Quality Regimes in Scottish Further Education

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Declaration of own work

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the documents (paper and electronic) used is done according to the University rules. I have not copied the work of others (including students) in any way.

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Abstract

The Further Education (FE) sector in UK is considered by politicians as serving the needs of the economy and addressing the needs of social justice, in an effort to make Britain more competitive. So, the marketisation of FE, engineered and supported by successive administrations, since incorporation in 1993 (year colleges were severed from local authority control) has resulted in institutions being subjected to changed modes of operation (governance). Such transformation has been underpinned by New Public Management (NPM), with the quality audit being seen as a clear way of establishing neo-liberal priorities. Consequently, the rhetoric of success acclaiming transformation in the performance of colleges has been prominent in the FE sector. More quality has been configured as better quality. Nevertheless, the impact of changes continues to present a significant challenge to those working in FE. Given, a lack of consensus in the sector, this thesis is presented in a critical tradition whereby official success stories about the triumph of the regime are subject to being challenged.

List of Acronyms

AA: Associate Assessor

EIS: Educational Institute of Scotland

FEFC: Further Education Funding Council

HMIE: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

IiP: Investors in People

LECs: Local Enterprise Companies

LSC: Learning Skills Council

NPM: New Public Management

PAC: Parliamentary Audit Committee

PI: Performance Indicator

PFI: Private Finance Initiative

QUANGO: Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation

SE: Scottish Executive

SEETLLD: Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department

SFC: Scottish Funding Council

SFEFC: Scottish Further Education Funding Council

SFEU: Scottish Further Education Unit

SLA: Service Level Agreement

SOEID: Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

SQA: Scottish Qualifications Authority

SQMS: Scottish Quality Management System

SUM: Student Unit of Measurement

TQM: Total Quality Management

VET: Vocational Education and Training

VFM: Value for Money

WSUM: Weighted Student Unit of Measurement

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The development of post-incorporation Further Education

The provision of further education (FE) in the UK has its roots in the nineteenth century, although it is considered being of relatively recent origin. In Scotland, during the early decades of the twentieth century, FE serviced Scottish manufacturing by training apprentices (Johnston, 2003). Generally (in the UK) FE did not become an established part of the educational lexicon until it was referred to in the 1944 Education Act. Local authorities were tasked to provide education for those over compulsory school age plus leisure and cultural courses for the community (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). While FE may defy simple definition or description it can be considered as a 'level of learning' (Thomson, 2003) that is diverse, ranging from vocational to academic and recreational which blends with higher education and schools provision. Provision can be administered in colleges (main focus) or in the community offering, "local, accessible, 'second chance' for post school education and training" (Johnston, 2003, p 619). Being a catch all provision for activities not taking place in schools and universities has arguably left the FE sector without a clear definition or lacking purpose in its strategic mission (Hyland and Merrill, 2003).

Over the past two decades the consensus that characterised the post-war political, social and organisational settlements (Clarke and Newman, 1997) in welfare arrangements has been fractured, none more so than in the UK FE sector (Esland, 1996; Loots and Whelan, 2000; Alexiadou, 2001; Avis, 2002; Mather and Seifert, 2003). From the 1980's successive Conservative administrations encouraged public sector transformation through market based reform. The thrust in policy was to strip down the welfare state financial burden by making services more efficient and effective according to market indicators.

The UK FE sector now provides a prime agency, which has promoted the thrust for successive political administration's education and training policy, with its nation-based strategy to modernise the economy, improve global economic

performance and generate jobs (Gleeson, 1996). The development of human capital (Avis, 1999) is seen as conferring competitive advantage and contributing towards economic success predicated on efficient market based production. Neo-liberal doctrine is the overarching framework to explain Britain's political economy (Hyland and Merrill, 2003) with the market envisaged as the central and most efficient mechanism of allocation and distribution, whereby it is "unquestionable" (Alexiadou, 2001, p 414). The adoption of a business process governance and accountability model in FE, propelled by the quality agenda, supports the economic and political philosophy. In this context quality in the public services is defined by an emphasis on efficiency and the development of standards (Newman, 2001).

1.1.1 *The emergence of the quality agenda*

Since incorporation in 1993 when colleges were severed from local authority control to become independent bodies resourced by a government funding agency, there has been a proliferation of quality mechanisms accompanied by official advice on how to address quality in FE institutions. However defining the concept of quality is difficult because it can depend on who is framing a reference. This thesis aims to explore the complexity surrounding quality in FE and provide more clarity and understanding about events in the sector.

