore, only 2 members were sufficiently interested by the issue to deem it worthy of further notice and to enable decision-making around HE participation to occur. There were no consistent reasons which could be attributed for members not considering HE worthy of further notice outside the totality of their lived experience. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 74 - Different analyses of Relevant Systems and Relevant Issues
From this somewhat simplistic example, mirroring SSM Stage 3 identification of Relevant Systems analysed using a traditional CATWOE can be seen to be insufficient in a data analysis and interpretation strategy. In contrast, a Relevant Issue can be defined as an issue which is deemed to be relevant to the primary research question. Adapting the methodology to allow Relevant Issues to be identified and analysed through a restricted MA(T)WO(E) leads to the development of Root Definitions which can help to gain a greater appreciation of the members’ lived experience which in turn can assist in gaining a greater appreciation of why more young, socially disadvantaged individuals do not take advantage of the right to participate in Higher Education as extended by the Widening Participation policy.

9.11. Making sense of research members’ experience

The Rich Picture at Figure 72 (page 316) was used as the basis for making sense of the members’ lived experience by identifying Relevant Issues which were then subjected to a MA(T)WO(E) analysis as discussed above. The imposed necessity of using social contacts as informal gatekeepers for accessing research members resulted in a fairly ‘randomised’ mix of individuals introduced in groups. Although it can be seen that group members have at least one major attribute in common, (for example being either a construction worker, a young unmarried mother or employed by a particular supermarket), the life trajectories of the individual members as a whole are both diverse and similar at the same time. Twelve Relevant Issues were identified from the holistic representation of the members’ lived experience, the first of which, *HE: An option worthy of notice?* has been discussed above. Other Relevant Issues are discussed briefly below with supporting
information provided in Appendix E. I return to deeper consideration of these issues in the following Chapter.

**Relevant Issue 2 - Perceptions of childhood**

Whilst analysing the data for development of the holistic Rich Picture at Figure 72, perceptions of home life as either happy or unhappy emerged as a significant influence within members’ life experiences. The majority of the members overtly discussed such a perception and, for those who did not, it was implicit in their accounts. 10 of the members reported a happy childhood, 9 reported a unhappy childhood and the remaining 4 discussed a shift in perception due to the occurrence of particular circumstances. Figure 75 provides the correspondence of perceptions as emerging from the data. As can be seen from the Rich Picture from which this data analysis is taken, so significant does the influence of perception of childhood and home life appear to be, it is centralised as an issue from which other issues emanate. These are identified as separate Relevant Issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of childhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HAPPY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Billy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Harry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Joe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Bethany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Daisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Fiona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Oliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNHAPPY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Charlie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Greg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Ian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Holly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Julie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Lucy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHANGING PERCEPTIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Alicia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Claire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Pete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy to unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy to unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy to happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy to unhappy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 75 - Member’s perceptions of childhood
**Relevant Issue 3 - Factors contributing to perceptions of unhappiness in childhood.**

In exploring the members’ experiences of childhood, Figure 72 indicates a correlation between incidences of parental alcohol abuse, mental illness, sexual abuse, violence, premature death, criminal activity and a familial ‘tradition’ of pregnancy in perceptions of unhappiness. These issues are variously reported to be more prevalent in areas of high deprivation either as an effect or cause of social exclusion (See, for example, Khalifeh, Hargreaves, Howard and Birdthistle, 2013; Delargy, Shenker, Manning and Rickard, 2010; FPA, 2010; Levy and O’Hara, 2010; Directgov, 2009; House of Commons Health Committe, 2009; Staggs, Long, Mason, Krishnan and Riger, 2007; Ribbens and Jessop, 2005; R. Room, 2005). Growing up on a council estate also emerged as a particular factor contributing to childhood dissatisfaction. Members in this cluster often reported having been adversely affected by several of these interrelated factors; this is not surprising as there is well-documented evidence of the multiple harms which may result from alcohol abuse including mental health issues, (for family members in addition to the alcohol abuser), criminal activity, violence and broken homes (see, for example, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2004, p. 9). A confounding factor for perceptions of childhood arises for members forced to live in non-parental care as a result of one or more of the above parental incidences, further deepening the sense of unhappiness in childhood.

Interestingly, there appeared to be no specific factors which could be deemed to contribute similarly to perceptions of happiness in childhood.
Relevant Issue 4 - The influence of role models

Role models emerged from the analysis as being either positive or negative dependent upon members’ perceptions of childhood. Positive role models were attached to members reporting happy childhoods. For those reporting unhappier experiences of childhood, parents and friends were more likely to be act as negative influences on life trajectories. It is also the case that whilst ‘happy’ members experienced affirmative influences from positive role models in early childhood, ‘unhappy’ members only appeared to find similarly positive role models at a later point in their life experience. This was particularly true for members who wished to ‘escape’ the consequences of their own behaviour such as criminality and alcohol abuse.

Relevant Issue 5 - A distinction in values and attitudes

During the research process, I was frequently humbled by the accounts members gave of their life struggles, particularly those who reported unhappy childhoods. The language and demeanour of these members during the interview process is reflected in the sharp distinction of members’ values and attitudes based upon their childhood perceptions emerging from Figure 73. Those reporting a happy childhood repeatedly articulated values and attitudes such as “proud”, “generous”, “honest”, “work ethic” and “ambitious”, suggesting a positive sense of self. In contrast, those from an unhappy background used terms such as “fearful”, “selfish”, “dishonest” and “angry”, suggesting a weaker sense of self-worth.

The role of principal caregivers in the early experiences of childhood as determinants of an individual’s self-worth and emotional well-being have long been recognised by psychologists (see, of example, the works of Sroufe, 1978; Erikson, 1963). Early social
experiences and the perception of acceptance or rejection closely correlated with happy or unhappy childhood perceptions respectively, are translated into a basic sense of worthiness or unworthiness. This, in turn, is theorised to influence later life trajectories (Rosenberg, 1986) which can be witnessed in practice from members’ accounts of their life experiences in this study.

Relevant Issue 6 - Ambition, aspiration and desire to ‘be something’

The immediate destinations of members after compulsory education again differ depending upon perceptions of happiness in childhood or otherwise. The most obvious difference is between those who ended up in employment and those who didn’t. Here it would be simple to correlate ambition with a desire ‘to be something’, (for example, an electrician, a hairdresser or a celebrity), which would certainly cohere with a Governmental view of ‘aspiration’ and ‘ambition’ as being related to a desire to ‘better oneself’ through HE participation and consequent upwards social mobility. At the outset of the practical inquiry, I feel that I was perhaps guilty of such a viewpoint but at the conclusion of the inquiry, I had formed an entirely different viewpoint.

‘Ambition’ is defined as “an aspiration to be, to do” (SOED, 2007, p. 67). From the analysis of the holistic representation of members’ lived experience, two distinct trends emerge predicated on perceptions of happy or unhappy childhoods. For those with a happy home life experience, there appears to be an immediate ambition to be something as a result of occupation. For those unhappier childhood experiences, there appears to be a tendency to want to do something such as, for example, to maintain a reputation through anti-social behaviour or, at the most basic level, ‘escape’ a current desperate situation or simply to survive.
From this analysis, all research members can be seen to possess ambition at some level with the vast majority running counter to Governmental conceptions of what that should be. Counter-intuitively, those with the most modest ambitions experienced the greatest struggles to achieve them.

**Relevant Issue 7 - Tradition and norms**

The influence of family traditions and norms emerge as significant factors in the life experiences of many of the members, regardless of their perception of childhood, although perception of childhood appears to have some impact upon how this surfaces. Members from families where work was a norm tended to end up in employment whereas those from workless families tended to be workless in the sense of legal paid employment. It is also the case that those reporting happy childhoods tended to be born into families with a work history and those reporting unhappy childhoods tended to be from workless households.

From the analysis, members who indulged in criminal or anti-social behaviour tended to have criminal parents and young teenage members who chose to become unmarried mothers came from families with a history of teenage pregnancy. More positively, male members from working families were also likely to follow their fathers’ career paths.

**Relevant Issue 8 – Perceptions of poverty**

Perceptions of poverty in childhood were not seen to contribute to a perception of unhappiness but did appear to engender hankerings for material wealth and possessions regardless of background.
Relevant Issue 9 – Experience of school

A negative experience of school is frequently cited in the literature as being a major reason why more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative. Although it was a common factor for the majority of research members, it does not appear to have had particular relevance on whether they deemed HE as being worthy for notice. Incidences of truancy appear to be more associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour than with a general dislike of school.

Relevant Issue 10 – A Lack of Opportunity

Members from both happy and unhappy backgrounds mentioned the environment in which they grew up as being influential on their life expectations. Several felt that their wider environment, usually cited as Gosport, afforded no opportunity for social mobility. Others felt that the immediate environment, particularly the council estates on which they had grown up, created a damaging culture where crime, alcohol, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and worklessness were norms. It also appeared to be the case that members had not considered moving away from the environment to seek different opportunities but had preferred to stay close to their local communities and take advantage of the limited opportunities which existed there.

Relevant Issue 11 - Perceptions of HE

Perceptions of HE do not appear on the holistic representation of the members’ lived experience as the majority did not deem it worthy of notice. As such, perceptions of HE did not form part of their lived experience. They are, however, highly relevant to gaining a greater appreciation of the primary research question.
During the interviews, members were asked whether they had ever considered going to University. In response to this question, many members not only provided a direct answer but also proffered their opinions of university which are included on individual Rich Pictures but not on the amalgamated or final holistic Rich Pictures. To explore these perceptions further, I developed a separate Rich Picture to elucidate the proffered opinions as illustrated at Figure 76 (page 329). This includes consideration of whether opinions differed depending upon perceptions of childhood as so many of the other relevant issues had.

From this Rich Picture, it can be seen that perceptions of Higher Education were generally negative and also can be considered to be ‘classed’ opinions in the main. There is, however, no correspondence between perception of happiness or otherwise in childhood and perception of HE.

Figure 76 - Perceptions of HE
Relevant Issue 12 – HE: a decision to participate

The final relevant issue, without which this analysis would be sorely lacking, is the decision to participate in HE made by a minority of research members. Significantly, there are some commonalities in their lived experience, including: an enjoyment of the school experience; a happy perception of childhood; parental support; and holding a specific teacher as a positive role model. Equally significant is the fact the members were not able to participate in Higher Education due to adverse circumstance which rendered the families unable to forgo the income the members could bring into the household. This appears to resonate with the Governmental notion of barriers to Higher Education participation.

9.10 Summary

Part One of this thesis was concerned with identifying the research questions which inform this inquiry into the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education. Three research questions were identified (Chapter 1, pages 31 to 34) from a systemic exploration of Widening Participation in its wide problem space, the primary one concerned with investigating the failure of the Widening Participation Policy. To address this question of why more young disadvantaged people do not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative, I declared that I would conduct a practical social inquiry involving a number of socially disadvantage individuals who do not, and have not, participated in Higher Education but who would have been classed as ‘WP students’ had they done so (Chapter 1, pages 28 to 30).
Part Two of this thesis firstly outlined all the actions required for mounting and conducting the practical social inquiry including specification of an Ethical Framework (Chapter 6), creation of a research member profile and arrangements for accessing potential research members (Chapter 7) and development of a Framework for Practical Inquiry (Chapter 8).

In this Chapter, I have outlined the progress of the practical inquiry which has operationalised all ideas from previous discussions. I have demonstrated how the foreseen difficulties of locating and accessing research members were circumvented through the employment of informal gatekeepers from my personal social network, resulting in the engagement of 48 individuals. Of these, 18 withdrew during the inquiry and a further 7 were found to not meet the member specification. I then provided details of the final 23 members whose participation is included in the outcomes of the inquiry followed by a timeline of the actual research carried out with these members in three separate Field Studies.

I then described in detail the progress of practical inquiry with the members, including the role played by the informal gatekeepers in facilitating rapport to allow successful outcomes from the individual interviews. I also showed how the revealing of my identity contributed to the members possibly revealing more of themselves than they had intended to. Following this, I discussed the issue of member anonymity as: firstly, being the main reason why such a large proportion of members withdrew during the inquiry; and secondly, how I had underestimated the effect of conducting individual interviews in group situations on maintaining anonymity including the way in which I dealt with this with other members once the issue had become apparent.

Since the members’ lived experience as revealed during interview was represented visually in the form of a Rich Picture, I then explored possible data analysis methods for
sensemaking activities. I concluded that current data analysis methods are oriented towards textual representations of data gathered during practical inquiry, leading me to adapt Stage 3 of SSM for data analysis and sensemaking. To facilitate data analysis, I developed three Rich Pictures to amalgamate the experiences of the members for each field study. These were then collated into a holistic representation of the gathered data, illustrated at Figure 72 (see page 316), which was then used for data analysis. Rather than selecting Relevant Systems, I adapt the methodology for the selection of Relevant Issues, defined as issues emerging from the gathered data which were relevant to the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education.

In total, 12 Relevant Issues were identified and subjected to a MA(T)WO(E) analysis (as adapted from the CATWOE analysis of Stage 3). The transformation process (T) in this analysis describes the contribution this issue made in transforming the member from potential Higher Education participant to ‘HE non-participant’.

The first Relevant Issue selected was the fact that the majority of members did not consider Higher Education worthy of notice. Perceptions of childhood were selected as a second Relevant Issue since the members were divided in their worldviews of this; for those with a happy perception of childhood, very different outcomes in their later life trajectories were witnessed from those with an unhappy perception. Factors contributing to an unhappy perception of childhood were considered to be a Relevant Issue since members reporting this tended to have unhappy perceptions of childhood, grown up in workless households and suffered a number of parental behaviours which can be seen to be either the cause or effect of social deprivation. A fourth Relevant Issue was selected as the influence of role models upon members since ‘happy’ members tended to see parents and friends as positive influences whilst ‘unhappy’ members saw them as negative influences.
There was a sharp distinction in values and attitudes between ‘happy’ and ‘unhappy’ members, which was considered to be a Relevant Issue since it appeared to suggest a difference in self-worth which later affected the life trajectories of the members.

The effects of the above issues were apparent in the next Relevant Issue which centred on members’ ambitions and destinations after leaving school. ‘Happy’ members tended to have an ambition ‘to be’ something; for the majority, this was enacted through career choice (e.g. to be a carpenter, hairdresser or celebrity), whilst for a minority it was to be a university student. ‘Unhappy’ members, on the other hand, tended to want ‘to do’ something such as maintain a reputation through anti-social behaviour or simply escape their current intolerable circumstances. The influence of family traditions and norms emerged as another Relevant Issue since many members followed parental examples; for the ‘happy’ members this tended to be a move into paid employment whereas for ‘unhappy members from workless families, worklessness was the immediate destination after school.

Experience of school was a ninth Relevant Issue as the members who did not deem Higher Education worthy of notice reported a negative experience with only the small majority who considered attending University reporting a positive experience of school. The members' perceptions of the immediate environment (i.e. Gosport) as having a lack of opportunity were considered a Relevant Issue since, although they were aware of this, they did not move away to seek greater opportunity. Instead they preferred to remain within the community and take advantage of the limited opportunity it offered.

A negative perception of Higher Education was a Relevant Issue for those who did not consider HE participation worthy of notice whilst, for the small majority, a decision to participate in HE was the final Relevant Issue, including social deprivation as the underlying cause of their inability to actually participate.
Having conducted the practical social inquiry to elicit research members’ life trajectories following compulsory education and analysed the data as described in this Chapter, I now turn attention to addressing the three research questions informing this study in Part Three of this thesis which details the contributions to knowledge made.

Chapter 10 firstly addresses the first research question of why more young disadvantaged people do not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative by comparing the outcomes of practical inquiry against the issues revealed through the systemic investigation into the wide problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education from Chapter 2. Chapter 10 then considers the second research question, whether holistic research into the main research question could be useful for informing joined-up social and economic policy arenas by examining whether the issues revealed through exploration of the first research question have relevance to joined-up social and economic policy arenas.

As explained in Chapter 1 (page 33), the succession of the Conservative/Liberal Coalition Government in May 2010 changed both the way Widening Participation would be funded and also required students to pay full tuition fees, both of which are considered to have a potentially negative impact on the future success of the Widening Participation policy. This led to the emergence of a third research question, namely whether the lessons learned from this systemic research into Widening Participation policy as operationalised under the New Labour government could be useful for informing revised Widening Participation policy as introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010; this is explored in Chapter 11. Part Three of this thesis then concludes with a personal reflection on the whole study.
Part Three:

Learning from Action
Chapter 10. Learning from Practical Inquiry: Contribution to Knowledge

There is no question that in our age there is a good deal of turmoil about the manner in which society is run. Probably at no point in the history of man has there been so much discussion about the rights and wrongs of the policy makers...[Citizens have] begun to suspect that the people who make the major decisions that affect our lives don't know what they are doing... They don't know what they are doing simply because they have no adequate basis to judge the effects of their decisions. To many it must seem that we live in an age of moronic decision making.

Churchman (1979a, p. 1:vi)

10.1. Introduction

The findings from this research represent an original and valuable contribution to knowledge because, in certain key areas, explanations for non-participation in HE by individuals targeted by the Widening Participation policy are both under-researched and under-theorised. Whilst there is a large body of literature which has extensively theorised HE non-participation, these theories have been culled from research with WP students already participating in HE. To date, however, there is very little knowledge and explanatory theory about non-participation with individuals targeted by the Widening Participation policy who are not participating in HE. I have highlighted this gap in the research throughout this work, and also shown how commentators in the arena have called for this gap to be filled and those “absent voices” to be heard (Reed, Croudace, et al., 2007, p. 21). This work contributes towards filling this gap through inquiry with HE non-participants who were, and remain, potential Widening Participation participants.
There is also a well-documented body of literature which illustrates how the Widening Participation policy failed to meet its ambitions during the period of the New Labour Government but little appropriate explanatory theory on why this was the case. The findings from this practical inquiry are an original contribution to the knowledge base of factors explaining why the Widening Participation policy failed to engage a number of targeted individuals. They also have direct relevance to future policy direction in a number of arenas, including Widening Participation.

In exploring the wider problem space within which Widening Participation policy is situated in Chapter 2, I have illustrated its interrelationships with other social and economic policy. I also evidenced how HE participation was conceived to contribute to the alleviation of identified national problems in both arenas. An extensive search revealed a second gap in the literature in that little holistic research appears to have considered WP initiative in the wider problem space of HE, although a large body of non-systemic work has concentrated on WP policy implementation within the narrow confines of the HE sector. The systemic nature of this research suggests that Systems Thinking at the ‘micro level’ of WP policy provides insights for useful holistic policy development in the intertwined societal, economic and educational arenas. These insights into holistic policy development provide a useful basis for making recommendations for policy direction for the revised Widening Participation agenda under the Coalition Government. Therefore, this research meets a valuable need in a number of areas.

Part One of this thesis focused on firstly outlining the problem to be investigated and then elucidating the most appropriate means by which this should be done. In the opening Chapter of this work, I described how I embarked upon this process of inquiry with no defined research objectives in mind beyond gaining a greater appreciation of the Widening
Participation initiative. Using a research framework developed through SSM, I allowed
the research questions, aims and objectives to emerge as a result of initial research into the
subject. These were declared as:

1. to gain a greater appreciation of why more disadvantaged young people do not
   embrace the opportunity to participate in HE as extended through the Widening
   Participation agenda;

2. to investigate whether holistic thinking at the “micro level” of Widening
   Participation policy can be useful in gaining a greater appreciation of the issues at
   the “macro level” of holistic policy development; and,

3. to consider the lessons learned from the Widening Participation policy as
   operationalised under the New Labour government in relation to revised Higher
   Education policy introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010.

In Chapter 2, I explored the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher
Education, revealing it to be a messy, complex situation which required the application of
a systemic lens for effective inquiry. Declaring the intellectual Framework of Ideas as Soft
Systems Thinking, I then explored the theoretical bases of this (Chapters 3 and 4),
concluding Part One with the selection of Checkland’s Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)
as the most appropriate idiopathic methodology for inquiry (Chapter 5).

Part Two of the document moved into operationalizing the ideas from Part One. In
Chapter 6, I explored ethical and moral issues arising from the nature of the research
which is centred on social class. The sensitive nature of the research was revealed through
recourse to literature, and suitable procedures to mitigate risks to researcher and research
members were instituted in a suitable Ethical Framework for Inquiry. The lack of precise
definition of individuals targeted by the Widening Participation policy was firstly discussed in Chapter 7 and a profile developed to provide a ‘good fit’ between research members and the Widening Participation policy. The difficulties surrounding locating and accessing suitable research members were then explored and a strategy of using ‘informal gatekeepers’ implemented. Chapter 8 described the development of the Framework for Practical Inquiry underpinned by SSM and based on the Vickers’ notion of Appreciation.

Difficulties of communication were discussed and resolved through a strategy of visual representation of research members’ lived experience using the SSM device of Rich Pictures. Chapter 9 then concluded Part Two by outlining the progress, methods and outcomes of the practical inquiry. The role of ‘informal gatekeepers’ was shown to have facilitated successful interaction with research members through their revealing of my identity to establish rapport. The lack of documented method for interpretation of Rich Pictures used as a device for interpretation and representation of data gathered in interview was explored, leading to the development of a unique method for this particular inquiry through an adaptation of SSM Stage 3. A holistic Rich Picture was developed to illustrate the combined worldviews of the research members and this was used for sensemaking of the gathered data. Issues deemed significant to gaining a greater appreciation of why more young people did not embrace the opportunity to participate in HE as extended by the Widening Participation policy were selected. These were then defined as Relevant Issues and subjected to a MA(T)WO(E) analysis. The resultant Root Definition provided a precise description of the contribution of the issue which transformed research members from being potential HE participants to HE non-participants.

Part Three of this thesis is dedicated to addressing the 3 aims of the research stated earlier. In this Chapter, I pay attention to the first two aims. Firstly, I use the outcomes of the practical inquiry as articulated in the Relevant Issues to address the first aim of gaining a
greater appreciation of why more young people had not embraced the opportunity to participate in HE as extended through the Widening Participation policy. I then consider the whole process of inquiry, including the findings from the activity above, to theorise whether holistic thinking at the ‘micro-level’ of WP policy has provided insights useful at the ‘macro-level’ of holistic policy development. The results of the findings from this Chapter are then compared against recent developments in the Widening Participation policy as instituted by the Coalition Government in May 2010, the implications of which are discussed in the next and final Chapter.

As mentioned above, I have consistently emphasised the lacuna of research studies into Widening Participation which involve non-participants. I have addressed this gap by engaging 23 non-participating research members in practical inquiry and have implemented processes to ensure, as far as possible, that their lived experience is authentically represented in the work. In Chapter 1, I stressed the fact that my interest was not in generalising the findings but in gaining a deeper, situated appreciation of the members’ involved in the study. The findings reported here are therefore bounded by this constraint.

10.2. Outcomes of research to address main research question

HE: An option worthy of notice?

In Chapter 2, I described the Widening Participation agenda, instituted by the New Labour Government in 1998, as the first policy to positively discriminate for HE participation of the socially excluded. I also showed how, despite substantial public expenditure, the initiative had failed to achieve Governmental ambitions, resulting in only sluggish growth in participation of individuals that the policy wished to target.
Throughout the period under investigation, many researchers have theorised reasons why more young socially disadvantaged people have not embraced the opportunity to participate in HE. The linking idea between the majority of these theories is that non-participation is formulated as conscious choice. I have argued that the New Labour communitarianist political ideology conceived the Widening Participation agenda as a conferring a right which those targeted were expected to accept as a responsibility, so conceptualising HE participation as something which would automatically be considered in decision-making processes (see page 71). This is highlighted by Leathwood (2005, p. 19) who states that non-participation is seen by Government as being based on “uninformed decision-making”.

Greenbank (2007, p. 368) provided a counter-argument to this, contending that “working class families and their children …may not even consider HE as an option”. He used supporting evidence from a Market & Opinion Research International (MORI) poll to show that 49% of 16-30 year olds from (what would now be) social classes 4-6 and 60% from social classes 7-8 had never considered going to university. This theme appears not to have been pursued by other researchers in the arena but is one that is significant to this study.

In Chapter 4, I described Vicker’s notion of Appreciation as a convincing holistic account of how individuals construct their bases for decisions through their experience of living in the world. In this view, whilst myriad opportunities exist in the environment, an individual will only select those which are of sufficient interest as being worthy of notice for consideration. The rest will simply be unnoticed.

A simple example of this can be construed as follows. As an EU citizen I have the unalienable right to “reside freely within the EU” (European Commission, 2013).
Although I am aware of this, I have had no cause to bring it to the forefront of my mind as it is of no interest at this moment in time. I therefore do not deem it to be worthy of notice for further consideration. I do not live in England because I have either decided to live here or decided not to accept my right to live elsewhere. It is merely a fact of my existence, a continued trajectory of residing in the country of my birth. For now, I am satisfied with this state of affairs, but that is not to say that this may not change in the future. If this is the case, I may deem my right to reside freely within the EU as worthy of notice for further consideration at that time, whereupon a decision will be made to either stay or move.

The right to participate in HE was similarly extended to young, socially disadvantaged citizens of the UK by the New Labour Government. For the majority of research members, this right to participate in HE was not deemed worthy of notice. They did not choose to not participate in HE, but simply never deemed the issue to be sufficiently interesting to be worthy of notice. For them, there was no decision to be made. The issue was neither consciously ignored nor rejected. It merely passed them by, along with myriad other unnoticed opportunities in which they had no interest. This gives credence to theories that many working-class children do not consider HE as an option.

This finding is important for gaining a greater appreciation of why rates of widened participation failed to increase to the levels desired by the Government. New Labour progressively pursued policy implementation and development allied with public expenditure based on an assumption that certain actions, as discussed later, could stimulate increases in WP rates since these actions were predicated on the idea of HE participation as a decision to be made. This is evident in a large body of literature, including some notable examples of research with non-participants, in which the idea of deciding to participate in HE or otherwise is central to the findings (see, for example, Diamond, 2008;
Fuller, 2008). Since the majority of research members in this inquiry did not deem HE participation as being worthy of notice, much less as something they wished to make a decision about, it naturally follows that Governmental actions and expenditure to stimulate participation would be limited from the outset.

A small, but equally important, minority of research members did consider HE participation as worthy of notice and further consideration. They made a decision to participate in HE, but were later prevented from doing so by particular circumstances which are discussed in more detail on page 354.

The analysis here contributes to explanations for the sluggish rates of Widening Participation but fails to address the primary aim of the inquiry. Gaining a greater appreciation of why these potential participants were transformed into HE non-participants involves unpacking those elements of their experience identified as Relevant Issues in relation to the Widening Participation policy and current theory around this.

The research members from this inquiry can be seen to fall into two primary groups. To differentiate between the two groups for ease of reading, I refer to the majority who did not deem HE participation as worthy of notice as Group 1. The minority who wished to participate in HE but were prevented from doing so are referred to as Group 2. The following discussion firstly concentrates on Group 1 before turning attention to Group 2.

**The effect of family background**

A large proportion of WP literature theorises that the major reason for non-participation is because ‘target WP individuals’ are faced with ‘barriers’ they cannot surmount (see page 100). These ‘barriers’ are conceived as factors which act to dissuade or prevent young, socially disadvantaged people from accessing a University education. It is also theorised
that the removal of identified barriers would automatically act to improve rates of widened participation. HEFCE have actively encouraged research into barriers and policy development has been predicated on the evidence arising from such studies. I return to this issue later on page 354 in relation to the minority of research members who were prevented from HE participation. However, for members in Group 1, and others like them, who did not deem HE participation worthy of notice, the notion of ‘barriers’ is inapplicable.

A lesser proportion of researchers have centered explanations of low rates of Widening Participation on matters of social class, and these ideas have greater relevance to this group of members. I have discussed New Labour’s Moral Underclass Discourse of social policy (see page 83) and the consequent deficit model applied to not only non-participants but also their families. Leathwood (2005, p. 19) sums this up neatly, stating “working-class young people and their families are assumed to lack the right kinds of aspirations and motivation, with non-participation seen as irrational.”

Lawler (1999, p. 4) argues that class inequality is reproduced through the pathologising of “working class subjectivities”. This is achieved through the characterisation of lower class individuals as “lazy, irresponsible and uneducated”, their families as “dysfunctional” and individual family members as “unintelligent slobs” (Leavitt and Fryberg, 2013, p. 121). A major reason for HE non-participation is lack of attainment at school due to a lack of aspiration (Greenbank, 2007, p. 371) and working class children are conceived as “educational problems and failures” (Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p. 228). As Maringe and Fuller (2007, p. 18) observe:

“There is little in the policy literature which presents a positive picture of ‘nonparticipation in HE’, the terminology itself creating a negative image. At best
there is a ‘policy silence’ around those who choose not to participate, pursue alternative routes and who have different concepts of what constitutes success”

The outcomes from this research study demonstrate several pertinent factors arising from social class, but these are not centered on a lack of aspiration. Instead, the research members emerged as individuals striving to lead lives fuelled by their individual ambitions and constrained only by the societal barriers they faced in achieving these.

Class distinctions are structured through societal hierarchies (Guinote and Vescio, 2010) and position in the hierarchy determines access to influence and resources (Keltner et al., 2011). Social exclusion places individuals in the lower tiers of the hierarchy, so limiting their access to resources and influence through the operation of multiple indices of deprivation such as those which affected the research members. The resultant economic and social marginalization is theorized to prevent young working-class individuals from having a stake in society (Wiggans, 2010, p. 95), so relegating them to a passive role. In remarking on his own HEFCE-funded review of WP, Watson (2006b, p. 16) contended that young, socially disadvantaged individuals were “not passive by choice, but seriously angry about the hand they have been dealt. “

These “‘abstract” notions of class (Compton, 2006, p 659) act to homogenise all working-class individuals into groups, a practice which is widely criticised (Sørensen, 2003; Adonis and Pollard, 1998). Any social and cultural differences which may exist are ignored and all individuals in the homogenized group are ‘tarred with the same brush’. Members of Groups 1 did not emerge homogenously, but as sub-groups with social and cultural differences. Although were linked through the fact that they did not consider HE participation an option worthy of notice, there was a sharp distinction in their perceptions of how they had been affected by social disadvantage.
9 of the 21 members, whom I will refer to as Sub-Group 1a, were not “seriously angry about the hand they have been dealt” and did not perceive themselves to be socially disadvantaged. Although they mentioned poverty and other indicators of social exclusion such as environment, they did not feel these had negatively affected their early lives. They generally lived in households where one or both parents worked and family members were seen as strong, positive role models. Rather than lacking aspiration, Sub-Group 1a members had specific ambitions to ‘be something’ through pursuing a preferred career path. For the males in this sub-group, this often involved continuing a family tradition of specific occupation such as carpentry or other construction trade. Sub-Group 1a members also demonstrated a positive sense of self-worth articulated through their values and attitudes towards life. Pride, ambition and a work ethic were common values. Far from considering themselves as an ‘underclass’, they generally knew what they wanted out of life and had ambition to succeed at whatever they had chosen to be.

The remaining 12 research members, whom I will refer to as Sub-Group 1b, reported less satisfactory experiences in their young lives. For them, life had been more difficult due to a number of recurrent factors. Members in this sub-group were mainly children of workless homes and tended to have been affected by one or more parental incidences of alcohol abuse, mental illness, mental and physical violence, and/or criminal activity.

Alcohol abuse is known to be both a cause and effect of social exclusion (Delargy et al., 2010; R. Room, 2005; EMCDDA, 2003) and there is well-documented evidence of the multiple harms which may result, including mental illness, criminal activity and violence (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2004). Socially disadvantaged families experience higher rates of domestic violence (Khalifeh et al., 2013; Staggs et al., 2007) and the effects of mental illness for lower class individuals and their families are more pronounced as they
are less likely to seek help (Levy and O'Hara, 2010). Teenage pregnancy was also a parental trait for some of these members which is again evidenced to be more prevalent amongst those living in areas with higher social deprivation (FPA, 2010). Those who did not suffer from these incidences perceived the death of a loved one as the major cause of their unhappiness. Evidence suggests that mortality rates are higher amongst lower social classes (House of Commons Health Committee, 2009) and social class is also suggested to have a negative effect on a child’s ability to cope with bereavement (Ribbens and Jessop, 2005).

Members of Sub-Group 1b did not cite social deprivation as the underlying cause for their unhappiness in early life, but were “angry about the hand they had been dealt” in relation to their home situations. All but 2 of them lived in the most disadvantaged wards in Gosport, suffering the highest number of indices of social deprivation which, according to the evidence provided above, were likely to be root causes (or effects) of their parents’ dysfunctional behaviours in the home. As such, they were victims of social disadvantage. Sub-Group 1b members generally demonstrated a negative sense of self-worth articulated through their values and attitudes which, according to Berger and Luckman (1967), naturally reflects parental influences from early primary socialisation. (see pages 132 to 134).

People act in the world according to their relationships with other people around them (R. White and Wyn, 2004; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Bourdieu (1977) argues that the development of an individual’s “habitus” occurs through the family and its networks, creating a history that becomes embodied and acted out through class based practices. These practices emerged as intergenerational patterns occurring in the life trajectories of
all members in Group 1, although the way they ‘played out’ between the sub-groups was very different.

Whereas members in Sub-Group 1a enjoyed a virtuous cycle by ‘following in father’s footsteps’ to paid employment after leaving school, most members in Sub-Group 1b followed a vicious cycle led by ‘the sins of the fathers’. Alcohol abuse, anti-social/criminal behaviour or, for the female members, deliberately opting to be a teenage unmarried mother were severally reported, generally following patterns of behaviour which had been experienced in the family home.

Despite their difficulties, members in Sub-Group 1b did not lack ambition, although, for many, these were what may be thought of as ‘modest’ ambitions. They did not want to pursue big dreams but mainly wanted ‘to do something’ to escape situations they found intolerable. For some, these situations were outside of their own control, whilst for others, they were consequent to the dysfunctional behaviour they indulged in as discussed above. In either case, they were merely attempting to escape the existences which had been shaped for them by the multiple indices of deprivation. Their struggles to achieve this were far greater than for the previous group of research members; whereas members in Sub-Group 1a were able to pursue their ambitions with the support of their immediate families, members in Sub-Group 1b had to rely on their own agency or the help of more distance family members.

**Summing up**

It is clear that two very different sub-groups of individuals emerged from the majority of research members in Group 1, the majority who did not deem HE worthy of notice. The distinguishing feature between the two sub-groups is not a matter of social class per se, but
rather how they were affected by social disadvantage in their formative years. Individuals in Group 1a did not perceive themselves to be socially disadvantaged, had supportive families with a history of work and had ambitions ‘to be’ something as a result of their own employment. Whilst Group 1b did not perceive social deprivation to be the cause of their less satisfactory early lives, the incidences of parental dysfunction arising from (or causing) social dysfunction, negatively affected their early lives. They tended to come from workless families, indulged in their own patterns of dysfunctional behaviours and followed their ambitions ‘to do something’ to escape intolerable situations.

The distinctions between the two sub-groups leads to different explanations for their transformation from potential ‘HE participant’ to ‘HE non-participant’ and these are discussed below.

**The ‘non-decision of HE’ as a ‘normal biography’**

K. Sayer and Fisher (1997, p. 60) have said that a working class identity is not something that is “aspired to”. The Widening Participation policy, imposed from the perspective of individuals with a “very different class and habitus”, assumed that the socially excluded would want to aspire to something better (Slack, 2003). Archer and Leathwood (2003) feel that these Governmental views

“… have framed working-class participation in higher education as a way of achieving ‘change’; that is, for working-class participants to change themselves and the national and/or local population by becoming more educated, skilled, affluent, socially mobile, ‘civilised’ and (implicitly) middle class. These changes are assumed to be ‘good’ and worthwhile.”

Current theories find that “social class is alive” and “it matters” (Grossmann and Huynh, 2013, p. 117). Nayak (2003, p. 320) argues that individuals’ social identities continue to
be “closely intertwined with family histories, gender, place, class, religion and locality”.

Both social class and community are important sources of pride and self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and individuals maintain a strong identification with class (G. Marshall et al., 2005) so that:

“while social class may rarely be discussed by young people, it continues to be threaded through the daily fabric of their lives: it is stitched into codes of respect, accent, dress, music, bodily adornment and comportment. In short, the affective politics of class is a felt practice, tacitly understood and deeply internalised” (Nayak, 2006, p. 828)

M. Watts and Bridges (2006) theorise that young socially disadvantaged people with little or no desire to participate in HE on leaving school have different, rather than low, aspirations, which direct them towards destinations which they valued. This was the case for members in Sub-Group 1a who did not feel they had been ‘socially disadvantaged’ Hutchings (2003, p. 97) has argued:

“Other people (more often working class) have never considered higher education; it simply has not been on the agenda. Probably only a minority of people reach a point where they make a decision about whether or not to apply. From the point of view of widening participation, this is a group to target, because it may be possible to inform and/or influence their decisions. But from the point of view of social justice, the focus must also be the larger group who never even consider the possibility of higher education. Thus it is important to research their perspective.”

It is difficult to see how targeting this particular sub-group could either inform or influence them to make a decision to participate in HE. For them, social stability is more important than social mobility. Many of these members acknowledged that there was a “lack of opportunity” in the socially deprived area in which they grew up but, rather than move away to seek different opportunity, preferred to remain within their communities and close
to their families. Whilst they were ambitious for material gain and career success, social prestige was not a main driver. In contrast to the view that working-class individuals “do not know the right things, they do not value the right things, they do not want the right things”, (Lawler, 1999, p. 11), these members emerged as grounded individuals with clear ideas of who and what they wanted to be. They preferred to live in an authentic mode of being (Heidegger, 1962, §27), leading

“… lives that they value and have reason to value. It is probably the value system which encourages non-participation rather than the perceived obstacles that any WP agenda should address.” (Maringe and Fuller, 2007, p. 19)

Ball et al. (2002, pp. 53-54) argued that “for middle-class students, HE is a ‘non-decision’ because it is part of a ‘normal biography’”. For individuals in this sub-group, HE was also a ‘non-decision’, again because it was part of their ‘normal biography’.

**Reaching the ‘final frontier’: a need for social justice**

I now turn attention to considering the factors which provide explanations for the transformation of members in Sub-Group 1b from potential ‘HE participants’ to ‘HE non-participants’. These individuals were negatively affected by the manifestations of dysfunctional parental behaviours or other issues which are generally seen to be caused by (or be the cause of) social deprivation.

It has been argued that individuals are responsible for their eventual class position, that they are responsible for becoming what ‘one is’ (Baumann, 2001, p. 144). This view emanates from the perspective of “conservative” social commentators who consider the personal shortcomings of the socially excluded to be the cause of their poverty and lack of
social mobility (Bullock et al., 2011, p. 151). It is what Levitas (1998) describes as a Moral Underclass Discourse of social exclusion.

Bufton (2006, p. 71) believes that:

“Many members of the working class limit their horizons or remove themselves from the education system completely, due to a combination of structural barriers (such as poor educational qualifications, financial difficulties or geographical location), cultural influences (family, friends or educational institution) and rational choice-making processes.”

Rather than limit their own horizons, the majority of members of Sub-Group 1b had their horizons limited for them by the unfortunate circumstances of their early lives. For many, these were manifested by behaviours they experienced in the parents and which they later emulated in their own life trajectories. For others, these were manifested through circumstances beyond their control such as bereavement or mental violence. They did not have big ambitions ‘to be’ anything, but only ‘to do’ something to escape the consequences, a struggle described by one member as a matter of ‘survival’. Their ambitions were based on despair and unhappiness and enacted through their own agency and resources. However, like Sub-Group 1a members, the majority chose to remain close to their local community.

Whilst the ambitions of this sub-group of members can be described as ‘modest’, the achievements of some members were anything but. Lawler (2004, p. 112) argues that although behaviour may be reproduced across generations, the dynamic character of the social world means that it will not occur perfectly and a more or less identical habitus may generate widely different outcomes. Charlie and Ed for example, did reproduce parental behaviours of criminal behaviour in what I have earlier termed a ‘sins of the fathers’
vicious cycle, and their habitus did not differ widely from that of their fathers. However, the reproduction was not identical in that both of these members later sought to distance themselves from such behaviours and live a different life. For them, moving from criminal to non-criminal activity and then from worklessness into work represents social mobility of a different kind. Others, such as Holly chose to maintain a social status quo by deliberately becoming pregnant as the “only escape” from an intolerable home life. Here the intergenerational reproduction occurred perfectly; her grandmother and mother had also been teenage unmarried mothers, their habitus was identical and the outcomes did not differ.

In 1998, at the beginning of the Widening Participation initiative, Woodrow et al. (1998, p. 3) noted that children of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers were the most under-represented group in HE and that extending participation to include those from these backgrounds had been described as “one of the last frontiers for Higher Education”. The Widening Participation policy attempted to breach this final frontier, predicated, in theory at least, on notions of social justice and equality of opportunity which Atkins (2010, p. 254) describes as “smoke and mirrors, a massive deception”.

Barry (2005, p. 58) argues that:

“The first demand of social justice is to change the environments in which children are born and grow up so as to make them as equal as possible, and this includes (though it is by no means confined to) approximate material equality among families. The second demand – which is more pressing the further society fails to meet the first demand – is that the entire system of social intervention, starting as early as is feasible, should be devoted to compensating, as far as possible, for environmental disadvantages.”
This creates a ‘chicken and egg’ situation. Members in Sub-Group 1b can be seen to have been transformed from potential HE participant to HE non-participant by social deprivation and lack of opportunity, the very things the Widening Participation policy intended to alleviate. For members in Sub-Group 1b, as for members in Sub-Group 1a, HE participation remains a ‘non-decision’. However, this not due to them being content with a ‘normal biography’ but because their horizons were limited by multiple indices of social deprivation in their formative years. If they are standing now at the ‘last frontier’, this has been mainly due to their own agency. Only social intervention at an earlier stage of their, or their parents’ lives, could have taken them to the frontier in time for educational interventions to have had an effect on their ‘non-decision’ of HE participation. However, there is perhaps merit in an assumption that intervention is likely to have shifted their experience closer to that of Sub-Group 1a members resulting in a ‘non-decision’ of HE participation as part of a ‘normal biography’.