Quality is regarded as both inclusive and exclusive in that it can be ascribed a number of meanings to include among other things, high standards, good results or improvements in the service of education. More emphasis on the setting of official standards in FE has accentuated quality as an assurance mechanism, which incorporates different meanings and practices i.e. guidelines, procedures, protocols and systems employed to meet targets and guarantee improvement in the service. The mechanisms of quality as forms of measurement are utilised to control the activities of professional practitioners, which is reinforced or strengthened by audit and external oversight (Newman, 2001)

Focusing on Scottish FE (the intention of this thesis) provides an example (as with the wider UK) where the practices of managerialism have been adopted (Loots and Whelan, 2000). It is evident that the importance of standards and enhanced scrutiny in the sector concord with the funding regime and a regulatory state role which stresses value for money (VFM). Financial health and governance of colleges has in turn resulted in an 'extraordinary volume of audit' (Johnston, 2003). The Funding Council distributed £467million in 2005/06 to Scotland's 45 colleges (SFEFC, 2005). At this time, institutions employed 22,000 staff, (Association of Scottish Colleges, 2004) to support training and education for people of school leaving age and upwards. Larger colleges have a turnover in excess of £25 to £30 million, with top salaries for Principals of over £100,000 (Midgely, 2004, p2) and rising. Around 489, 895 students were enrolled in 2002/03, an increase of 19 per cent from 1997/98, with productivity in colleges estimated as increasing by 33 per cent from 1995/6 (Association of Scottish Colleges, 2004).

Due to public sector modernisation it is arguable whether the pressures on the FE sector have been any less under successive New Labour administrations (from 1997) across the UK. Also the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) (from 2007) shows no signs of abandoning neo-liberal philosophy, whereby the state fixation with business process models is likely to remain and become more entrenched. Quality audits are an important strand of modernisation programmes, leading to an intensification and extension of regulatory trends (Corby and White, 1999; Mooney and Scott, 2005). Yet, the quality audit being conceptualized as a 'neutral device' has been subject to challenge (Power, 1997). Also, Mooney and Scott (2005) determine that it is easy to become seduced by the idea of a 'New Scotland' under a devolved Scottish Parliament and ignore the extent to which continuities and change have been features of social policy. Examining the Scottish dimension will assist an analysis of the scope of quality processes contextualised in a managerialist state, both in terms of how far it stretches and its particular manifestation (form, shape and scope) in any one environment.

Making the *a-priori* assumption that there are variances between the two systems (England and Scotland) needs to be evaluated against whether such differences really matter in the type of outcomes produced. Suggesting policy convergence or divergence alongside financial interdependence between Westminster and Holyrood is one part of a more complex picture that to an extent can be addressed and debated by assessing policy outcomes. The potential to peddle myths about the distinctive environment of Scottish FE cannot be taken out of the context of a wider neo liberal economic and political dimension.

Given market based reform with the evolving and emerging forms of regulation in the UK FE sector colleges have faced increased regulation of their activities with an emphasis on lifelong learning, challenging social exclusion, on-going development of new skills (as an investment to increase productivity) all focused on constructing and maintaining a strong economy (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). The development of New Public Management (NPM) with an emphasis on market mechanisms, budgetary rigour and audit has been instituted as a solution (Pollitt, 1993) through the adoption of corporate managerialist policies. Commentators (Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Loots and Whelan, 2000; Alexiadou, 2001; Avis, 2002; 2003) have documented events in FE, with later contributions acknowledging that New Labour modernisation programmes have consolidated on a business process model that promotes a common sense technicism, which pervades managerialism and silences dissent (Avis, 2002). The prominence, expansion or 'explosion' of the audit mechanism (Power, 1997) in public sector reform, has appeared to expose professional autonomy to quality mechanisms, which have contributed to what Avis notes as "a re-writing of state professionalism" (Avis, 1999, p 246).

Traditional models of professionalism and bureaucracy have been challenged with teachers identified as having been complacent in not paying enough attention to skills and attitudes required to regain Britain's declining prosperity (Shain, 1998; Esland, 2000). Further education has not been immune from the shifts in the labour market across the private and public sectors influencing work

identities, which have become more unstable (Sennett, 1998) with a decline in worker discretion (Warhurst et al, 2004). The changes in forms of rationality have installed managerial modes in the education sector whereby the locus of power has appeared to shift from practising professionals towards "auditors, policymakers and statisticians" (Davies, 2003, p 91). Audit dominated policy has been a factor in the exposure of a "thin culture" of professionalism in FE (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004) with the construction of auditable organisations (Power, 1997).

1.2 Missing elements in the FE literature

Despite the magnitude of change in FE, it is perhaps arguable whether rapid changes have propelled the sector from a 'Cinderella' (Randle and Brady, 1997) or 'invisible man' (Hyland and Merrill 2003) status because colleges are still considered to be, "the forgotten sector of British education", being "rarely noticed" (Beckett, 2001, p 15). Newsprint on FE appears to be minimal while the tradition of academic writing has tended to be overlooked. The post incorporation story of FE has attracted a steady interest, although commentators have bemoaned the attention the sector has been given. There has been a feeling that FE remains, "largely unexplored terrain" (Shain, 1998, p 1) being "largely ignored" (Randle and Brady, 1997, p121) with a "general dearth" (Reeves, 1995, p 2) of literature covering the sector. Nevertheless commentators make claims about the impacts that transformed structures continue to have within the sector, although critical debate is less than prolific (Alexiadou, 2001).