**The notion of barriers: a barrier to effective policy development?**

I have earlier evidenced that the Governmental notion of barriers to HE participation did not apply to members in Group 1 (see page 343). I now turn attention to considering the reasons for the transformation of members in Group 2 from potential ‘HE participant’ to ‘HE non-participant’, and here the notion of barriers is very relevant. These members did decide to participate in HE but were prevented from doing so by the poor financial circumstances of their families.

A major barrier to HE participation is widely seen to be a financial one (see, for example, Callender, 2009; Curtis, 2004; A. Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; M. Bowl, 2001). In 2009, Lord Mandelson, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills responded to a
letter from the MP Tessa Jowell in which she had expressed concern about the financial barriers to HE for poorer constituents, stating:

“I would like to ensure (sic) your constituents that I am particularly concerned to ensure that the chance to participate in HE should not be denied to those from poorer backgrounds. A number of policy interventions have been developed to remove financial barriers to HE, including: the abolition of up-front fees and the introduction of an income-dependent repayment mechanism; HE institution bursaries for students from poorer backgrounds; and the reintroduction of grants worth up to £2,906 a year for students from poorer backgrounds. Eligibility for grants and bursaries means that lower income students need not be deterred by the prospect of debt. We realise that without this support students from low income families might otherwise have difficulty accessing, or remaining in, HE.” (Mandelson, 2009).

Mandelson went on to state that these measures had had a significant effect since “the number of people from poorer backgrounds accepted to university has risen by 8% this year, compared with a rise of 3.8% for those from more privileged backgrounds”. In this and other moves to remove financial barriers, action was predicated on evidence that ‘target WP individuals’ were in need of financial support. Their families were not considered except as a beneficiary of HE participation which would allow their children to make a financial contribution to their economic situation (Lynch and O’Riordan, 1998). However, the financial barrier preventing the participation of Group 2 members resided not in their own situations, but within the circumstances of their families who were unable to forgo the income that would be lost had the members participated.

As highlighted several times throughout this study, the majority of evidence regarding possible explanations for non-participation was gained through research with participating ‘WP students’ rather than non-participating target individuals, a tendency which has been
heavily criticised ((Gorard and Smith, 2007; Gorard, Smith, May, et al., 2006; Watson, 2006a). In many ways, the notion of ‘barriers’ arising from such research activity can be seen to describe factors which have made it more difficult for ‘WP students’ to participate, but have not acted to prevent their participation. I have suggested that using outcomes from research with this group as though it could be representative of non-participating ‘WP individuals’ may form a flawed basis for policy development, and the findings presented here give weight to this assumption. The ‘real’ barriers to participation of Group 2 members were caused by social deprivation and the poverty of their families who could not afford to lose their income. As with members of Group 1b, only interventions to alleviate social deprivation could have changed this situation.

10.2.2 The usefulness of systemic research for informing holistic Widening Participation policy development

In Chapter 2, I investigated the wider problem space of the Widening Participation policy, demonstrating its interlinking with other educational, social and economic policy in New Labour’s attempt at “joined-up policy for joined-up problems”(Mulgan, 1998). The Widening Participation agenda ran alongside other Governmental ambition for HE participation to rise to a level of 50% of all young people overall. R. Jones (2006, p. 12) has argued that the dual agendas for HE were contradictory to the extent that they competed against each other. However, ambitions for increases in both overall participation and Widening Participation in Higher Education were seen to make an important contributions to broader Government policy aimed at increasing global economic competitiveness and decreasing social exclusion (DfEE, 2000, p. 3); the intertwining of policy arenas was also felt to be contradictory (Burke and Hayton, 2011, p. 9).
Despite the ‘joined-up’ nature of these policies, there appears to be a dearth of systemic investigation into the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education to date. Kettley (2007, p. 334) argues that a holistic research agenda is required to “expand explanatory resources and provide strong evidence for education policy.” HEFCE (2008) acknowledged the need for gaining a “holistic picture” of the “broader social and cultural questions” for effective policy development, but, rather than instituting a holistic research strategy, reduced the ‘big picture’ into “threads” which were seen as useful areas for contributing to understanding non-participation.

This systemic inquiry is deemed to provide outcomes which are useful for holistic policy development, not just in the arena of Widening Participation in the Higher Education sector, but in all interrelated educational, societal and economic policy arenas. These are discussed below.

**Which comes first: the social chicken or the social egg?**

The findings from the practical inquiry with research members as discussed above, reveals a situation whereby the multiple indices of social deprivation, including poverty, transform individuals from potential ‘HE participants’ to ‘HE non-participants’. In contrast, the intertwining of Widening Participation with social policy intended to reduce the outcomes of social exclusion. I argue that this creates a social ‘chicken and egg’ situation.

The capability approach of Sen (1999) contrasts the “realized functionings” - what individuals are actually able to do – against their “capability set of alternatives” - their real opportunities. The result is two different types of information, the first relating to what individuals do, and the second about the things they are “substantively free to do”. He illustrates the approach with the example that “fasting is not the same thing as being forced
to starve” (Sen, 1999, p. 76). For the members transformed from potential ‘HE participant’ to ‘HE non-participant’ through the operation of social exclusion, measures of deprivation acted to limit their real opportunities or “capability set of alternatives” and so prevent manifestation of their “realized functionings”. As Thompson (2008, p. 143) argues:

“Social exclusion is a far bigger societal problem than solutions such as accessible HE can provide. What is needed are fundamental policies that tackle a hierarchical society based upon privilege and an uneven distribution of wealth, and therefore life chances in terms of jobs, education, healthcare, services and facilities. Essentially, as Lloyd and Payne (2003) noted, a much bigger societal project is required and it is highly unlikely that this will occur in today’s post-industrial, neoliberal climate. The Government is therefore faced with formidable barriers that, at best, it can re-shape to a limited degree. In terms of the HE paradoxes so consistently aired by commentators and referenced in this paper, we witness little in the way of correcting these or coming to some kind of compromise.”

**Big picture policy, small detail people**

As discussed previously Chapter 2, New Labour’s theme of ‘one nation, one community’ (Blair, 1996a) constructed ‘community’ as lying at the national level (Driver & Martell, 1997, p. 34). Community values were seen to subsumed by shared, national values which the Government attempted to impose on citizens through a communitarianist project which was necessarily centralised, prescriptive and authoritarian (Calder, 2004; Martell, 2004; Driver & Martell, 1997). Hutchings (2003, p. 97) argues that it was assumed that working-class individuals would wish to maximise their long-term economic positions through HE participation, and that if information about the long-term benefits of HE were widely known, more people would decide to enter.
The importance of local community and primacy of local, rather than national, values to Group 1 members who did not deem HE participation worthy of notice has been evidenced earlier. They did not cleave to nation as community and did not seek elevation to the ‘valued’ middle classes and those who were financially ambitious were aware that:

“…class and income do not always coincide as skilled manual workers can earn high wages while some professional groups are comparatively poorly remunerated.” (Hatt, 2005, p. 343)

**Outward-looking policy, inward looking people**

The discussion above is significant to the linking of Widening Participation in Higher Education to economic policy. The UK was perceived to operate as a Low Skilled Economy, rendering the nation globally uncompetitive and there was a perceived need to move to a High Skills Economy to address this situation (Winch, 2002, pp. 110-111). The economic imperative of the Widening Participation policy rested on raising the skills of the workforce which would effectively shift the nation towards a High Skills Economy (Rammell, 2006). According to Glennerster (2002, p. 121) a low-skill labour force could only attract and sustain firms that require a low skills mix, but the raising the basic skills of those at the bottom would ensure an adequate supply of educated people on higher wages capable of sustaining an High Skills Economy.

The wider problem space of Widening Participation, concerned as it is with matters of globalisation, can be seen to be an outward looking policy, as illustrated in Figure 72 on page 316. The members in Group 1 in this inquiry, on the other hand, were inward-looking as discussed above; although they recognised the lack of opportunity afforded in their immediate environment, this is where they wanted to be. This reveals a second ‘chicken and egg’ situation.
Fasih (2008, p. 11) conceptualises the linkages between education and the labour market as being: the determinants of education determine educational outcomes which, in turn, determine labour market outcomes of individuals. The Widening Participation policy intended to increase the educational outcomes of socially disadvantaged individuals and so increase their labour market outcomes.

For members in Group 1, the opposite effect can be seen. Desiring to remain within their local communities meant that they took advantage of the limited opportunity available and did not seek greater opportunity by moving outside of this. Therefore, for them, the limited opportunity available determined their educational outcomes rather than the other way around. The outward-looking economic imperatives of the Widening Participation policy were over-ruled by the inward-looking ambitions of Group 1 members.

*From economy to society: an egg and chicken situation?*

The discussion above leads into exploration of the interlinking of the economic imperatives Widening Participation policy with social policy. The intention to raise the skills of the socially excluded to levels capable of sustaining an High Skills Economy were also seen to contribute to the elimination of child poverty and social exclusion (Glennerster, 2002, p. 121). Watson (2009, p. 8) stated that “at the heart of the matter is the question of social mobility.”

In 2004, Keep (2004) expressed concern that the competing aims for expansion of the HE sector and the Widening Participation agenda would lead to a decline in social mobility rather than an increase. He believed that a fundamental redistribution of access opportunity for the socially excluded to participate in HE was required to the range of labour market opportunities of non-participants becoming worse. Watson (2007, p. 117)
concurred with this, and later stated that the Widening Participation policy “leads to a
famous paradox. For higher education to be ‘fairer’ it has to be allowed to expand, and as
it expands it increases the gap between the life chances of those who participate and those
who do not (Watson, 2009, p. 8).

Recent research by Lindley and Machin (2012) shows that, as educational opportunities
have grown, so has social inequality. This has impeded social mobility because “those
from low socioeconomic groups are so disadvantaged, and those from high socio-
edconomic groups are so advantaged, from the outset” (Francis and Wong, 2013, p. 2).

Far from redressing social injustices, this evidence suggests that the competing aims of
increasing overall participation in Higher Education and the Widening Participation policy
have reinforced them. Social mobility has not increased, but social inequalities have. This
is likely to lead to greater incidences of the indicators of social deprivation which
transformed some members in this study from potential ‘HE participants’ to ‘HE non-
participants’. It logically follows that the only outcome from this will be a reduction in the
numbers of the most socially deprived who are able to take advantage of “the equal
opportunity” of Higher Education participation. This returns me full circle to my original
question of which comes first, the social chicken, or the social egg. As Entwhistle (2011,
p. 9) remarks:

“It is evident that equality of opportunity is a conceptually ambiguous notion and it
has recently been attacked from both sides of the political spectrum; from the left
because its application leaves the social status quo completely undisturbed; from
the right because it implies unacceptable social change. ..As a recipe for social
engineering, it merely makes for mobility within the status quo. ..From this point
of view, it almost seems that the word equality is an accidental occurrence in the
phrase  (or perhaps cynically included to exploit its emotive overtones), where
everything really hangs on the word ‘opportunity’ which, in turn, seems logically inconsistent with the notion of equality. When the emphasis is upon opportunity, the implication is that outcomes will be unequal.”

This has led Watson (2009, p. 8) to ask: “Is HE participation essentially a shield against downward social mobility for dull middle-class children?”

**Hatching the egg and loving the chicken**

The systemic research carried out for this inquiry allied with the findings in Section 10.2 provides a useful basis for unpacking the issues relevant to holistic policy development. It is clear that the political rhetoric enacted within intertwined social, economic and educational policies fail to recognise the cultural identities of the working-class members in this study.

A Moral Underclass Discourse of social exclusion conceives lower class individuals as deficient and responsible for their own poor destinies. The outward-looking Widening Participation policy is underpinned by notions of social mobility and economic prosperity, conceiving socially excluded individuals wanting to shed their working-class identities by elevation into the middle class through HE participation, lured by the promise of greater long-term economic gain. Economic policy is constructed on notions of raising the skills of the lower classes to levels capable of sustaining a High Skills Economy, a grand plan seen to be necessary to compete on the global stage.

The cultural and social identities, values and ambitions of the research members are not reflected in New Labour’s political rhetoric. Members in Sub-Group 1b and Groups 2 who were transformed from potential HE participant to non-participant were **victimised** by
multiple indices of deprivation and I have suggested that Government intervention to alleviate the effects of these are required to ensure widened participation in HE.

Members in Sub-Group 1a were transformed from potential ‘HE participant’ to ‘HE non-participant’ through a combination of factors which led them to be satisfied with their working-class identities and long-term financial prospects. They wished to remain within their local communities which they perceived to offer limited opportunity. However, rather than seek enhanced opportunity elsewhere, they took advantage the limited opportunities of the socially deprived environment in which they lived. These were generally Low Skills Economy occupations, so reproducing the economic outcomes of a traditional Low Skills Economy. This suggests that stimulating an economy towards a High Skills Economy requires greater opportunity to be made available in socially deprived areas which contain only opportunities traditionally associated with a Low Skills Economy. This, of course, is a difficult balance to achieve since the higher skills required to sustain High Skills Economy opportunities are likely to be a scarce resource in socially deprived areas, although it can be assumed that higher skilled individuals would also be likely to follow suitable High Skills Economy opportunity. Whilst there is no guarantee that the existence of greater opportunity would act to motivate individuals such as those in Sub-Group 1a to want to participate in HE, its absence creates certainty of non-participation.

My final comment here is that the only way to ‘hatch the egg’ is by ‘loving the chicken’. This involves viewing the socially excluded as valuable and worthwhile members of society who are the victims and not the causes of social deprivation. It also requires the move from a Moral Underclass Discourse of social exclusion to a Redistributive, Egalitarian Discourse (Levitas, 1998). This emphasises the structural roots of social
disadvantage and endorses political and structural solutions (Bullock et al., 2011, p. 151) through redistribution of wealth (Levitas, 1998). An understanding of the cultural situations of the socially excluded is required to be embedded in political rhetoric to ensure it does not continue to be a reflection of the “very different class and habitus” (Slack, 2003) of the “political elites” (Reay, 2001a, p. 343).

10.3. Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have addressed the first two research questions informing this inquiry through analysis of the Relevant Issues identified in the sensemaking analysis of members’ lived experience (Chapter 9) in comparison to the major issues identified from systemic investigation into the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education (Chapter 2).

The first research question informing the inquiry was “Why do more young disadvantaged people not embrace the opportunity to participate in Higher Education as extended through the Widening Participation initiative?” To address this, and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge of explanatory theory for lack of widened participation, I compared the Relevant Issues identified in the previous Chapter against issues emerging from problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education identified in Chapter 2 and concluded that 3 explanations emerged from this inquiry:

1. A majority of the socially disadvantaged members did not consider Higher Education participation as worthy of notice – i.e. the issue did not enter into their consciousness and therefore, they did not decide to not participate. They simply wanted to follow other ambitions.
2. For members who did not consider Higher Education participation as worthy of notice, two very different life experiences emerged:

a. Those who did not feel they had been negatively affected by multiple indices of deprivation had ambitions to be something through choice of a career. Whilst they recognised that the socially deprived area did not offer opportunity, they prioritised remaining within their communities and taking advantage of the limited opportunity available rather than moving away to seek greater opportunity. For this group, Higher Education participation is a ‘non-decision’ because it is part of their ‘normal biography’.

b. Those who were negatively affected by multiples indices of deprivation did not have a lack of aspirations, but their ambitions were far more ‘modest’ and tended to centre around escaping circumstances they found intolerable. For this group, Higher Education participation is a ‘non-decision’ because they have been transformed from potential ‘HE participant’ to ‘HE non-participant’ by social deprivation and lack of opportunity; only social intervention at an early stage of their lives could have changed this situation.

3. The small minority of members who did wish to participate in Higher Education were prevented from doing so by a barrier of social deprivation since their families could not afford to lose their income had they participated. Such a barrier has not previously been identified in Widening Participation research, and removal of financial barriers for ‘WP students’ would have been of no assistance here. Only social intervention to alleviate the poverty levels of the members’ families could have changed this situation.
In relation to the second research question informing the inquiry, I wished to explore whether this systemic study and holistic thinking at the “micro level” of WP policy could be useful in gaining a greater appreciation of the issues at the “macro level” of holistic policy development. I concluded that this was the case, and the following finding emerged from considering the findings from the first research question informing the inquiry as outlined above against the wider problem space of the Widening Participation policy.

From the findings already discussed, a proportion of members emerge as satisfied with their working class identities, desirous of remaining within their local communities and ambitious for career paths not requiring a Higher Education qualification. They prioritised remaining in their local communities over social elevation so that the underlying ethos of Higher Education participation being a national value and something socially disadvantaged young people would want to aspire to does not hold true for this inquiry. For these members, it would appear that there is little that could be done to stimulate their participation in Higher Education. However, the prioritisation of local community over social elevation suggested that members limited their educational outcomes to the limited opportunities available in the socially deprived area. This effect is the opposite of the Widening Participation policy intention to increase educational outcomes and so increase labour market opportunities. It also reveals the inward looking nature of these citizens compared to the outward looking economic policy and its focus on globalisation.

For other members, I suggested that the effects of social deprivation which transformed them from potential Higher Education participant to non-participant were incompatible with the social objectives of the Widening Participation policy to reduce social deprivation, increase social mobility and provide equality of opportunity. Many members
were too socially deprived to have any, much less, equal opportunity of HE participation even for those who did want to participate.

The implications of the above for holistic policy development here suggest that:

1) A shift from a Moral Underclass Discourse of social exclusion to a Redistributive Egalitarian Discourse is required to ensure that:

   a. The socially excluded are viewed as valuable and worthwhile citizens who are the victims, and not the causes of, social deprivation.

   b. Redistribution of wealth and social intervention compensates for existing equality of opportunity which prevent certain citizens from HE participation as a result of social deprivation

2) An understanding of the cultural situations of the socially excluded is required to be embedded in political rhetoric to better understand the ambitions and needs of the socially excluded.

3) Stimulating the economy towards a High Skills Economy for globalisation requires greater opportunity to be made available in socially deprived areas as a means of encouraging young people to increase their educational outcomes.

From the contributions to knowledge detailed in this Chapter, I now turn to addressing the third research question informing this inquiry – whether the lessons learned from this systemic research into Widening Participation policy as operationalised under the New Labour government could be useful for informing revised Widening Participation policy as introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010 in the next Chapter.
Chapter 11. Future directions

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Jefferson (1776, p. 1)

11.1. Introduction

In the previous Chapter, I have addressed the first two research questions informing this inquiry. I have firstly contributed to the existing body of knowledge of theory to explain reasons why more young socially disadvantaged people do not participate in Higher Education as a result of the Widening Participation policy. I have also demonstrated the usefulness of this systemic research into the wider problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education for holistic policy development.

In this Chapter, I use the findings of the previous Chapter to feed forward as implications for the progress of the Widening Participation policy under the Coalition Government. I firstly provide a brief outline of changes to the Widening Participation policy and other relevant policy areas instituted by the Coalition Government since May 2010. I then utilise the findings from the previous Chapter to explore implications they might have for progress of the Widening Participation policy under the Coalition Government in light of these policy changes. Whilst it is obvious that some contribution to policy is made by this inquiry, it is also the case that certain areas worthy of further investigation also emerge and these are highlighted as future directions for research activity to conclude.
The final Chapter in the thesis then provides a personal reflection on the work as a whole.

11.2. Contribution to knowledge about the discipline of “policy-making”

In the previous Chapter, I have outlined the usefulness of Systems Thinking to the development and operation of interrelated policy arenas. The contributions to knowledge for the discipline of “policy-making” revolve around two specific ideas, the need for holistic thinking and the need for ethical policy-making.

Chapman (2004, p. 10) has argued that the dominant approach to policy making is based on mechanistic and reductionist thinking. It is clear that New Labour did attempt to embrace systems ideas (see Chapter 2, pages 94-97) and this work demonstrates the limits to which this was applied in the case of the Widening Participation Policy and interrelated economic and social arenas. As Bates (2013, p. 39) comments, the “technical-rational conception of education as a closed system”, a system in which cause and effect can be manipulated, has led to “unexpected consequences”. One of these consequences is the widening of the social inequality (see Chapter 10, page 361) rather than a narrowing which was a stated intention of the Widening Participation policy. As long ago as 1997, van der Stoep and Kee (1997, pp. 406-407) observed that “the fruitless attempt to solve the mobility issue in either an individualistic or collectivistic way constitute a challenge to find new and more promising policy approaches”. The contribution offered by this work for the discipline of “policy-making” is for Governments to embrace systems thinking throughout, rather than in pockets as is currently the case. This has been acknowledged by the Government Operational Research Service which states that “Government faces a broad range of complex challenges that one needs, not just a wide range of science and engineering expertise to tackle them but also the systems approach to shape effective
policy interventions” (GORS, 2012, p. 3). To date, however, the systems approach is embraced by only a few isolated Government departments such as the Waste Prevention Programme instituted by DEFRA (Freeman, Yearworth, Angulo and Quested, 2013). The structural challenge for society offered by this work is for the systems approach to be embraced throughout Government in all areas of policy-making if effective outcomes, rather than unintended consequences, are to be the result.

The related contribution to the discipline of “policy-making” arises partly from the need for systemic thinking but also an associated need for ethical thinking. There is, of course, a huge diversity of opinion on what counts as ethics in policy-making, but the perspective taken here is the ethics behind the questions posed by Boston, Bradstock and Eng (2010, Loc 69): “what norms and values should guide the behaviour of those involved in the policy process?”

The norms and values taken by successive Governments in the Widening Participation policy (and related economic and social policy) has been “the neo-liberal market model (albeit modified by a commitment to social justice” (Oppenheim, 2010) as demonstrated in the “authoritarian communitarianist” approaches discussed in this work (see Chapter 2, pages 66-76). This is tantamount to an implicit assumption that there should be a sharing of values between social classes accompanied by a moral judgement of individuals who do not take up opportunities extended to them, such as a right to Higher Education as extended by the Widening Participation policy. It is this implicit assumption of shared national values that has led successive Governments to conceive Higher Education and social mobility as something those of lower social classes strive to attain. The findings of this work demonstrate this not to be the case.
Poverty and deprivation are conceived as relative measures in the Widening Participation and interrelated policies; relative poverty is defined as being below some specified line such as households which earn less that 20% of the median national income. Runciman (1966) made one of the first formal definitions of relative deprivation through an investigation of British working class militancy between 1880 and 1960. One of Runciman’s observations was that individuals suffering relative deprivation invest their energies in limited social worlds and are generally marked out by limited social horizons; manual workers, he said, tend to compare themselves with other manual workers rather than dukes. This perspective appears have been embraced by politicians in the development of the Widening Participation policy and implies the assumption that all manual workers would aspire to be dukes if they could. The findings of this work run contrary to this perspective; despite being deemed as living in relative deprivation, research members who experienced happy childhoods did not consider themselves deprived. Neither did they aspire to a higher education or social mobility but instead chose to cleave to the values and norms of local communities in which they wished to remain. For those who experienced unhappy childhoods, there was a feeling of deprivation and a desire for social mobility, but that mobility was not an aspiration towards a dukedom; quite simply they would have been content to be raised above the level of despair to a happy working class childhood.

Jonsen and Butler (2012, p. 19) state that “those concerned with policy-making – the politicians, the bureaucrats and the technicians – generally avoid discussing ethics”. However, Oppenheim (2010) maintains that “the craving for an ethical basis to politics stems from the fact that the prevailing values of this past era have left out some essential elements of what it is to be part of a good society”. Ethical policy-making involves considering others’ points of view (Schrecker, 1998, p. 8). It is the political ability to
demonstrate phronesis, practical wisdom concerning universal truths which include the contextual pragmatism to know what is suitable for the common good “relative to the person, the circumstances and the object” (Aristotle, 2009, 1122A25-6). For Government:

“The task for progressives is to re-engage with their rich ethical heritage – whether that is co-operatives, faith, the role of voluntarism, social enterprise – as well as the familiar tools of state action for achieving change. There is no single tradition on which to draw, but the task is rather to integrate different insights from this wide source of alternative ethical frameworks to start putting together the new scaffolding that will guide policy thinking as we look towards 2020.” (Oppenheim, 2010)

Ethical policy making, then, should uphold the basic tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, Article 19)

- Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, Article 22)

- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, Article 26(3))

- Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. . ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, Article 29(1))

- (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, Article 29(2))
The tenets listed above suggest that individuals are, and should be, respected and treated as unique and irreplaceable in society. This necessarily involves explicit acknowledgement of different values and norms and the elimination of the notion of a ‘limited horizon’, a horizon conceived from the lofty heights of a political elite. Replacing paternalistic government enacted through authoritarian communitarianism with a respect for individuals, their communities and local norms and values provides the ethical thinking that may have prevented the failure of the Widening Participation policy and the unexpected consequences which did emerge. This means that politicians must cease viewing the world and what counts as valuable to be aspired to from their own horizons. However, it also involves resolving the battle between free-market fundamentalism and the social democratic belief that individual reward can be balanced with social responsibility (Rudd, 2006b) and this can, as has been demonstrated here, only be resolved through a systemic approach to the discipline of “policy-making”. This contribution to knowledge is demonstrated through the consideration of the future of the Widening Participation policy under the Coalition Government, as outlined in the remainder of this Chapter.

11.3. Implications for the progress of Widening Participation in Higher Education under the Coalition Government

The previous discussions have implications for the progress of the Widening Participation policy under the new Coalition Government who came to office in May 2010. In this subsection I firstly provide a brief account of changes to Widening Participation in Higher Education and other related policy initiatives under the Coalition Government and then explore implications for progress of these as arising from earlier discussions in this Chapter.
The Coalition implementation of Widening Participation in Higher Education and other relevant policy

In May 2010, New Labour was succeeded by a Conservative/Liberal Coalition government which inherited the largest budget deficit in post-war Britain (H.M. Treasury, 2010, p. 5). “Austerity measures” were instituted to reduce this deficit through public spending cuts in which “particular focus” was given to “reducing welfare costs and wasteful spending” to prioritise “the capital investments that support long term economic growth” (H.M. Treasury, 2010, p. 5).

The Higher Education sector was not immune to sweeping changes which were designed to make “the higher education system more efficient and diverse” (Clegg, 2013). Austerity measures resulted in a £3 billion reduction in public spending on Higher Education (Porter, 2011), representing an 80% reduction in overall funding (Brink, 2012). At the same time, recommendations that students should bear the cost their higher education arising from the latest review of Higher Education (Browne, 2010) were formalised in the Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2010. This set thresholds of between £6,000 and £9,000 per annum for full-time tuition fees which new undergraduate students would be required to pay from academic year 2011/12 onwards. The Coalition anticipated that universities would charge an average of £7,000 in order to compete for students through their fee-setting, but the majority opted to charge nearer the maximum of £9,000 (Johnston, 2013, pp. 200-201). Greater restrictions on student quotas also resulted in HEIs losing approximately 25,000 student places overall (Hackett et al., 2012, p. 20).

The Coalition Government, again believing Widening Participation in Higher Education to be critical to improving both social mobility and economic competitiveness, announced
that Widening Participation would remain a key priority (Cabinet Office, 2011; DBIS, 2011). However, responsibility for funding, resourcing and achieving widened participation was shifted onto Higher Education Institutions. This included greater involvement in outreach activities to compensate for the disestablishment of Aimhigher in 2010.

Funding of Widening Participation was linked to fee income. The new Regulations stated that HEIs could charge up to £6,000 for fees with no regulatory constraints. However, HEIs could only charge fees above this, up to the maximum threshold of £9000, if they satisfied the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) they were investing a significant amount of additional income earned above £6,000 on WP measures. They were required to submit Fair Access Agreements to set out how they intended “to sustain or improve access and student success among people from under-represented groups” (OFFA, 2013). OFFA was given greater regulatory power to place sanctions of HEIs who failed either to meet expectations or demonstrate sufficient effort in attempting to do so.

Benchmarks were set for each HEI and WP funding structured for proportional achievement against this target. These were configured as low, medium and high for which 30%, 22.5% and 15% of additional fee income respectively had to be used to fund WP activity (Johnston, 2013, pp. 207-208).

HEIs charging above £6,000 were also mandated to participate in a National Scholarship Programme intended to “protect those on the lowest incomes in higher education” (H.M. Treasury, 2010, pp. 7-8). This would “target bright potential students to encourage them to apply to university and meet their expectations” (Willetts, 2010). By 2015, the Scholarship Programme was expected to be worth £150 million per year, progressively
funded by HEIs, and would ensure that “at least the first year” of HE study was free for targeted individuals (Willetts, 2010).

During New Labour’s term of office, the lack of success in WP was seen to be due to disadvantaged individuals’ unsatisfactory school experiences and there were many calls to improve this. The Coalition recognised that existing systems “fail to provide effective education …to help disadvantaged families improve their prospects” (H.M. Treasury, 2010, p. 7). Action to improve includes; a “new focus on the foundation years before school” to provide 15 hours free early education provision for disadvantaged 2 year olds; a pupil premium worth £2.5 billion for the educational development of disadvantaged students in compulsory education to be allocated to schools as a blanket payment; a school refurbishment programme and the provision of new schools in areas of “demographic pressure”; improving further education and vocational training; and providing almost half a million employment and training opportunities for 18-24 year-olds through a Youth Contract (Clegg, 2013). By 2015, all young people will be required to remain in education or training until the age of 18 (DfE, 2013).

There is a continued Social Integrationist Discourse (Levitas, 1998) orientation towards interrelated social and economic policy under the Coalition. Reforms to the welfare system are intended to simplify and are aimed at “promoting work and personal responsibility …. as well as providing enhanced support for those with the greatest barriers to employment” (H.M. Treasury, 2010, p. 8). These ‘simplifications’ ensure that “work pays” and save £7 billion per annum through measures such as withdrawing Child Benefit from families with a higher rate taxpayer and capping the combined incomes of members in a workless household to the national average take-home pay of working households
Caps are to be set at £500 per week for couples and single parents and £350 for single people (Smith, 2013).

Economic policy is aimed at stimulating economic growth to enable the UK to complete in the global economy whilst “supporting people who work hard and want to get on in life” (Osborne, 2013). Measures include investing in industry; improving business loans; providing grants to stimulate exports; helping people to find and stay in work; and, boosting private sector employment in England (Clegg, 2013).

From past to present: implications for the progress of the Widening Participation initiative under the Coalition

The intention of this subsection is not to provide commentary on the overall policy initiatives discussed above, but merely to consider the implications the findings from this inquiry have for progress of the Coalition Government Widening Participation policy. To do this, it is necessary to touch upon other related educational, social and economic policy areas since these are intertwined with the intentions for Widening Participation in Higher Education. However, the account above is brief and necessarily omits elements of policy development in related areas which are not directly relevant to this discussion.

The Coalition Agreement objectives include a commitment to “fairness and social mobility, providing sustained routes out of poverty for the poorest” (H.M. Treasury, 2010, p. 6). Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg noted that “increasing social mobility is a challenging goal … we must work to remove barriers in every stage of life, to give people equal access to opportunities and help give second chances to those who need them” (Clegg, 2013).
This practical inquiry has found that social exclusion is a major barrier to Higher Education participation for some individuals and suggested that social policy should concentrate on reducing multiple indices of social deprivation to encourage wider participation. However, capping total benefit income appears to adopt Moral Underclass Discourse orientation to social policy, transforming the workless into the ‘workshy’.

Some members involved in this inquiry came from workless households and tended to suffer from parental incidences of alcohol abuse, mental illness and teenage pregnancy which are generally theorized to be more prevalent in socially deprived households. Alcohol abuse is acknowledged by the Government to be “one of the most damaging causes of poverty (Bauld et al., 2010, p. 1) and, in common with mental illness, makes it harder to sustain employment (Zabkievicz and Scmidt, 2007; Dooley and Prause, 2002). Over one third of teenage mothers have no qualifications, 70% are not in education, training or employment and find it difficult to find employment (Teenage Pregnancy Associates, 2011). Capping benefit income for these individuals is consequently unlikely to result in them finding work but may act to increase their levels of deprivation and further victimize their children. This will result in maintenance of the status quo in Higher Education non-participation of individuals such as the particular research members considered here.

Other members in this study wanted to go to university but were prevented from doing so by the adverse financial circumstances of their families. New scholarships, bursaries and other financial support available for ‘WP students’ would not address the barriers preventing their HE participation. There is nothing in Coalition proposals that would help their families to compensate for their lost income should they participate, and benefit caps again would only serve to worsen the situations of families such as this.
The final group of members in this study did not deem Higher Education worthy of interest, much less as something they wished to make a decision about, and preferred to follow other ambitions within their local communities. I have, however, noted that, although they recognised the lack of opportunity available in their immediate environment, they did not wish to move away and instead chose to take advantage of the limited opportunity available. I also argued that their ambitions were not constrained by educational outcomes but by the limited opportunities available and suggested that provision of greater opportunity in deprived areas may have a positive effect in shifting ambition with a resultant effect on HE participation.

The Coalition is committed to stimulating the national economy through a number of measures, including boosting employment in private industry. Whilst there are programmes such as the Regional Growth Fund aimed at supporting growth and jobs in areas that rely on the public sector (NAO, 2012), local communities, councils and civil society organisations are “in the driving seat“ for regenerating deprived areas (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). In effect, communities are responsible for their own regeneration. However, Wiggans (2010) points out that “engagement in communal politics is highly structured through levels of educational attainment and social class“ so that individuals in deprived areas are less likely to engage. Whether regeneration of disadvantaged areas will occur in reality is questionable, especially since:

“We see a growing emphasis on the need for people to be active citizens who participate in public deliberation; at the same time we see a trend towards greater apathy, passivity and withdrawal into the private sphere of family, career and personal projects” (Kymlicka, 2002)
For individuals such as the members in the research study discussed here, the status quo is likely to be maintained in regards to HE non-participation. There is also a consequence that, if opportunity determines educational outcome rather than the other way around, measures to improve educational attainment will be wasted for individuals such as this who will not perceive a need to attain highly in order to pursue limited opportunity.

This discussion would not be complete without acknowledging the growing body of literature which theorises the negative effects of the combination of tuition fees and new meritocracy of Higher Education. Prior to the general election, the Liberal Democrats had signed a pledge to not raise tuition fees and the decision to do so lost the party much respect and prompted party leader Nick Clegg to make a public apology (Kirkup, 2012; Wintour and Mullholland, 2012). Although the introduction of tuition fees was stated to preserve “a careful balance between higher and lower earners, by requiring higher earners to make a fair contribution to the costs of the systems as a whole” (DBIS, 2011), it was met with expressions of outrage (Porter, 2011). The prevailing view is articulated by Burke and Hayton (2011, p. 13) who believe that attitudes to debt are connected not just to income level but also to social identities so that:

“…it is likely to be the poorest sectors of society that will struggle to come to terms with the concept. For many, ‘fear of debt’ is a palpable emotion linked to poverty, want and loss, not an abstract concept.”

Whilst there are currently no official statistics to demonstrate the effects on Widening Participation, the number of applications for part-time study from mature students, many of whom are ‘WP students’, have reduced by 40% since 2010/11 (Fazackerly, 2013; Heagney and Marr, 2013).
Although the Coalition maintains it is committed to creating a fairer society, “in a fair society is what counts towards your success is how hard you work and the skills and talents you have” (Clegg, 2013). Building a fairer society, then, rests upon meritocratic principles, and this is evidenced in the targeting of “bright potential students from poor backgrounds to encourage them to apply to university and meet their aspirations” by the National Scholarship Programme (Clegg, 2013). However, the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, recognised that “rich thick kids” continue to do better at school than “poor clever kids” (Paton, 2010). These new meritocratic foundations for Higher Education participation in general and Widening Participation in particular are likely to act as their own barrier to widened participation of the socially disadvantaged.

I earlier suggested that a greater understanding of the cultural and social identities of the socially disadvantaged should be embedded in political rhetoric, but it is obvious that the Coalition continue to consider their needs from the perspective of the political elites. The comment that the National Scholarship Programme will encourage bright potential students to “meet their aspirations” assumes aspirations which the working class do not necessarily possess as highlighted by members in this study.

There are conflicting concepts within the Coalition Government and it is theorised here that, not only will the status quo of non-participation be maintained for individuals similar to the members involved in this research study, non-participation is likely to increase as a result of social policy, tuition fees and the new meritocracy of Higher Education. If this is so, an unfairer society will emerge as a result.

To this, and successive Governments, I make the following recommendations:
1. Increase the evidence base upon which widening participation is predicated to arrive at a clear and supported intention for its outcomes;

2. Increase the evidence base from research with socially disadvantaged individuals to gain an understanding of who is interested in HE participation, why and what acts to prevent their participation;

3. Institute targeted measures based on evidence collected as above to allow interested individuals to participate in Higher Education by removing ‘real’ barriers; and

4. Identify individuals who may become interested in HE participation if certain things were different and implement targeted measures to make those changes.

Blanket initiatives targeting a largely under-appreciated and undervalued section of the population for Higher Education participation is evidenced by this inquiry to have limited success and theorised to have less success in the future. In short, I recommend that only a policy which evidences answers to “Is Widening Participation in Higher Education important and to whom?” is likely to produce significant changes in the HE participation of socially disadvantaged young people.

11.4. Future directions for research activity

In general, I recommend that all future research activity in Widening Participation aimed at gaining a greater understanding of issues of non-participation should engage only suitable ‘HE non-participants’. The difficulties of considering findings of ‘WP students’ as though they could be representative of ‘HE non-participants’ have been highlighted by the outcomes of this inquiry. Continuance of such a practice, especially where findings
contribute to the evidence base for policy development are more likely to impede rather than progress Widening Participation in Higher Education.

The systemic nature of this research has identified issues external to the Widening Participation policy which act to transform potential ‘HE participants’ into ‘HE non-participants’. This has led to recommendations for changes in both social and economic policy. Studies which concentrate only on Widening Participation in Higher Education without considering the wider problem space limit useful outcomes and I therefore recommend that more holistic research is carried out.

The study clearly demonstrates that the socially disadvantaged cannot be considered a homogenous group; even in this relatively small sample, cultural and social differences lead to the emergence of sub-groups with different types of experience. It is highly unlikely that this inquiry has done more than scratch the surface in gaining a greater appreciation of why more socially disadvantaged young people do not participate in Higher Education. Although it provides a valuable contribution to the knowledge base of explanatory factors, I recommend that similar research is carried out with greater numbers of non-participants to provide a wider knowledge base.

In particular, the relationship between the employment opportunity and educational outcomes for non-participants emerges as being of particular interest. I therefore recommend that future research embraces a range of localities, from the most deprived to the most affluent, to investigate the extent to which such a relationship is found to exist in other areas is conducted.

Overall, I feel that implementing these recommendations for future directions of research will provide a much rounder picture and create a strong knowledge base of explanatory
factors upon which targeted measures to increase rates of widened participation can be established.

11.5. Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have carried forward the contributions to knowledge elucidated in the previous Chapter to answer the third research question informing this work, namely whether the lessons learned from this systemic research into Widening Participation policy as operationalised under the New Labour government could be useful for informing revised Widening Participation policy as introduced by the Coalition government in May 2010. Prior to answering this question, I have clarified the contribution to knowledge for the discipline of “policy-making”, concluding that effective policy making requires to be underpinned by both systems thinking and ethical thinking which acknowledges the differing norms and values in society. This contribution to knowledge is then demonstrated by answering the final research question.

The Chapter concludes with consideration of future directions for research activity, suggesting that all research which purports to address the issue of why the Widening Participation in Higher Education policy has failed to meet its stated ambitions engages only HE non-participants rather than participating ‘WP students’. Finally, I recommend that future research effort be directed towards determining whether a relationship between the employment opportunity and educational outcomes for HE non-participants exists in other localities. The next and final Chapter in this work concentrates upon reflections arising from this research project.
Chapter 12. Reflections on a Research Adventure

12.1. Introduction

In this research, I set out to investigate the wide problem space of Widening Participation in Higher Education with the primary aim of gaining a greater appreciation of possible reasons why more young socially disadvantaged individuals take advantage of the Widening Participation initiative to participate in a university education. Additionally, in applying a systemic lens to inquiry, I was also interested to discover whether holistic analysis of the Widening Participation policy could be useful for informing development of interrelated economic and social policy. Finally, during the process of research, a change of Government changed the direction of the Widening Participation policy whilst retaining the underlying ethos which led me to consider whether the lessons learned from policy development under previous Government could suggest ideas for ensuring future success of the policy. Part One of this thesis, detailed the ground work necessary for ensuring that this Action Learning research project could be recoverable by elucidating the Area of Interest (A), Framework of Ideas (F), and Methodology (M) which were the wide problem space of Widening Participation, Soft Systems Thinking and Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) respectively. Part Two, then detailed the actions taken for Practical Social Inquiry, including development of an ethical framework, specification, research member profile, development of a Framework for Practical Inquiry including a number of preliminary field studies to test methods and the conduct of the practical inquiry itself and analysis of the research data. Part Three details the outcomes and the contributions to knowledge provided by this research project, concluding with recommendations for future research directions.
Researcher competency is based upon continual improvement in praxis through reflection upon each research project and elucidation of the lessons learned, including what was done, what could have been done and how these may have been improved. This chapter is dedicated to reflecting upon this particular research adventure and is the concluding chapter of this thesis.

12.2. Reflections on Methodology

Rationale for selection of SSM.

In Chapter 5 (pages 179 - 183), I discussed the rationale for choosing Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) as the most appropriate methodology for this research project. In these discussions, I stated that a number of other methodologies had been considered and rejected and the reasons for this. On reflection, I feel that consideration of alternative methodologies to SSM was carried out more as a formality than as an earnest effort to determine any possible advantages any alternative may offer over SSM. From the outset, familiarity and experience of prior use of SSM advocated that it should be used for this research project for a number of reasons.

As mentioned above, my concern was to ensure that this Action Learning project was recoverable (see Chapter 1, pages 36 to 40) and that the Methodology (M) should fulfil two particular requirements. Firstly, it should be congruent with the declared Framework of Ideas (F), and secondly, it should be capable of effective systemic inquiry into the Area of Interest (A). With regard to the first requirement, previous projects have suggested that the nature of social ‘reality’ encapsulated in SSM supports a ‘phenomenological account’ (Checkland, 1981, pp. 277-285); since Soft Systems Thinking (the declared Framework of Ideas (F) for this work) is underpinned by phenomenological concepts, SSM would be
congruent with F. This would also be true of the majority of the other alternative systemic methods considered (with the possible exceptions of Grounded Theory and Interactive Phenomenological Analysis) but it was the second consideration which was more problematical.

The Area of Interest (A) for this work is Widening Participation in Higher Education and systemic inquiry needed to be performed in two particular areas. Firstly, an investigation into the Widening Participation policy in a wide problem space encompassing interrelated economic and social policy needed to be carried out using evidence from a number of sources including literature, policy documents, governmental reports and target achievements to tease out significant issues. Secondly, a practical social inquiry needed to be conducted with a number of socially disadvantaged individuals who were not Higher Education participants but who, had they participated, would have been classed as ‘WP students’. The results of both of these inquiries would then need to be brought together to address the research questions.

From prior use of SSM, I was confident that using an SSM framework for the overall research would provide sufficient flexibility for effective inquiry in both areas. Over the past 12 years, I have refined my own expression of SSM for practical social inquiry such as the one to be carried out to the extent that it has become a ‘research skin’, familiar, comfortable and sufficiently flexible to be able to confidently adapt it to the changing needs of a project. This personal mature expression of SSM has been gained at the cost of many painful lessons; considering the importance of this research, I was aware that the necessity to learn similar lessons had an alternative methodology been used possessed the potential to severely compromise the outcomes. Unwilling to take such a risk, I chose
SSM due to my confidence in my ability to use the methodology competently to achieve successful outcomes.

In hindsight, I feel that this time-constrained research project was ambitious for a lone researcher to complete, especially considering the extended duration for practical inquiry due to withdrawal of a high proportion of research members (discussed in more detail below on pages 396 to 397). Unnecessary time and effort was expended in considering possible alternative methodologies when all that was required was to declare SSM as the chosen methodology and state the valid reasons for this being the case. A valuable lesson to remain true to my own personal research directions has been learned here and in future I intend to do exactly that, rather than attempting to ‘cover all the bases’ because it is something I feel I should do.

*How SSM was used.*

Whilst the use of SSM in this project was perhaps very different from that which he envisaged during development of the methodology for analysis of organisational problems, Checkland (2007, p. 19) now agrees that “the application area for SSM is very broad” based on hundreds of different accounts of its use in action. He further states that there are two key ideas behind SSM: firstly, to create a process to *learn one’s way* through a problematical situation to action to improve; and secondly, to ensure that the learning is organised and structured. These two key ideas represent the way in which SSM was used in this project.

At the beginning of the project, I used SSM to ‘learn my way’ to the research questions. This was achieved by creating a meta-framework for the research as illustrated in Figure 47 (see page 202) following the guidance of Checkland and Scholes (1990, p. 294).
Through this framework, issues significant to the Widening Participation and interrelated economic and social policy were teased out and two research questions initially emerged. These were configured as Relevant Systems, or, in other words, questions which required further investigation and action; in keeping with the ethos of SSM, Root Definitions and CATWOE Analyses were performed for both, resulting in two new Activity Models (see Appendix B, pages 460 and 462 respectively). In effect, these Activity Models were used as research frameworks to structure the actions required to address the two initial research questions. As such, they can be considered subsystems to the overall research framework and, in essence, there was little that was unique about this application of SSM in the project.

A unique use of SSM did occur during the practical social inquiry phase (see Chapter 9, pages 306 to 330,) when adaptation of Stage 3 was employed to carry out sensemaking of visually represented research data in the absence of existing methods to do so. Before discussing this particular use of SSM, I feel it apposite to firstly reflect upon the use of visual artefacts per se as this is highly relevant to the discussion which follows.

**Visual artefacts**

Throughout this work, I have referred to the visual artefacts produced during the research interviews as Rich Pictures, so irrevocably associating them with SSM as though they are part of the methodology as presented by Checkland. On reflection, this association is perhaps unfortunate and may create some confusion as to the purpose and use of the visual artefacts themselves.

The term ‘Rich Picture’ dates back to Checkland’s original work on SSM in 1975 in which he states:
“The end point of this stage in the analysis should be a picture of the problem situation, one as rich as can be assembled in the time available” (Checkland, 1975, p. 281)

Although the notion of the now accepted cartoon-like drawings to represent the problem situation was not elaborated at that early stage in development of the methodology, the Rich Picture has evolved as such over time. It has therefore become ingrained into the process of SSM and the term ‘Rich Picture’ is generally thought of as the depiction of a problematical situation under investigation. In Chapter 2, I use Rich Pictures extensively in this way to illustrate the problematical situation of Widening Participation in Higher Education from which significant issues are teased out.

The visual artefacts produced in the practical inquiry (see Chapter 9) are quite different in character from those used in Chapter 2 since they are used to illustrate the lived experience of research members rather than explore a problematical situation. The difference is quite subtle and yet significant at the same time. In their group work, Bell and Morse (2010, p. 4) disassociate their use of Rich Pictures from SSM stating that they are “more concerned with the use of Rich Pictures as free standing, problem diagnosing tools”, maintaining the impression that Rich Pictures are always concerned with problem analysis. This is not the case with the visual artefacts created with the research members.

I have employed the method of representing research conversations as visual artefacts in two previous social inquiries and have found that it is useful for engaging the research members in the project. Due to the social class issues highlighted in Chapter 6, the method appeared to be highly suitable for this particular research project and indeed, proved to be very satisfactory. Upon reflection, however, I feel that some aspects of the method were
not explicitly included in the thesis which, along with the misleading terminology, reduces the impact of what was achieved with the research members.

Developing the visual artefacts

On completion of the research conversations, worksheets (see Figure 59 on page 282) were created with the co-operation of the research member to facilitate the development of a draft visual artefact. From this, an iterative process was followed to develop and finalise the visual artefacts in accordance with the activity model created for this part of the empirical process (see Figure 60 on page 283). Firstly, I created a very rough draft picture and then met with the research member to discuss, modify and refine as required. Articulation of this part of the process within the thesis is less than explicit and, upon reflection, there is a specific underlying reason as to why this should be.

As outlined in Chapter 9 (see section 9.7 on page 304), the issue of anonymity for the research members mainly revolved around fears that their peers would be able to identify them from the data presented in the visual artefacts. During the process of modifying or refining the draft visual artefacts, research members would write and/or draw on what I had produced to better represent their experience to their own satisfaction. Several members expressed their fears that, even if their peers could not identify them from the visual artefact itself, they may be able to recognise their handwriting and asked that the amended drafts not be included in the published work. I was happy to agree to this but then internalised this part of the process rather than explicitly stating it in the description of what was done.

Internalisation of the visual artefact development stage allied with the terminology ‘Rich Picture’ seems to provide an impoverished account of the method and its outcomes.
Through this development stage, some extra details or elements of research member experience emerged and this is lost in translation. On reflection, the way in which this method is represented in the work suggests that visual artefacts have somehow proceduralised Stage 2 of SSM and that the artefacts produced by me were de facto representations of facts. This is far from the case of what actually happened since the visual artefacts were actually vehicles for further dialogue and engagement. Those illustrated represent the outcomes of my final meetings with the research members.

The unique use of SSM for interpretation of visual artefacts

Leading on from the above, the impression that SSM Stage 2 was proceduralised in the development of the visual artefacts is somewhat heightened by the fact that SSM Stage 3 was then adapted to allow for interpretation of the pictures produced. Although I am aware that there are many accepted methods for the interpretation of visual data, these tend to be oriented towards art appreciation and interpretation of, for example, the use of colour and placement of elements in the visual artefact rather than data analysis. This difficulty is acknowledged by Bell and Morse (2010, p. 8) who state that:

“The interpretation of Rich Picture Diagrams, and indeed an understanding as to the factors which help form what appears in such pictures, is very much an inexact science. This is not so in art, of course, as historians have long sought to understand and appreciate the motives and influences which have acted upon artists and which helped frame the work they produced.”

Although the 6-step approach to interpreting Rich Pictures developed in group scenarios developed by Bell and Morse (2010) appeared to be an effective method, it involved the participation of the group members in the process. Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to gather all the research members together to assist in interpretation of the Rich
Pictures, partly due to logistical issues but mainly due to the fact that members were concerned about being identified from the visual artefacts. I therefore turned to Stage 3 SSM as a potential method.

During this phase, SSM was adapted heavily for the purposes of the data analysis. Three amalgamated Rich Pictures were developed from the individual pictures created in each Field Study and then analysed using Root Definitions and (M)ATWOE analyses (a modification of the CATWOE Analysis of SSM). It was impossible to mirror the exact tools and techniques of SSM Stage 3 since its intention is to uncover particular issues for debate and possible change or, in other words, to look at ‘what could be’. My intention in the data analysis was to look at ‘what was’ in the experience of the research members, requiring modification of the original methodology for this purpose. Overall, I feel that the adaptations made were successful in achieving the objective of examining the 12 identified Relevant Issues and would like to take this forward in future research for refining of this modification of the methodology. I do not feel that an alternative approach would have garnered ‘better’ outcomes, although I am certain that different outcomes would probably have resulted.

On reflection, I have some ambivalence about the use of visual artefacts in the project. Whilst they were successful in both engaging the research members in the study and allowing for a holistic data analysis as reported above, they also created some unexpected difficulties. These difficulties arise mainly from unforeseen issues with anonymity expressed by the members which is discussed in more detail in the section below.
12.3. Reflections on the conduct of the practical inquiry

Issues of anonymity

As discussed in Chapter 9 (see page 304), an unexpected concern with anonymity was exposed as a result of accessing members as a group but interviewing them individually. Research members were less concerned about the wider implications of anonymity – i.e. being identified by readers of the research – than being identified by their peers from the information presented in the visual artefacts. On reflection, and with the gift of hindsight, I feel that I should have – or could have – anticipated that such concerns may arise. However, this was not the case and the implications for the research are significant.

Firstly, the withdrawal of a high proportion of research members as a result of these concerns had a significant impact upon the duration of the practical inquiry and was costly in terms of time and effort. Secondly, the concerns arose mainly after the research members had been involved in developing and agreeing the visual artefacts (or Rich Pictures); a number of those who did not withdraw from the study requested that draft pictures which they had been involved in developing not be included in the study as they felt they could be identified by their peers from their handwriting. This resulted in the unconscious internalisation of this part of the process, leading to an impoverished account of the overall empirical process as reported above (see above, pages 391 to 393).

On reflection, I am unsure as to how these concerns could have been avoided since they arose as a result of the way in which research members were recruited to the project as discussed below.
Accessing research members in groups

In Chapter 9 (see pages 291 to 293), I discuss the difficulties experienced in accessing individuals who met the defined research profile; such difficulties are acknowledged in the literature and have been theorised to be the reason why many researchers in the field involve participating ‘WP students’ as research members (Gorard, Smith, H., et al., 2006). For this study, I found it difficult to access suitable individuals without asking individuals from my social network to assist and these contacts mainly facilitated access to research participants as part of a group. The fact that their group peers knew they were participating gave rise to the concerns about anonymity discussed above.

Although I have reported earlier in this work that a small number of research members were recruited as individuals rather than as a group, they were in fact suggested as a group but were only ever accessed as individuals. Therefore, it was the case that their participation in the study was known by others and the anonymity concern was the same for these members as those accessed as part of a group. This is perhaps not as clear as it could have been in the reporting of the practical inquiry.

For research members who withdrew from the research, the concern appeared to arise from the fact that they had revealed certain information to me which they were unwilling for their peers to know. In some ways, this is a pleasing outcome since it suggests that they were comfortable in their conversations with me and happy at that point to discuss deeply private matters. However, it is also a limiting outcome since it was the reason they became unwilling to allow their results to be used in the study. Even though the remaining participants did not have this particular concern, a number did express anxiety that they could be identified from handwriting on draft Rich Pictures. It is clear, then, that
recruiting individual research members from a larger group had a significant impact on the progress of the study.

On reflection, it is difficult to know how these concerns could have been avoided even if the issues had been foreseen in advance. I question to what extent the use of visual artefacts heightened the concerns of participating research members and whether using textual methods instead could have alleviated this to some extent. This, of course, is a moot point since it remains a theoretical musing but it does suggest that this could be a useful direction for further research efforts.

**Use of ‘informal gatekeepers’**

Throughout the study, I have referred to the contacts from my social network who facilitated access to the research members as ‘informal gatekeepers’. As discussed above, I found it impossible to gain access to suitable research members without the assistance of these contacts but I feel that some clarification of their involvement should be made. Gatekeepers are generally understood to hold power in research relationships through their ability to restrict access to the researcher (see, for example, Munro, Lesley, Rainbird and Leisten, 2004; Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry, 2004) but the power exercised and role played by informal gatekeepers as facilitators of access is not generally addressed in the literature.

For this inquiry, I initially appealed to a wide variety of contacts in my social network to suggest suitable individuals who may be willing to participate in my research; the contacts were, at this point, free to discuss the research with interested individuals if they wished to. However, my original intention was to use the contacts only as a source of advice on potential research members rather than as an initial point of contact. As such, the term ‘informal gatekeeper’ at this stage was very loose and did not prescribe any particular
actions that the social network contacts should make. However, this did change as the practical inquiry progressed following the abortive ‘Rowdy Crowd’ field study (see Chapter 8, page 283).

I have described the access method for the Rowdy Crowd Study as being a ‘cold access’ approach but on reflection, this is not entirely the case since ‘cold access’ implies that there was no prior knowledge of the individuals before the access approach was made. The contacts who suggested the group were in fact acting as ‘informal gatekeepers’ in the sense that I originally intended it to be used. The fact that I had not fully considered issues of researcher safety in attempting to carry out this field study was a valuable lesson to learn but it also exposes a particular gap in the practical inquiry as reported. Although the incident did indeed cause me to use the ‘informal gatekeepers’ to initiate the initial contact with potential research members, this was not a change in access strategy but rather a difference in the way in which the strategy was used. From this point forward, the ‘informal gatekeepers’ were requested to facilitate an initial introduction to potential research members but had no further involvement with the research from that point forward.

Reflecting upon this, I feel that the term ‘gatekeeper’ in both the social science literature and in this study requires further refinement. The term itself implies that individuals described as being in this position have some control over who is accessed and therefore occupy a position of power in the research process. This was not the case for this study and the term, as it is used here, is misleading as to the role and involvement of the social contacts involved in the research process. ‘Informal gatekeepers’ have been described as individuals trusted by potential participants who are effective in gaining access to potential research members and have a greater ability to recruit (see, for example, Moore and Miller,
1999; McNeely and Clements, 1994; Gueldner and Hanner, 1989). Whilst this description is nearer to the way the term is used in this study, it is not entirely accurate since the contacts used as ‘informal gatekeepers’ had no part in the actual recruiting of members into the study. However, in the absence of an alternative accepted term for the role the social contacts played in facilitating access to the research members, the term ‘informal gatekeeper’ has been used. For future studies involving social contacts in a similar way, a different terminology will be devised and the role played defined more tightly.

12.4. Reflections upon a personal journey

Reflecting upon the research journey as a whole, I am aware that many personal changes have taken place as a result of undertaking the project. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate the mistakes that were made and how these were dealt with and I have included my reflections on these issues above. However, these are theoretical and methodological reflections rather than personal which is what I want to briefly address here.

As the project progressed, I became aware that it was perhaps a larger piece of work than I had been prepared for when I embarked upon it. Although I had previously been involved in a number of other research projects, none approached the size and scale of this study. Throughout, I veered between satisfaction and despair at the progress of the study and was particularly downhearted when such a large proportion of research members withdrew their permission for their conversations to be included in the results of the practical inquiry. At several points, it appeared that completion of the study within the timescale would be impossible to achieve. I fear that it is true that without great encouragement, I
would have been tempted to abandon the attempt several times and I am very grateful that enough people had enough faith in me and the work to encourage me to the end.

As the project progressed, I became aware that I was taking some risks in areas such as, for example, using the visual artefacts rather than textual descriptions of the conversations held with research members. Whilst I did experience some anxiety in how these methods would be received in what was a personally significant undertaking, I also experienced great excitement in exploring the means by which these methods could best be employed.

I agree that other methods could have been used and that they would possibly have yielded equally useful, if not more useful, results but possibly the greatest satisfaction I have gained from completing this project is the experimentation it afforded along the way.

In Chapter 5 (see page 179), I discussed the impossibility of value-free interpretive research since the biases, values and worldview of the researcher cannot be avoided. I found it interesting to examine my own biases and values as I moved into the practical inquiry phase of the project. Where I had believed myself to be free of prejudice, I discovered this not to be the case, especially with the ‘Yummy Mummies’ (see Chapter 9, pages 293 to 294), the young unmarried mothers who took part in the research. On reflection, I can see that I did possess certain unconscious prejudices against young unmarried mothers, but following my interactions with these ladies and hearing their often harrowing stories, these prejudices no longer existed. From a personal perspective, gaining a greater appreciation of their worldviews and experiences has allowed me to interact with society in a new and less prejudicial manner through the bringing forward of the unconscious to the conscious and understanding the fallacy of those prejudices. Indeed, interacting with all of those who took part, including those who later withdrew, was perhaps the greatest source of joy in this project whilst at the same time being an
extremely humbling experience. The only comment I can make here is that I emerged from the practical inquiry as a very different human being than the one who entered into it.

Finally, I have learned much about the process of research and the pitfalls that can occur along the way. Many valuable lessons have been learned, from curbing impulsive action in favour of more deeply considered and cautious undertakings to ensuring that steps in the process are not internalised for whatever reason, have been learned. I feel that I have emerged from this process as a more accomplished researcher, especially following reflection on praxis.

12.5. Conclusion

This Chapter concludes this thesis by providing reflections on what was done, what could have been done and what should not have been done. In reflecting upon issues arising from the work, including why SSM was chosen and how it was used, the use of visual artefacts, accessing research members and the use of ‘informal gatekeepers’ and personal reflection, I have clarified some points made earlier in the work and exposed some gaps worthy of further research. Whilst I consider that this research has been useful in achieving its objectives and providing valuable contributions to knowledge in certain areas, I am also aware that the work cannot be described as ‘perfect’. Incorporating the lessons learned as outlined in this Chapter into future research will, however, allow a further small step towards perfection to be achieved.
References


Arthur, M. (2011, 14 April). The future of higher education after draconian cuts - October 2010. For Staff, from


Fazackerly, A. (2013, 1 April). Big fall in mature students comes as a shock to universities. *Guardian*, from [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/apr/01/fall-mature-university-students-shock](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/apr/01/fall-mature-university-students-shock)


Frean, A. (2006, 5 May). We’re all middle class now as social barriers fall away, online, *Times*. Retrieved from http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article713386.ece


education. A report to HEFCE by the University York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies.


ONS. (nd). Neighbourhood Statistics - Key Figures for Education, Skills and Training Retrieved 21st November 2007, from http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadKeyFigures.do;jsessionid=ac1f930c6e652766f2e25245fb9a23d3e0d54902bd.e38Qa3mPbh4Kai0PaxiPaNaQa3f0n6jAmijGr5XDqQlvpAe?a=1&b=307192&c=PO12+4FQ&d=141&e=5&g=450998&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=0&s=11956646519


Appendix A: A New Appreciation of Appreciation Part One

Original paper.


Introduction

Sir Geoffrey Vickers did not confess to be an academic (1983, p. xxvi) and yet his work has made a significant contribution to both Systems Thinking and Systems Practice. In particular, Vickers’ concepts of Appreciation and Appreciative Systems have been particularly influential in the work of many systems theorists and practitioners, particularly Checkland who has based his powerful Soft Systems Methodology on the underlying concepts of appreciation. However, the most influential model of appreciation, that of Checkland and Casar (1986), is based upon an interpretation of Vickers’ work which includes action as a central component of the appreciative cycle and also separates standards from the reality and value systems which generate them. This interpretation and the resulting model appear to provide an impoverished representation of Vickers’ appreciation and a reduced opportunity for using the concepts to perform useful and rigorous systemic social inquiry.

This paper begins by providing a brief interpretation of Vickers’ notion of appreciation and then critiques the current models and interpretations of other authors. A richer interpretation is then offered with an attendant systems model through which, it is contended, a framework for rigorous, recoverable systemic inquiry can be constructed to provide a new and valuable contribution to both systems thinking and systems practice. This paper does not intend to present the framework for systemic social inquiry but merely the interpretation and model upon which such a framework may be constructed.

**A brief interpretation of Vickers’ notion of Appreciation**

Based on his own life experience, Vickers seeks to explain how human beings make sense of the world in which they live. He sees the world as a two-stranded rope, an intertwining of events and ideas in history developed in mutual relation with each other (1965, p. 30) and yet does not consider there to be a single, definitive world in which all humans live. Rather, humans develop within “the far from consistent demands of three hard masters” (1987, p. 92), the physical world which must be survived, the social world shared with other communicating humans and the inner, personal world constituted from experience. As he states:
“The inner world, in which men inescapably live, develops in intimate relationship with the physical world, yet according to its own laws and its own timescales. Human history can be understood only as the interaction of the two worlds. The inner world has its own realities, its own dynamism - and its own ecology. Like the life forms of the physical world, the dreams of men spread and colonise their inner world, clash, excite, modify and destroy each other, or preserve their stability by making strange accommodations with their rivals.” (1968, p. 59)

The inner world – or appreciated world - of humankind is structured by a readiness to see, value and respond to situations in particular ways (1968, p. 59) but only situations considered to be of interest are selected for notice, resulting in an incomplete world, a world both limited by and giving form to expectations (1970, p. 98). Appreciation therefore seeks to provide a description of human understanding (Vickers, 1987, p. 99; 1968, p. 142), interpretation (1968, p. 12), learning (1987, p. 69) and communication (1983, p. 43) and is thus a mental activity (1983, p. 43), a circular process through which humans develop their own set of values and standards about the appreciated world which in turn modifies those standards and values (1987, p. 20).

Vickers’ rejects the notion of humankind as teleological beings, arguing that “…most human behaviour … is norm-seeking and, as such, cannot be resolved into goal-seeking.” (1968, p. 147) and that “…life consists in experiencing relations, rather than in seeking goals or ‘ends’” (1970, p. 128). Furthermore, he states that “The relations which a man, an organisation, a society is set to attain or preserve (and to escape or elude) are manifold …” (1968, p. 162). Thus, the underlying premise of appreciation is that humans, individually or collectively, do not seek goals but rather seek to attain, maintain, escape or elude relationships and that these relationships are what Vickers refers to as norms (1968, p. 162).

Whilst Vickers introduces the notion of appreciation through a description of a systems engineering model (1965, pp. 50-51), he emphasises that whilst human systems share some similarities with the description of mechanical regulatory systems, there are important differences. Appreciation falls into two defined segments. In the first segment, relevant aspects of the actual course of affairs are compared with the norm and information is gathered about the relation between the two so that a set of problems in constantly defined. In the second segment a response will be chosen to provide a solution to the problem although those solutions may be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The major difference between human and mechanistic systems occurs in the first segment; whereas mechanistic systems are designed to maintain a particular relation through a given repertory of set responses, human systems have no set response but maintain relationships through the making of judgements. (1965, p. 52).

Judgements can be either reality judgements concerning what is or what is not the case, value judgements concerning what ought or ought not to be the case, and instrumental judgements concerning the best means available to reduce the mismatch between what is the case and what ought to be the case. Reality and value judgements are inseparable constituents of appreciation with a close, mutual relationship since “…facts are relevant only in relation to some judgement of value, and judgements of value are operative only in relation to some configuration of fact” (1965, p. 54) so that “judgements of value give meaning to judgements of reality”.(1965, p. 55). For humankind, whether individually or collectively, appreciation is a mental process.
concerned with relationship maintenance; using reality judgements, humans select what is relevant and determination of the relevance is a value judgement.

Reality judgements are the skill of prediction, the ability to represent to oneself and others not only the present state of affairs and possible future course of relevant events, to comprehend complex situations whether real or hypothetical and to simplify without distorting by excluding the inessential. Value judgements assess the significance of the reality judgements by assessing what is against what ought to be based upon internal standards which may included obligation, commitment, what can and cannot be done, what should and should not be done, what must and must not be done and preferences for what is or what is not wanted (1965, pp. 88-123).

Whilst reality and value judgements appear throughout Vickers various descriptions of appreciation, instrumental judgements, described as the skill of innovation (1965, p. 89), are explicitly described only in The Art of Judgement and yet provide a pivotal element in the understanding of appreciation and appreciative systems. Instrumental judgements concern the best means available to reduce the mismatch between what is the case and what ought to be the case by producing apt solutions by applying personal resources such as time, attention, intellect, passion, money or power. Therefore, all three forms of judgement are inextricably linked in the process which Vickers terms appreciation; the following quotation makes explicit the importance of the less considered instrumental judgement whilst introducing a common interpretation of appreciation as being concerned with the taking of action in the world which, it is suggested, is an impoverished interpretation:

“For Vickers, human action (as distinct from reaction, instinct or reflex) inextricably entails all three forms of judgement; it is a product of judging what is, what ought to be, and what can be done to reduce the difference by selecting specific means from the set of actions at hand.” (Guy, 1995, p. xix)

**Human being versus human doing.**

In common with Guy et al, a number of other interpretations of Vickers’ work revolve around the taking of action in the world (Kumar, 2006; Thomas, 2005; West, 2005; P. B. Checkland, 1999; Stowell, 1995; P. B. Checkland, and Cesar, A., 1986), most of which have adopted the Checkland model described below. Close examination of the various writings of Vickers reveals a recurring emphasis on appreciation as a mental construct almost entirely divorced from action and nowhere is this more forcefully stated than in:

“…the choice of action – is separable and may be irrelevant. Appreciation may or may not call for – and if it does, it may or may not invoke – action which may or may not abate an observed discrepancy, action which I will I call regulative action. There may be no observed discrepancy; match signals, no less than mismatch signals are important and ….informative. There may be nothing to be done.” (1968, p. 149)
Vickers stresses that the outcome of an appreciation is firstly and more critically a classification of a situation as something that can be accepted or enjoyed (1983, p. 55); alternatively, a problem may be identified for which solutions may be sought; even in this scenario, though, there is no certainty of the outcome being action. As Vickers states:

“I labour this points because our technological culture, dominated by ‘problem solving’, tends to take problem setting for granted.” (1983, p. 55)

Action, far from being the default outcome of appreciation, is rather the rarer case.

Vickers refers to the current state of the appreciative system at any point in time as its appreciative setting (1965, p. 83). The flux of events and ideas in history represents the physical and communicated worlds which a human shares with fellow humans; the appreciated world is a human being’s inner world from which only some of all possible events and ideas are selected subject to that human being’s interests and concerns and readinesses to see and value. Judgements and decisions, therefore, may have an effect on the flux of events and ideas in the lifeworld in which others participate but will certainly, without exception, affect the appreciative system (1968, p. 158)

By focussing on action rather than decision making, human beings are reduced to ‘human doings’ and only their actions rather than their judgements and decisions are represented as influencing the general flux of events and ideas in history. By so doing, the constant interaction between appreciation and its immediate effect on the appreciative setting of the system is unrepresented and the rich notion of appreciation itself is impoverished as described below.

The impoverished interpretation of appreciation

Checkland and Cesar (1986) view Vickers as “… attempting to provide a description of what he regards as the actual social process which characterises human communication and action” (1986, p. 4), constructing perhaps the most widely used and referenced model of an appreciative system on the following interpretation:

“The starting point for the model is the Lebenswelt, the interacting flux of events and ideas unfolding through time. ‘Appreciation’ is occasioned by our ability to select, to choose. Appreciation perceives (some of) reality, makes judgements about it, contributes to the ideas stream, and leads to actions which become part of the events stream. … There is a recursive loop in which the flux of events and ideas generates appreciation, while appreciation itself contributes to the flux. Appreciation also leads to action which itself contributes to the flux.” (1986, p. 5)

The model, illustrated at Figure 77, presents action as the inevitable outcome of appreciation. That appreciation leads to a decision is not in dispute; what is in dispute is whether the decision should merely be how to maintain, modify or elude relevant relationships rather than how to act to maintain, modify or elude
relevant relationships since, as Vickers is at pains to stress, nothing may be required to be DONE other than to merely accept or enjoy the situation. Furthermore, Vickers asserts, even where the decision may be to take some action, there is absolutely no certainty that action will be taken as a result of that decision, whereas Checkland and Cesar place action as a central element of their interpretation.

In other publications, Checkland uses a condensed model of appreciation as shown at Figure 78 to illustrate activities which lead to a view on how to act for maintenance of relevant relationships from which action follows (P. B. Checkland, 1999, p. A51) thus largely negating the decision-making element in favour of the taking of action.
Indeed, in his latest book publication, Checkland includes action as part of the process of appreciation rather than a result or something which may occur as shown in Figure 79. (2005, p. 28). There is no doubt that Checkland’s interpretation of Vickers’ work has been influential in guiding others’ interpretations (see earlier references); indeed, attempts have been made to either modify Checkland and Cesar’s model as shown in Figure 80 (West, 2005) or to use it as a systemic inquiry tool (Kumar, 2006, p. ).

In both cases, the emphasis has remained upon action although for Kumar and Sankaran, there is a focus on coping with as much as there is on acting within situations. In adopting the central theme of action, it is suggested that an opportunity for analysing human behaviour becomes impoverished in comparison with a richer interpretation of appreciation as discussed below.
The richer interpretation of appreciation

As stated earlier, it is suggested that the focus on action provides an impoverished interpretation of appreciation. Rather richer is the interpretation which closely follows Vickers’ own assertion that appreciation is concerned with describing, analysing and understanding “the process of judgement and decision” (1965, p. 30). Other voices have favoured such an interpretation but have not attempted to ‘unpack’ or model it for wider application (Winder, 2005; Jacobs, 2004; Wiberg, 2004; Barrett, 2000; Cooperrider, 1987).

The decision making process attempts to reduce the mismatch between what is the case and what ought to be the case; in many instances, it will be judged that there is nothing to be done, that the situation is “one that must be accepted or simply enjoyed; match signals are as potent as mismatch signals and still, happily, more frequent though less noticed.” (1983, p. 55). If however, a mismatch signal indicates that there is a discrepancy between what is and what ought to be, “then – and only then – the concerned mind devises possible responses and evaluates them with the aid of criteria set by other concerns. A ‘problem’ begins to emerge. ‘Solutions’ are sought. Action may or may not follow.” (1983, p. 55). From this, it is possible to unpack the decision-making process to create a richer model of appreciation through examination of Vickers’ work as shown below.

The basic interactions of an appreciative system occur between the mutually related reality judgements and value judgements (1965, p. 54) which contain standards of fact and standards of value (1987, p. 85). It is important to note that this interpretation does not take standards and norms to inform reality and value judgements as suggested by the Checkland and Cesar model, but rather that the standards are implicit within those judgements (1987, p. 86) and that the norm represents the “ought to be” of the relationship being attained, preserved, escaped or eluded (1968, p. 168). “Values are general and explicit. Norms are specific and static. Yet each affects the other and both change in the course of the process already illustrated…” (Vickers, 1973, p. 175).
Reality judgements provide information on what is the case whilst value judgements provide information on what ought to be the case and a signal is generated to determine the level of match or mismatch between “is” and “ought” to be. Instrumental judgements consider the level of match or mismatch and provide alternatives on the best means available to reduce the gap between “is” and “ought” calling on all available personal resources (1965, p. 69). These basic interactions are illustrated in Figure 82.

Individuals exist in an appreciated world constituted by previous experience, expectations, standards, values and norms and thus only certain events or ideas are selected for judgement from the whole range of possible events and ideas available; thus, each person’s appreciated world is limited to those events and ideas selected not only by their interests but also by their readiness to see and select such events and ideas (1970, pp. 97-98). Whilst interests are based upon our value system, readinesses to notice emerge from our reality system (1987, pp. 69-70) and, in circular process, what is noticed for judgement may in turn modify standards of both value and reality (1970, p. 95). The basic interactions of an appreciative system can now be expanded into a richer model shown at Figure 82.
The result of appreciation is the decision on how to attain, preserve, escape or elude desired relationships (1968, p. 161); this may or may not require action and, even if action is suggested, may not result in action (1968, p. 149). Therefore, the resulting decision may fall into one of two categories; either no action is deemed necessary or appropriate, or action is required. These distinctions are not as simple as may at first sight appear; there is no guarantee that a “no action decision” is the result of a match between “is” and “ought” or that a mismatch between “is” and “ought results in an “action decision”. Rather than concentrating on the type of decision made, it is best perhaps to investigate the possibilities a match or mismatch signal may generate.

**Match signals and no action decisions**

Taking first the match signal which signifies that there is no significant disparity between what is and what ought to be, the first alternative is, as Vickers says, that the situation should be “accepted or simply enjoyed” (1983, p. 55) which would result in a no action decision. For example, I may have the television tuned into a particular channel and when the programme I am watching has finished, I discover that the next programme
is one I would also like to watch; in order to do so, I need take no action but simply enjoy the programme when it starts. In scrutinising my bank accounts, I may discover that there are sufficient funds in my current account to cover all my predicted outgoings and I need, therefore, take no action to transfer funds from other accounts which represents a course of action I may have considered if the current funds had been proven to be insufficient. Thus, I merely enjoy the first situation and accept the second.

**Match signals and action decisions**

The second alternative response to a match signal is to decide to take some action; for example, if I receive an invitation to an event I judge to be one I would like to attend, I will make a decision to accept the invitation. In order to accept the invitation, I know that I must take some action to pen the acceptance, address and stamp an envelope, place the acceptance into the envelope and finally to post the acceptance back to the person or body who sent the original invitation. At this point, only a decision has been made to take these actions but no action has yet been taken.

**Mismatch signals and no action decisions.**

Life is such that humans are often presented with situations in which a mismatch between what is and what ought to be is detected and, although action to change the situation to reduce the disparity is desired, there is full and certain understanding of one’s powerlessness over the situation. For example, a pay agreement for one’s employment may generate a disparity between what one will be paid and what one believes one should be paid for the work in hand but, if the agreement has been accepted by the union or by the organisation in general, one is individually powerless to change the situation. This is not a situation which can be accepted with equanimity. It will generate resentment and may lead to further judgements on whether to remain in that employment or to look for a different job with a higher salary; this time the judgement will consider all other aspects of the current employment including convenience, working relationships and conditions, job satisfaction and a whole host of other elements. If the final decision is to remain in the current post, despite the mismatch signal, a decision on no action will be the result but this time, rather than enjoyment and acceptance, there will be feelings of resentment and powerlessness.

**Mismatch signals and action decisions**

Taking the example above, if after all elements have been considered it is decided that one will seek new employment, an action decision is made to change the current situation to one which reduces the disparity between what is and what ought to be. Again, at this point only the decision to seek new employment has been made but no steps to do so have yet been taken nor may they ever be.
The effect of decisions

Unlike the Checkland and Cesar model, the argument presented here suggests that each decision and its related outcomes equally affect the course of history whether or not action is taken. As Vickers points out, the options a human being has to influence his relationships are to either alter the course of affairs, to alter his/her own course or to reorganise his/her appreciative system to bring within his view a wider or different set of possible responses (1965, p. 105); thus, the decision itself will influence the relationship whether or not action is taken and this remains true even when an action decision has been made and no action actually occurs.

Inaction decisions

In the situation where a decision has been made to simply accept or enjoy a situation, although it may appear that nothing changes, what is actually happening is that we are being reassured “that our appreciated world is sufficiently in accord with the real world to be serviceable.” (Vickers, 1970, p. 98). In other words, norms and standards are reinforced. There are no reorganisations of the appreciative system to make, no shifting of values, merely a reinforcing of those standards and values already present. There may, of course, be a mismatch signal generated during the course of enjoyment or acceptance in that what actually is does not accord with the expectation of what ought to be – this, however, will lead to a separate appreciation and a shifting of standards and values.

In situations where it is deemed impossible, undesirable or infeasible to take action, no such reinforcement of the current appreciative setting will occur. Instead, feelings of resentment, powerlessness, hate, jealousy, anger or other negative may be aroused and, as Vickers points out, “a mismatch signal makes a difference even though no action follows. And among human beings its initial effect is usually to start debate which often endures for years before action results.” (Vickers, 1987, p. 87). The debate generated may be external in shared communication with fellow human beings, or it may be internal, resulting in a disruption of the inner world and a colouring of the appreciated world in general.

The importance of inaction decisions lies in the feelings generated as a result; these, whether negative or positive, will colour the future, influencing one’s readinesses to see and value those things of interest and concern. They will always affect the appreciative setting but may or may not influence the general flux of events and ideas in history.

Action decisions

The most important fact to recognise is that action decisions remain only decisions and do not in any way presuppose that action will be taken. Therefore, the results of an action decision can be that all action is actually taken as intended, some action is taken as intended or no action is taken as intended and it is the action which is not taken which is as important as the action which is taken. Where action is taken not
intended as a result of this decision must, in actuality, represent the action emanating from an action decision made in a separate cycle of appreciation.

Bateson offers a lucid explanation of the effect of intended actions not taken:

"The letter that you do not write, the apology you do not offer, the food that you do not put out for the cat – all these can be sufficient and effective messages because zero, in context, can be meaningful…" (Bateson, 1979, p. 43)

Inaction arising from intended action can influence the course of events as profoundly, if not more so, than the taking of intended action. An intended apology not offered can destroy a relationship one intended to preserve and a letter not written can break a relationship one intended to attain; desired relationships affected in this way can have unintended and perhaps irrevocable consequences through missed opportunity. Writing the letter or offering the apology at least provides the possibility of the desired relationship enduring; not writing the letter or offering the apology may provide an end point for the desired relationship.

Action itself is not part of the appreciative system; it is not in itself a mental construct but only arises as its outcome and therefore lies outside the system boundary. Indeed, the actual taking of action may not occur as a result of the particular cycle which deems it necessary but of a separate and future appreciation. Every decision will result not only readjustment or reinforcement of the appreciative system in its current setting but may affect the general flux of events and ideas in history; likewise, each action taken will have the same effects. A richer model of appreciation based upon this interpretation is illustrated at Figure 83.

**Application of a richer model of appreciation**

Vickers’ considers appreciation to apply to individuals, societies, subcultures, institutions and nations equally (1987, p. 25). Checkland considers Vickers’ notion of appreciation to constitute “an epistemology for making sense of the (groundless) social process” (2005, p. 28) based on Checkland and Cesar’s claim for appreciation as “an epistemology for describing the social process in which humans deliberate and act.”(1986, p. 10). However, it is contended that the resulting model based upon this interpretation which centralises action as an essential component of the appreciative system provides an impoverished foundation for making inquiry into the social process.

Central to any form of social inquiry is an understanding of the events and ideas which humans, individually or collectively, choose to select for attention from the whole range of possible events and ideas available at a particular time in history. The richer interpretation of appreciation makes explicit the f readinesses to see and value and the concerns and interests through which events and ideas are selected for seeing and valuing; understanding the extent of the readinesses and the particular interests or concerns can contribute to the appreciation of the selection of particular events and ideas and, as importantly, the neglect of others.
In interpretative social inquiry, factors such as motivation, opinion, emotion, fear, expectation and sense of obligation are as important to understanding and learning about a situation as the actions taken or not taken as the case may be; in particular, the not taking of intended actions can be as illuminating as the taking of action. Through the richer model of appreciation, such factors can be rigorously investigated and analysed, providing an expanded opportunity for understanding and learning about the situation under investigation.

**Conclusion**

Vickers’ notion of appreciation provides a valuable contribution to systems thinking but the most influential model, that of Checkland and Casar, based on an interpretation which centralises action as an essential component of the appreciative cycle, provides an impoverished opportunity for social inquiry. An alternative interpretation which considers appreciation to be a mental construct only, internalises standards within the reality and value systems, makes explicit readinesses to see and value and the interests from which the events and ideas are selected for consideration, and separates decision from action, provides a richer opportunity for useful systemic inquiry into the social process. Whilst the framework for rigorous, recoverable systemic inquiry is not presented in this paper, it is contended that this alternative interpretation offers the potential for a new and valuable contribution to both systems practice and systems thinking.
Classify experience that may be valued

Classify types of relation that may appear in various configurations of experience

What is or is not the case

Value judgements
What ought to be the case

What ought to be the case

Instrumental judgements
How to reduce mismatch between "is" and "ought to be"

Reality judgements
What is or is not the case

Figure 83 - A richer model of Vickers' appreciation
References


Appendix B: Relevant Systems, CATWOE Analyses and Root Definitions for the Primary Research Questions

At the beginning of the inquiry, a learning systems was defined using a version of Checkland’s SSM(p) framework adapted to meet the broad objective of gaining a greater appreciation of WP in HE, illustrated below. At this stage, the wider problem space in which WP in HE was situated was not clear and I needed to gain a greater understanding prior to defining the objectives of the research project.

Iteration of Stages 2, 3, and 4 achieved the learning which is summarised in Chapter 2 of the thesis. Throughout this activity, both Stage 1 and the Monitoring and Control Stages (10, 11 and 12) were continually revisited and refined. There is no prescribed point at which it is possible to state that learning about the problematical situation is ‘complete’ for moving into the Stage 5 of the framework. Indeed, there is invariably a fear that something significant may have been missed and the temptation to continue in perpetuum must be resisted! Experience and intuition are invaluable here for recognising that continued learning activity is giving only diminished returns, at which point the learning can be judged to be ‘adequate’. The information in Chapter 2, therefore, represents the point at which this judgement was made.

Having identified the major issues, Stage 5 was used to identify issues of particular interest which were defined as Relevant Systems capable of providing further insight into the problematical situation of WP in HE. Relevant System 1 defines the primary research objective, to gain a greater appreciation why more young, disadvantaged individuals do not participate in HE. Relevant System 2 defines the second research objective, to determine whether systemic inquiry into WP in HE may be useful for informing holistic development of inter-related Government policy.

CATWOE Analyses, Root Definitions and Conceptual models for the two Relevant Systems are shown below
Limited appreciation of WP in HE

Determine issues concerning mounting and doing the study:
- FMA
- Nature of the study
- Ethics
- Duration
- Resources
- Entry & exit points

Build up Analysis One

Build up Rich Picture of the problem situation

Build conceptual models

Decide desirable, feasible changes

Compare models with perceived reality: look for possible dangers

Conclusions and recommendations

Monitor

Assess criteria for:
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness

Take control action

Appreciate thoughts and previous uses of SSM

Reflect upon learning from this use of SSM

Appreciate current view of SSM

Capture learning for future use

Greater appreciation of WP in HE

To future uses of SSM
RD 1 – A system to gain a greater appreciation of why more disadvantaged young people do not participate in HE

CATWOE Analysis

C: Researcher; Research Community: WP in HE policy developers/implmenters

Research Community

A: Researcher; Non-participating WP target individuals

T: Current appreciation of non-participating WP target individuals
Greater appreciation of non-participating WP target individuals

Gaining a greater appreciation of non-participating WP target individuals is under-researched in the literature but may assist in increased understanding of why greater numbers of disadvantaged young people did not take the opportunity to participate in HE as extended by the WP in HE policy

W: Researcher: Non-participating WP target individuals

O: Researcher: Non-participating WP target individuals

Root Definition

A system to gain a greater appreciation of non-participating WP target individuals operated in the belief that it is under-researched in the literature but may assist in increased understanding of why greater numbers of disadvantaged young people did not take the opportunity to participate in HE as extended by the WP in HE policy. The system is operated by the Researcher and owned by both the researcher and the non-participating WP target individuals for the benefit of the Researcher, the Research Community and WP in HE policy developers and implementors. The operation of the system is constrained by time limits, the WP in HE policy which determines parameters for research participation, access to non-participating WP target individuals and the Researcher’s employment status which both defines the ethics procedures for the study and provides the necessary funding for the work.

Activity Model for RS1

The activity model constructed for RS1 is illustrated below.
**RD2 – A system to gain a greater understanding of whether systemic inquiry into WP in HE may be useful in informing holistic development of inter-related policy arenas**

**CATWOE Analysis**

**C:** Researcher; Research Community: Government policy developers /implementers

**A:** Researcher

**T:**
Current appreciation of whether systemic inquiry into WP in HE issue may be useful in informing holistic development of inter-related policy arenas

**W:** Systemic inquiry into the wider problem space of WP in HE may provide insights useful for informing holistic development of the inter-related policy arenas with which it was created

**O:** Researcher

**E:** Government; time; employment status;

**Root Definition**

A system to gain a greater appreciation of whether systemic WP in HE research may be useful in informing holistic development of inter-related Government policy in the view that the findings from systemic research into the wider problem space of WP in HE may provide useful insights for such. The system is owned and operated by the Researcher for the benefit of the Researcher, the Research Community and WP in HE policy developers and implementers and is constrained by completion of the systemic inquiry into the selected WP in HE issues, time limits, the WP in HE policy (which determines parameters for research participation), access to non-participating WP target individuals and the Researcher’s employment status (which both defines the ethics procedures for the study and provides the necessary funding for the work).

**Activity Model for RS2**

The activity model constructed for RS2 is shown below.
Appendix C: Ethical Checklist

Ethics Approval Form - Students

This form should be completed by the student and passed to the supervisor prior to a review of the possible ethical implications of the proposed dissertation or project.

No primary data collection can be undertaken before the supervisor has approved the plan.

If, following review of this form, amendments to the proposals are agreed to be necessary, the student should provide the supervisor with an amended version for endorsement.

The final signed and dated version of this form must be handed in with the dissertation. Failure to provide a signed and dated form on hand-in will be treated as if the dissertation itself was not submitted.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. | What are the objectives of the dissertation / research project?  
   To understand the nature of WP in HE and appreciate any effect it may have on an area with a high concentration of WP postcodes (i.e. Gosport) using systemic research methodologies |
| 2. | Does the research involve NHS patients, resources or staff? YES / NO (please circle).  
   If YES, it is likely that full ethical review must be obtained from the NHS process before the research can start. |
| 3. | Do you intend to collect primary data from human subjects or data that are identifiable with individuals? (This includes, for example, questionnaires and interviews.) YES / NO (please circle)  
   If you do not intend to collect such primary data then please go to question 14.  
   If you do intend to collect such primary data then please respond to ALL the questions 4 through 13. If you feel a question does not apply then please respond with n/a (for not applicable). |
| 4. | What is the purpose of the primary data in the dissertation / research project?  
   To analyse the nature, extent and effect of WP in HE |
| 5. | What is/are the survey population(s)?  
   a. Gosport: population of Gosport above school age who could be a potential WP student  
   b. PBS: academic staff  
   c. PBS Foundation Degree students: students enrolled on PBS Foundation Degrees |
| 6. | How big is the sample for each of the survey populations and how was this sample arrived at? |
**Gosport**: 500 (max. manageable sample for qualititative sample – not for statistical analysis)

**PBS**: 150 academic staff

**PBS Foundation Degree students**: students enrolled on PBS Foundation Degrees (approx 50 – 60 students over the period of the study).

7. How will respondents be selected and recruited?
   - **Gosport**: random selection; participation voluntary by personal invitation
   - **PBS**: selection by role; participation voluntary by personal invitation
   - **PBS Foundation Degree students**: selection by nature of enrolment on Foundation Degree courses; participation voluntary by personal invitation

8. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of informed consent will be met for those taking part in the research? If an Information Sheet for participants is to be used, please attach it to this form. If not, please explain how you will be able to demonstrate that informed consent has been gained from participants.

   The purpose of the research will be explained in face-to-face meetings; participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any stage.

9. How will data be collected from each of the sample groups?
   - By interview or by participation in Appreciative Inquiry Method (AIM) (see Welch, C. and Akers-Smith, L., 2007) for qualitative analysis

10. How will data be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research?

    Due to the systemic nature of the research, some data will be stored in hard copy and some data will be stored electronically. All data will be stored anonymously but may contain a code which could be used to determine identifying details. Regardless of whether the data is stored electronically or in hard copy, the identifying details will be stored electronically but separately in such a way that unauthorised use of computer equipment could not create the link of details to stored materials. The linked identifying details will be deleted either when no further follow-up is required or at the end of the research period, but will not be retained beyond the period of the research. The data itself may be retained if required beyond the end of the research but will contain no details to identify those from whom the data is gathered.

11. How will confidentiality be assured for respondents?

    Please see point 10. above. Also, confidentiality will be assured in the reporting of research results by removing or generalised particular information which could be used to identify the subject.

12. What steps are proposed to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents?

    Please see points 10 and 11 above.

13. Are there any risks (physical or other, including reputational) to respondents that may result from taking part in this research? YES / NO (please circle).

    If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to deal with these risks.
14. Are there any risks (physical or other, including reputational) to the researcher or to the University that may result from conducting this research? YES / NO (please circle).
   If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to manage these risks.  

15. Will any data be obtained from a company or other organisation. YES / NO (please circle) For example, information provided by an employer or its employees.
   If NO, then please go to question 18.

16. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of informed consent will be met for that organisation? How will confidentiality be assured for the organisation?

17. Does the organisation have its own ethics procedure relating to the research you intend to carry out? YES / NO (please circle).
   If YES, the University will require written evidence from the organisation that they have approved the research.

18. Will the proposed research involve any of the following (please put a √ next to ‘yes’ or ‘no’; consult your supervisor if you are unsure):

   - Vulnerable groups (e.g. children)? YES ☐ NO x
   - Particularly sensitive topics? YES ☐ NO x
   - Access to respondents via ‘gatekeepers’? YES ☐ NO x
   - Use of deception? YES ☐ NO x
   - Access to confidential personal data? YES ☐ NO x
   - Psychological stress, anxiety etc.? YES ☐ NO x
   - Intrusive interventions? YES ☐ NO x

---

8 Risk evaluation should take account of the broad liberty of expression provided by the principle of academic freedom. The university’s conduct with respect to academic freedom is set out in section 9.2 of the Articles of Government and its commitment to academic freedom is in section 1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2004-2008.
19. Are there any other ethical issues that may arise from the proposed research?
   No

Please print the name of:  

Student: Lynn Day
Signed: ________________________
(student)
Date 29th January 2009

I/We grant Ethical Approval
supervisor: Christine Welch
Signed: ________________________
(supervisor)
Date 29th January 2009

AMENDMENTS
If you need to make changes please ensure you have permission before the primary data collection. If there are major changes, fill in a new form if that will make it easier for everyone. If there are minor changes then fill in the amendments (next page) and get them signed before the primary data collection begins.

CHANGES TO ETHICS PERMISSION

VERSION: _____

Please describe the nature of the change and impact on ethics:

Please print the name of:  

student: ________________________
Signed: ________________________
(student)
Date ________________________

I/We grant Ethical Approval
supervisor: ________________________
Signed: ________________________
(supervisor)
Date ________________________
Appendix D: Worksheets and Rich Pictures for Field Studies 2-4

Field Study 2 – The Builder Boys

Member 2.1 - ADAM
Reference: P 2.2

My Decision:
To follow my Dad and Uncle into the building trade (carpenter)

Previous Experiences:
- Dad and Uncle both work in the building trade, so more people know
- The building trade pays good money
- Didn't enjoy school, wanted to leave as soon as possible - left academic.

I did not consider going to University

Values/attitudes:
- Ambition - to follow same trade as father
- Family values
- Honest
- Hard working
- Money important (living self supporting)
- Loyal
- Not academic - University not even a consideration

My Situation:
16. Living by home in close family unit, long-term relationship with girlfriend. Father and Uncle both earning good money as dry liners in the building industry. Didn't enjoy school, was not academic and left with no qualifications. An expectation of joining the building industry along with many from school up. "No worse thing to do".

Major Influences:
- Family - girls
- Boy - work ethic
- Girl friend - long-term relationship
- Mate - peer pressure; work together
- Team - lack of other opportunities
- Grandmother - higher ambition (wanted to go to Law)

Date:
Field Study Ref:

Member 2.2 - BILLY
Member 2.3- CHARLIE
Member 2.4 - DAVID
My Decision: To leave home and move in with my brother.

Previous Experiences:
- Unhappy home life - had a Nobody who was often absent
- Doing and working with many things although we aren't
  yet finished
- Many brothers had managerial jobs or positions by
  working on the sales staff
- Part-time work in the building
- Varsity basketball in Bracknell
- No enemies in school or played football off
  school filling on the vacant spaces where
  wrongs happened

My Situation:
1. I had been in quite a lot of trouble with the police for drinking and fighting and had a few court appearances. My income was less than zero with many chores. I had to help with the graphics in the after-school club and various things that I didn't like. After school, I was often home with my parents. I was often at home with my parents, expecting that I was a better driver and was supposed to work on keeping house with my parents. I was often involved in some criminal activities.

Reference 2-5

Outcome of Decision: I couldn't stay with my brother if I paid my way so I got a job to fund myself. My brother paid

Values/Attitudes:
- Always a problem with life in general
- Only happy when I worked
- Business
- Legal (to my wife)
- Liked - needed to look good
- Wanted respect
- University not in my plan of thinking

Major Influences:
- Education - great influence on my life
- Parents - had influence, especially older, violent
  after arguments
- Schooling - had influence, important, attitude of endings
- Goal: Want to

Date:
Field Study Ref:
Member 2.6 - FRANK
Member 2.7 - GREG
Reference: 26

My Decision:
To go to University to study Civil Engineering

Previous Experiences:
- Mother left the family home with another man — broke home
- Father single parent — worked hard both on his job and to bring up 2 children
- Tried to help out at home as much as possible
- Chased school and worked hard to get into University
due to advanced trauma from some family members —
- "trauma set"
- Dad and Mum very supportive of both me and my younger brother to go to University
- Had 2 particular friends — we wanted to go to Uni together
- Dad and uncle discussing our family and my future

My Situation:
This was a single parent after Mum left the family home to live with another man — he worked hard to look after us and try and make it work but as much as possible. The family was a close team, and we couldn't work. He was self-employed and had no insurance so we didn't leave enough money for me to finish studying for my A levels to go to University.

Field Study Ref:

Member 2.8 - HARRY
Member 2.9 - IAN
Member 2.10 - JOE
Field Study 3 – The Yummy Mummie

Member 3.1 - ALICIA
Member 3.2 - BETHANY
Member 3.3 - CLAIRE
Member 3.5 - ELLEN
**My Decision:** I decided to go to college to be a nurse.

**Outcome of decision:**
- I had to work and study at the same time.
- It was challenging, but I was determined to succeed.
- I learned new skills and knowledge.
- I made many friends and gained confidence.

**Values/Attitudes:**
- Personal pride in achieving my goals.
- Self-discipline and hard work.
- Commitment to my future.

**Major Influences:**
- Family support and encouragement.
- Friends who helped me stay motivated.
- Personal experiences that shaped my values.

**My Situation:**

Date: [Insert Date]

Field Study Ref: [Insert Reference]

---

**GRACE**

---

484
Member 3.8 - HOLLY
Field Study 4 – The Shelf Stackers

Member 4.1 - OLIVER
Member 4.2 - JULIE
**Member 4.3 - KATHY**

My Decision: Wanted to become a teacher but couldn't afford to go to college or train so had to get a job.

Outcome of decision: Working at many jobs as possible while studying part-time so I can earn money/savings to become a teacher in the few years' time.

Previous Experiences:
- Really liked school, especially English and science
- Enjoyed after school clubs
- Seeing so many teachers and finding it was just like bullying and could have been significant

I did/didn't consider going to University:
- I was too young to be involved in planning and politics, I was just a student and doing my best.

Values/attitudes:
- I don't look down on any idea or project to make changes on a weekend - the environment
- I was reading and planning the package
- I want to be the kind of educator who travels to places overseas
- I was being driven and looking after children and finding those things

Major Influences:
- Teachers who had some sort of background, but who had arrived to find a better lift through teaching
- Learning about new places in the world I want to travel to
- Mum and dad supporting my education even if it be
couldn't afford to

My Situation:
I had done well in my GCSE and would have liked to stay on at school.
I went to home with my mum and dad and did 3 week-ends and 3 weeks stint at school. Although I didn't enjoy school very much, it was still at school. Although my mum and dad were really proud of me, they wouldn't have let me stay at school because it wasn't fair to let me when they wouldn't be able to do all of my duties. But also made redundant and always paid a salary.
Member 4.4 - PETE
Member 4.5 - LUCY
Appendix E: Relevant Issues identified from data collected in Field Studies with Supporting Information

Relevant Issue 1 – HE: An issue not worthy of notice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member; government; HE;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant ➔ HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Making a choice of whether to participate in HE or not can only take place if an individual deems the issue worthy of notice for further consideration which was not the case for 21 of 23 research members. Therefore, only 2 members were sufficiently interested by the issue to deem it worthy of further notice to enable decision-making around HE participation to occur. There were no consistent reasons which could be attributed for members not considering HE worthy of notice outside the totality of their lived experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to victimise both the Government and HE in the view that making a choice of whether to participate in HE or not can only take place if an individual deems the issue worthy of notice for further consideration which was not the case for 21 of 23 research members. Therefore, only 2 members were sufficiently interested by the issue to deem it worthy of further notice and to enable decision-making around HE participation to occur. There were no consistent reasons which could be attributed for members not considering HE worthy of notice outside the totality of their lived experience. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

Only 2 of the 23 members considered going to University after leaving school whilst the remaining 21 did not consider HE to be sufficiently of interest for notice. However, neither Kathy (who wanted to become a teacher) nor Harry were able to fulfil this ambition due to adverse circumstances. Kathy’s father was made redundant, and with 3 other children in the home, could not afford for her to stay on at school. Harry reported a similar incident in that his parents split up and his father, with whom he and his sister remained, was involved in an accident which prevented him from working. As a result, Harry felt he should find work to help support the family. Both Kathy and Harry hoped to realise their early ambition for HE participation at some point in the future. This situation tends to lend credence to Governmental ‘barriers’ approach but it is suggested that this may be significant for only a minority of individuals targeted by the WP in HE policy.

There are some interesting corollaries between the experiences of Harry and Kathy. Not only were they the only members to have nursed ambitions for HE, but they were also the only members who had enjoyed school and both viewed a teacher as a positive role model. They also reported having had a happy experience of home life as a child.
Relevant Issue 2 - Perceptions of childhood

MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant ➔ HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>The perception of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have been a significant influence on the life trajectories of research members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view that perceptions of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have been a significant influence on the life trajectories of research members. The member and all individuals within the member’s lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

Whilst analysing the data for development of the holistic RP of the research data, perceptions of home life as either happy or unhappy emerged as a significant influence within members’ life experiences. The majority of the members overtly discussed such a perception and, for those who did not, it was implicit in their accounts. 10 of the members reported a happy childhood, 9 reported a unhappy childhood and the remaining 4 discussed a shift in perception due to the occurrence of particular circumstances. Figure 75 provides the correspondence of perceptions as emerging from the data. As can be seen from the RP from which this data analysis is taken, so significant does the influence of perception of childhood and home life appear to be, it is centralised as an issue from which other issues emanate. These are identified as separate Relevant Issues.
4 members had changing perceptions of childhood. Alicia, Claire and Pete remembered being mainly happy as young children but this changed as they got older. Alicia remembers being happy when she was living alone with her unmarried mother. This changed when her mother’s boyfriend moved in; Alicia did not like the boyfriend and perceptions of life at home were that she was unhappy. Claire’s situation was very different as the incident which changed her perception was external to the family unit. At the age of 13, her best friend died leaving her feeling isolated and unable to cope with her emotions. Pete, a homosexual, remembers being happy in the company of his mother but increasingly unhappy in the company of his father who could not come to terms with his ‘soft’ son. Pete was afraid his father would discover his sexuality and spent his teenage years attempting to gain his father’s approval.

Grace was the only member who perceived moving from being an unhappy child to a happy one. In her early childhood, her wealthy maternal grandparents ‘disowned’ her mother because she had married a lower-class man who became notorious in the local area for his criminal activities. Whilst she was still very young, her father was killed in a street brawl, resulting in her mother descending into a deep depression which rendered her incapable of looking after her and her brother. Grace’s perceptions of childhood became brighter when her uncle, her mother’s brother, looked after her until her mother was well enough to do so.

The interesting outcome considering members with changing perceptions of childhood is that the final perception is the one which appears to have influenced their life trajectories. For example, Alicia who was initially happy, ended up escaping her later unhappy situation through behaviours which are generally viewed as undesirable in society (she deliberately became a teenage unmarried mother as did many of her friends and as had many female members of her family before her).
Relevant Issue 3 - Factors contributing to perceptions of unhappiness in childhood.

**MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member: all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>The perception of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have been a significant influence on the life trajectories of research members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view that perceptions of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have been a significant influence on the life trajectories of research members. The member and all individuals within the member's lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

For those who were unhappy in the family home, issues such as parental incidences of mental illness sexual abuse, alcoholism or criminal activity on the part of a parent or growing up on a council estate were particular factors seen to contribute to the dissatisfaction with living in the family home. Members in this cluster often reported having been adversely affected by several of these interrelated factors; this is not surprising as there is well-documented evidence of the multiple harms which may result from alcohol abuse including mental health issues, (for family members in addition to the alcohol abuser), criminal activity, violence and broken home.

Parental alcoholism adversely affected Charlie, Ed and Greg whilst both Adam and Grace both suffered as a result of their fathers’ criminal activities. Grace was further affected by the onset of her mother’s mental illness following the highly publicised death of her infamous father in a street brawl.

Maternal mental illness was also a factor for Greg and Julie whilst both Ian and Ellen were victims of parental violence in the family home. Ellen was also sexually abused which she felt had a direct effect on her later promiscuity and resulting unplanned teenage pregnancy. The consequence for Greg, Grace and Julie was having to move into non-parental or social services care, further compounding their sense of dissatisfaction with their early lives.

Whilst it is possible to discern specific factors which appeared to influence a member’s perception of an unhappy childhood, no such factors are immediately discernible for those reporting a happy childhood. However, what does appear to be significant is the fact that positive role models were frequently discussed as strong influences on these members’ experiences of childhood. In particular, parents, grandmothers and friends were seen to be positively influential.
Relevant Issue 4 - The influence of role models

MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Role models appeared to have significant influences on members’ life trajectories and social behaviours. For those reporting a happy childhood, role models in early life tended to be positive whilst for those perceiving unhappy childhoods, role models tended to be negative. These latter members tended to find or turn to positive role models only in later years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Root Definition:

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view that role models tended to have significant influences on members’ life trajectories and social behaviours. Positive role models were cited by those reporting happy childhoods and negative role models tended to be present in the early lives of those reporting unhappy childhoods. These latter members tended to turn to positive role models only in later years. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

Role models emerged from the analysis as being either positive or negative dependent upon members’ perceptions of childhood. Positive role models were attached to members reporting happy childhoods. For those reporting unhappier experiences of childhood, parents and friends were more likely to be act as negative influences on life trajectories. It is also the case that whilst ‘happy’ members experienced affirmative influences from positive role models in early childhood, ‘unhappy’ members only appeared to find similarly positive role models at a later point in their life experience. This was particularly true for members who wished to ‘escape’ the consequences of their own behaviour such as criminality and alcohol abuse.

Positive role models tended to be fathers, mothers, brothers, cousins and grandparents. Friends were more often cited as negative role models although some members who reported happy childhoods cited friends as positive role models.

Relevant Issue 5 - A distinction in values and attitudes

MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS
**MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>The perception of childhood appears to create a distinction in the values and attitudes of members with those reporting happy childhoods displayed values and attitudes commensurate with a positive sense of self whilst those with perceptions of unhappiness in childhood articulated values and attitudes suggesting a much weaker sense of self-worth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view that perceptions of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to create a distinction in values and attitudes. Members reporting happy childhoods displayed values and attitudes commensurate with a positive sense of self whilst those with perceptions of unhappiness in childhood articulated values and attitudes suggesting a much weaker sense of self-worth. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

During the research process, I was frequently humbled by the accounts members gave of their life struggles, particularly those who reported unhappy childhoods. The language and demeanour of these members during the interview process is reflected in the sharp distinction of members’ values and attitudes based upon their childhood perceptions emerging from the holistic RP. Those reporting a happy childhood repeatedly articulated values and attitudes such as “proud”, “generous”, “honest”, “work ethic” and “ambitious”, suggesting a positive sense of self. In contrast, those from an unhappy background used terms such as “fearful”, “selfish”, “dishonest” and “angry”, suggesting a weaker sense of self-worth.

The role of principal caregivers in the early experiences of childhood as determinants of an individual’s self-worth and emotional well-being have long been recognised by psychologists (see, of example, the works of Sroufe, 1978; Erikson, 1963). Early social experiences and the perception of acceptance or rejection, closely correlated with happy or unhappy childhood perceptions respectively, are translated into a basic sense of worthiness or unworthiness. This, in turn, is theorised to influence later life trajectories (Rosenberg, 1986) which can be witnessed in practice from members’ accounts of their life experiences in this study.

**Relevant Issue 6 - Ambition, aspiration and desire to ‘be something’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The perception of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have been a significant influence on the life trajectories of research members. The member and all individuals within the member’s lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

The immediate destinations of members after compulsory education again differ depending upon perceptions of happiness in childhood or otherwise. The most obvious difference is between those who ended up in employment and those who didn’t. Here it would be simple to correlate ambition with a desire ‘to be something’, (for example, an electrician, a hairdresser or a celebrity), which would certainly cohere with a Governmental view of ‘aspiration’ and ‘ambition’ as being related to a desire to ‘better oneself’ through HE participation and consequent upwards social mobility. At the outset of the practical inquiry, I feel that I was perhaps guilty of such a viewpoint but at the conclusion of the inquiry, I had formed an entirely different viewpoint.

‘Ambition’ is defined as “an aspiration to be, to do” (SOED, 2007, p. 67). From the analysis of the holistic representation of members’ lived experience, two distinct trends emerge predicated on perceptions of happy or unhappy childhoods. For those with a happy home life experience, there appears to be an immediate ambition to be something as a result of occupation. For those unhappier childhood experiences, there appears to be a tendency to want to do something such as, for example, to maintain a reputation through anti-social behaviour or, at the most basic level, ‘escape’ a current desperate situation or simply to survive.

A perception of a happy childhood and the shaping of ambition to do

Only those with a perception of a happy childhood reported having a particular desire to enter into specific employment or further education on leaving school. Billy, David, Frank and Joe believed their family were instrumental in shaping their strong work ethic. With the exception of Joe who nursed ambitions to emulate his father’s friend and own his own electrician business, they all followed their father’s footsteps in career choice. Bethany, Daisy and Fiona nurtured their own ambitions for hairdressing and ‘celebrity’ but were supported by their parents in doing so. As mentioned earlier, Harry and Kathy were supported by their families in their ambitions but failed to achieve them as neither sets of parents were able to support them into HE.

Whilst Oliver can be seen to ‘buck the trend’ in having a particular occupational ambition, he was by no means ambitionless. Encouraged by his refuse collector father to not end up in a ‘dead end job’, he established his ambition as being to earn enough money to afford the material goods he aspired to. Without a clear direction for occupation allied with a clear knowledge of what he did not want to do, he merely drifted into a full-time contract in his existing supermarket part-time job. Once this had been achieved though, he
A perception of an unhappy childhood and the shaping of ambition to be

The case of Oliver above demonstrates the subtle differences in how ambition may be construed in the members’ life experiences. It is certainly the case that none of the members reporting unhappy childhoods talked overtly of “ambition” in their accounts, but their life trajectories reveal ambitions of a different kind.

Adam had a definite ambition not to follow in his criminal father’s footsteps following a brief foray into such behaviour. He also wanted to be able to support his mother who had fallen into depression following the break-up of her relationship with his father. His experience of poverty also led him to aspire to a better financial position which would allow him to accumulate the material goods he desired. Initially becoming workless upon leaving school, he developed a later ambition to enter into employment, at which point he took a job as a labourer on a building site.

Charlie, Ed and Ian recounted their descent into criminal activity and anti-social behaviour as their immediate destinations upon leaving school. However, none saw this as a purposeless descent but rather as one underpinned by specific ambitions. For Charlie and Ian, their ambition was to project a certain type of image with their peers and these criminal or anti-social behaviours were a way of maintaining their reputations. Ed’s case was slightly different but equally purposeful. Having been taken into the care of Social Services as the result of his mother’s mental health problems, his only ambitions were ‘survival’ and escape from his enforced residence in a care home. This led to him drifting from town to town for some time; again, this was not an aimless drifting but a search for something he could not define but eventually discovered when he fell in love. Moving in with his new partner gave him new aspirations for permanence and employment.

Ellen, a casualty of paternal alcohol abuse and the resulting violence between her parents, reported growing up in an environment where teenage pregnancy was seen as a norm. Her ambition was to become a teenage unmarried mother as a route to escaping the parental home, being allocated her own housing and receiving an income from the Benefits System. She also predicated her promiscuous behaviour as a resting on the sexual abuse she suffered from her father’s friend. As a consequence of this, she could not identify the father of her child but was unconcerned about this, pleased only to have achieved her ambition and to have moved forward with friends of a similar worldview.

Holly’s worldview and subsequent journey paralleled that of Ellen. She viewed teenage pregnancy as her future and worked towards that ambition, again unconcerned about who might be the father of her child. Whilst not affected by issues such as alcoholism or criminality in her childhood, she perceived her home life as having been less than happy and her mother as desperate for her to move out. Being a teenage unmarried mother was prevalent in her family with her grandmother, mother, aunts and sister all following the same path. Holly viewed the receiving of benefits as her ‘right’ and, like Ellen, considered unmarried motherhood
as her only possible route to independence. Neither Ellen nor Holly had any other aspirations in life other than motherhood and living within the community of other young unmarried mothers.

Although Lucy did not report becoming pregnant at 15 as a deliberate act, it certainly helped her fulfill her ambition of creating an independent life with her boyfriend whom she met when she was 14. As with Ed, the desire to create a happy home life with her partner became the motivating factor in her later ambition to earn extra money by working in a supermarket.

Julie described her perception of childhood as changing from happy to unhappy following the death of her baby brother. At this time, she herself was so young, her early happy times were entirely subsumed by this event and she therefore described her childhood as essentially miserable. After the death of her brother, her mother became increasingly unable to cope with looking after her, with the result that she was passed around various family members who temporarily became responsible for her care. As a result, she moved schools frequently and so was unable to make any friends. At the time of the interview, she had moved in permanently with her grandmother and her major ambition was to not have to work. She felt she did not fit in with society and therefore preferred being alone and by existing on benefits, she did not have to mix with people other than her grandmother. Unfortunately, her grandmother had recently become ill and Lucy was her primary carer. A desire to provide her grandmother with an adequate level of care had led Lucy to seek part-time work to supplement her benefits although she was careful to ensure that her earnings did not reduce the level of benefits she could claim.

Changing perceptions of childhood and the shaping of ambition

From the accounts provided by the members as recounted above, two distinct trends emerge predicated on perceptions of happy or unhappy childhoods. For those with a happy home life experience, there appears to be an immediate ambition to be something as a result of occupation, for example, to be a hairdresser or an electrician. For those with an unhappy childhood experience, there appears to be a tendency to want to do something; for example, to become pregnant or to maintain a reputation through criminal behaviours. However, there is also a tendency for those from unhappy childhood experiences (with the exception of Ellen, Julie and Lucy) to find new ambition at a later stage, often resulting in them taking employment of some kind. The trends emerging from the above data are underlined by the experiences of those whose perceptions of childhood changed due to certain circumstances occurring in their early lives.

Alicia was originally happy in her childhood, living with her mother who was a single unmarried parent. This changed when her mother entered into a new relationship and moved her new partner into the family home. Alicia and her mother’s boyfriend did not like each other and argued frequently, changing Alicia’s perception of her previously happy childhood into an unhappy one. In her happier days, Alicia nursed an ambition to be a hairdresser and to attend college with her friend in order to become one. As happiness turned to unhappiness, however, Alicia’s this original ambition was overtaken by a new aspiration to move out of the family home. Like Ellen and Julie, she believed becoming an unmarried teenage mother would be her only route to independence and this is the path she then followed. At the time of the interview, Alicia
was relatively new to motherhood but stated that she was beginning to consider reigniting her original ambition to become a hairdresser in the future in order to provide a better life for her child.

Claire’s changing perception of childhood from happy to unhappy arose from without the family when her best friend died at the age of 13. Despite the love and support of her family, she became increasingly lonely, believing nobody understood her despair and grief. Although she did not discuss what ambition she may have had in her earlier childhood, Claire described her descent into criminal behaviour, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse and promiscuity in detail. As with Charlie and Ian, this was not a purposeless descent but one fuelled by her desire to escape emotions she could not cope with. Her teenage pregnancy was not a deliberate choice as with Ellen, Julie and Alicia, but an accidental consequence of her behaviour at this time. Upon becoming a mother, though, Claire felt she was contented and wanted to provide something better for her child in the future and suggested she may think about going to University at some stage.

Pete was rather ambivalent about his perception of childhood as result of the differing attitudes of his parents. He acknowledges he was happy as a very young child but that this began to change when his father’s attitude to him began to change. Pete realized from an early age that he was a homosexual. He also realized that this would be unacceptable to his father who believed masculinity was a matter of machismo. Despite attempting to hide his homosexuality, Pete could not conceal his non-macho characteristics, leading to bullying behaviour from his father. Pete’s original ambition was to go to College with a view to pursuing a career as a musician. Although his mother supported him in all things, Pete was so eager to gain his father’s approval, he allowed himself to be bullied into following his father into a trade in the construction industry. Once there, he was subjected to further bullying by equally macho workmates and his only desire became to escape this untenable situation. He eventually realized this ambition by moving in to live with a musician friend and finding work in a supermarket to pay his share of the rent. He was also able to return to his earlier aspiration of becoming a musician but although his mother remained supportive, the consequence of these actions was to become estranged from his father.

Grace was the only member who perceived her childhood as shifting from unhappy to happy. In her early years, she suffered as a result of her father’s criminal activity and his resultant death in a street brawl. Her father was ‘infamous’ in the local and wider community as a result of frequent media reports of his criminal activities and her unhappiness after his death was compounded by the resulting publicity. Grace’s family had ‘disowned’ her mother when she married her father so there was little familial support available apart from her mother’s brother who helped to look after them. Her mother then met a new partner and Grace considers this was a turning point in her life as the household changed from being unhappy to happy. She talked much of her uncle who had his own accountancy practice. She believed she learned to love learning as a result of this influence and her ambition to become an accountant grew from working part-time in his practice. Her original intention had been to gain her accountancy qualifications from College whilst working but was unable to follow this path when she became pregnant. Fully supported by her family, she was now returning to College to study part-time and intended to pursue her ambition by taking an accountancy degree at University at some point in the future.
From this analysis, all research members can be seen to possess ambition at some level with the vast majority running counter to Governmental conceptions of what they should be. Counter-intuitively, those with the most modest ambitions experienced the greatest struggles to achieve them.

**Relevant Issue 7 - Family tradition and norms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member; society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member: all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant ➔ HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Family norms (or traditions) appear to be a significant influence in the life trajectories of members and perceptions of childhood as either happy or unhappy appear to have an impact upon how this surfaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member and society in the view that family norms (or traditions) appear to be a significant influence in the life trajectories of members and perceptions of childhood as either happy or unhappy appears to have an impact upon how this surfaces. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

The influence of family norms emerges as a significant factor in the life experiences of many of the members, regardless of their perception of childhood, although perception of childhood appears to have some impact upon how this surfaces. Members from families where work was a norm tended to end up in employment whereas those from workless families tended to be workless in the sense of legal paid employment. It is also the case that those reporting happy childhoods tended to be born into families with a work history and those reporting unhappy childhoods tended to be from workless households.

An interesting trend arising from the Builder Boys study is that all members reporting a happy childhood also suggested that they had inherited a good work ethic from their fathers. Indeed, Billy, David, Frank and Joe all followed in their fathers’ footsteps by embracing a trade in the construction industry. Whilst Billy, David and Frank followed the same trade as their fathers, Joe was more influenced by his father’s friend and so followed in his footsteps to become an electrician with a view to fulfilling his ambition to own his own business. Whilst Oliver had the precise ambition to not follow in his father’s footsteps by becoming a refuse collector, he did view work as the only route he wished to take on leaving school. Bethany, Daisy and Fiona all experienced an immediate family member being in work and also had ambitions to do something after leaving school; here, there was no following of a parent into a particular occupation but more a following of a parent into the general world of work.

Whilst criminality can be seen to have contributed to a perception of childhood unhappiness, it can also be seen to have influenced a members’ own descent into similar behaviours. Adam, Charlie and Ed all discussed their father’s criminal activities and all indulged in criminality themselves at some point in their...
lives. For these members, there was a later desire to break away from these lifestyles. The incidence of teenagers deliberately choosing to become young unmarried mothers, as Alicia, Ellen and Holly did, appears to be correlated with either a family history of teenage pregnancy, a view of this being a community ‘norm’ or a combination of both. For all of the members in this cluster, a notion of ‘escape’ from unhappy situations is frequently mentioned.

Both Harry and Kathy were prevented from going to university by such circumstances; in Harry’s case, his father could no longer work due to illness and Kathy’s father was made redundant. For both members, neither family was able to afford to support their children staying in school beyond the compulsory leaving age. The ambitions of Bethany, Daisy, Fiona and Grace to follow specific careers were interrupted by unplanned pregnancy and the death of a friend interrupted any life plans Claire may have formed if life had been different. Interestingly, each of the members in this cluster considered these interruptions to have been nothing more than that. They still retained aspirations to return to their earlier ambitions at a later stage and were generally willing to work hard to achieve their dreams. It is equally interesting that each of them perceived their childhood experiences to have been happy.

From the analysis, it appears that members tended to follow parental behaviours whether those behaviours were desirable in society or not.

Relevant Issue 8 – Perceptions of poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Poverty did not appear to be a significant factor in perceptions of happiness or unhappiness in childhood but, for those who acknowledged poverty as a factor in their early lives, it did appear to engender hankerings for material wealth and possessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of poverty in childhood were not seen to contribute to a perception of unhappiness but did appear to engender hankerings for material wealth and possessions regardless of background.

Adam, David, Fiona, Oliver and Kathy all mentioned issues of poverty as being significant when they were growing up but for David, Fiona, Oliver and Kathy, it did appear to detract from their recollections of a happy childhood. Adam was the only member perceiving an unhappy childhood to mention issues of poverty but it did not appear to be a significant factor contributing to his unhappiness as a child.

**Relevant Issue 9 – Experience of school**

A negative experience of school is frequently cited in the literature as being a major reason why more young, socially disadvantaged people do not wish to participate in HE. Although it was a common factor for the majority of research members, it does not appear to have had particular relevance on whether they deemed HE participation as being worthy of notice. Incidences of truancy appear to be more associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour than with a general dislike of school.

20 of the members reported not liking school, regardless of the ‘happiness’ quotient of their childhoods. Several comments such as ‘it’s not worth bothering with kids from there’ revealed a perception that teaching staff were not interested in children from certain areas. Others felt that they were not ‘clever’ and several, particularly male members, suggested that they ‘hated’ school.
David described his school experience as ‘helpful’. Only Harry and Kathy, who later decided to participate in HE, expressed an enjoyment of school and both cited a teacher as a positive and encouraging role model.

**Relevant Issue 10 – A lack of opportunity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>The environment in which the member grew up appeared to be a significant influence on their life expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view the environment in which the member grew up appeared to be a significant influence on their life expectations. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

Members from both happy and unhappy backgrounds mentioned the environment in which they grew up as being influential on their life expectations.

Adam, Billy, David, Ellen, Fiona and Holly all stated that they felt that their wider environment, usually cited as Gosport, afforded no opportunity for social mobility. Charlie, Ed, Frank, Ian, Alicia, Ellen, Julia and Holly furthermore felt that the immediate environment, especially the council estates on which they had grown up, created a damaging culture where crime, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and worklessness were norms. Indeed, so pervasive was this view that Ian’s father had moved his family away from such a council estate into private housing to escape his children being influenced by the culture.

It also appeared to be the case that most members had not considered moving away from the environment to seek different opportunities but had preferred to stay close to their local communities and take advantage of the opportunities which existed there. Charlie was the exception to this as he had moved into the local area in order to escape the criminal lifestyle he no longer wanted to be part of.

**Relevant Issue 11 - Perceptions of HE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Members who had deemed HE participation as not sufficiently interesting to be worthy of notice and further consideration tended to have negative perceptions of HE when questioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS

**Root Definition:**

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member in the view that members who had deemed HE participation as not sufficiently interesting to be worthy of notice and further consideration tended to have negative perceptions of HE when questioned. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

Perceptions of HE do not appear on the holistic representation of the members’ lived experience as the majority did not deem it worthy of notice. As such, perceptions of HE did not form part of their lived experience. They are, however, highly relevant to gaining a greater appreciation of the primary research question.

During the interviews, members were asked whether they had ever considered going to University. In response to this question, many members not only provided a direct answer but also proffered their opinions of university which are included on individual RPs but not on the amalgamated or final holistic RPs. To explore these perceptions further, I developed a separate RP to elucidate the proffered opinions as illustrated at Figure 76 on page 329. This includes consideration of whether opinions differed depending upon perceptions of childhood as so many of the other relevant issues had.

From this RP, it can be seen that perceptions of HE were generally negative and also can be considered to be ‘classed’ opinions in the main. There is, however, no correlation between perception of happiness or otherwise in childhood and perception of HE.

**Relevant Issue 12 – HE: a decision to participate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>Member; HE: Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Member; all individuals within the member’s lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Potential HE participant → HE non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Members who deemed HE participation to be worthy of notice and further consideration made a decision to participate in HE but were later unable to do so due to adverse familial economic circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>The total lived experience of the research member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MA(T)WO(E) ANALYSIS

Root Definition:

An issue owned by the research member which acts to affect the member and victimise both HE and the Government in the view that members who deemed HE participation to be worthy of notice and further consideration made a decision to participate but were later unable to do so due to adverse familial economic circumstances. The member and all individuals within the members’ lived experience can be considered to have acted to contribute to the relevant issue.

The final relevant issue, without which this analysis would be sorely lacking, is the decision to participate in HE by a minority of research members. Significantly, there are some commonalities which can be detected, including an enjoyment of the school experience, a happy perception of childhood, parental support and holding a specific teacher as a positive role model. Equally significant is the fact that, in order to achieve an ambition to participate in HE for these socially disadvantaged members is the ability of the family as a whole to support the financial burden of foregoing a regular income from a child living in the family home, regardless of any other financial burden which may accrue as a result of their participation in HE.
Appendix F – UPR 16

FORM UPR16
Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please complete and return the form to Research Section, Quality Management Division, Academic Registry, University House, with your thesis, prior to examination.

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information

Student Name: Lynn Day
Department: PBS
First Supervisor: Dr Christine Welch
Start Date: 1st October 2005

Study Mode and Route:
- Part-time
- Full-time
- MPhil
- MD
- PhD
- Integrated Doctorate (NewRoute)
- Prof Doc (PD)

Title of Thesis:
Is Widening Participation in Higher Education Important and To Whom?

Thesis Word Count:
70,886 (excluding ancillary data)

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University’s Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIKO Finished Research Checklist:
(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukriko.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)

- a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame? YES/NO*
- b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged? YES/NO*
- c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship? YES/NO*
- d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration? YES/NO*
- e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements? YES/NO*

*Delete as appropriate
**Student Statement:**

I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):</th>
<th>Attached</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed: (Student)</th>
<th>Date: 30/9/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have not submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered ‘No’ to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain why this is so:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed: (Student)</th>
<th>Date: 30/9/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>