While more critical attention has been paid to the FE sector this is predominantly based on the English experience post–incorporation. Others consider the "paucity of research" (Loots and Ross, 2004) on the UK FE sector has led to some speculation about impacts from academics. Arguably, the depth of research activity and the particular outcomes are perhaps now more widely debated, although, less is known about the FE Scottish sector, which continues to receive meagre empirical attention. Current gaps in FE research means further and on-

going attention, about phenomena in post-incorporation institutions is necessary to understand events more fully.

Evidence on quality has been mainly anecdotal and has not been subject to in-depth empirical scrutiny. Despite writers explaining managerialism (to incorporate business models and management as a solution to the running of organisations) with implicit suggestions of quality regimes in operation (Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain 1999) insufficient specific weight is given to the efficacy of quality audits and their impact on the working life of FE professionals, which allow official accounts to go virtually unquestioned.

The gap in our knowledge is of some concern given that FE professionals have experienced significant changes to their work. This is evidenced by job restructuring, cuts to terms and conditions and changes to organizational mission due to external, state driven manifestos of change. Such transformation is in the context of colleges besieged by a 'cash crisis' (Labour Research, 1997) and by a variety of sleaze and scandals (Hugill, 1995; Beckett, 2001) which has influenced an increase in industrial conflict (Williams, 2003). Commentary has depicted something close to a 'Bleak House' scenario having been created in FE (Beale, 2004). Concerns must be raised with regard to the impact on employment relations of New Public Management in the FE sector.

The above observations reveal an evolving body of research on the FE sector, which on the one hand provides an informative, but still relatively small, literature pertaining to the developing state FE sector relationship, and its impact on agents. In the Scottish context, we have only isolated studies and commentary (Halliday, 1994; 1997; 2003; Laird, 2002) concerning the nature of quality and the factors that influence quality development in the sector. Still rarer are efforts to try and directly link quality as a specific driver in regime development. Given these lacunae in the literature this thesis sets out to draw together and explore three core themes.

The first core theme is to explore the characteristics and demands of quality by examining issues of control, regulation and bureaucracy. The second core theme is to examine to what extent it is possible to conceptualise the development of quality regimes in FE. The final core theme is to ascertain what actors are involved in initiating, establishing, diffusing, reproducing, yet also resisting the quality regime.

Other areas of academic interest are also given recognition in this thesis with consideration given to the clash in paradigms between professionals and managerial modes of operation, plus how such interplay has impacted on the intensification of work and the identity of professional agents (Dent, 1998; Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004). These studies have been concerned with actor autonomy in the public sector and, along with others on the voluntary sector (Cunningham, 2005) have illustrated how such inter-organizational relationships in the quasi-market are complex and subject to variability due to a number of causal factors.

This thesis will explore the relationship and interplay between structures and agents in the development of quality in FE and seek to reveal the nature and causes of any variability in these social relations. Also, this thesis will seek to demonstrate an identifiable quality regime built on pre-existing structures within colleges and across the wider FE sector in Scotland.

By examining whether social structures and mechanisms can produce different outcomes in the characteristics, perceptions, impacts and acceptance of quality, the research methods for this thesis are influenced by a critical realist philosophy (Sayer, 1992; Bhaskar, 1975) which will be explained and developed in the methodology chapter. However, this chapter now proceeds to outline the plan for the rest of the thesis.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The thesis comprises of eight chapters overall. Following this introduction two literature chapters and a methodology chapter develop a conceptual framework and create scope for research questions. Chapter Two provides the opportunity for

developing several levels of analysis. On a *meta* level this thesis explores the neo-liberal philosophies that underpin the contemporary policy developments and legislation introduced by Conservative administrations and consolidated in the modernisation programmes of New Labour. Highlighting the marketisation of FE enables a context to be established. The degree to which the FE sector has not only become financially dependent on the state, but is also subject to significant pressures due to forms of regulation spawned by business process models and factored through an economized (market orientated) quality in institutions is illustrated. By illustrating the *macro* level structural influences of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as the funding agency and Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIe) which ensure quality on behalf of the Funding Council in Scottish FE on colleges' scope, is provided to create a picture of how activity is organised in FE. Also, along with the HMIe other funding bodies and quality agencies influence the structure and design of quality systems as a method of control, with obvious implications for the way in which quality is defined and managed on a *meso* (institutional or college) level.

Additionally, the literature search identifies *micro* level debates that focus on the orientations of professionalism and the frequently turbulent environment within which agents operate. Various strands of debate are identified which illustrate the unfolding FE post incorporation story. What is clear is that FE institutions are characterised by heterogeneous groups/agents suggesting a complex set of issues and interests are at play. As a consequence of a dearth of empirical attention failing to adequately conceptualise and address the impacts of quality in FE a case is made to develop a conceptual framework, which more adequately interprets events in the sector.

Chapter Three is concerned with the construction and justification of a conceptual framework, which is rooted in a multi-levelled (broadly neo Marxist) tradition. The theoretical framework establishes the location of state professionals and accepts a structured antagonism and the control imperative in the employment relationship, through a critical labour process application. Such an appreciation provides an

important framework for the study of work organisation and its link to wider society. This thesis also acknowledges a criterion of rationality expressed by the legitimation theorists which governs FE workers, is different from private sector arrangements.

The significant themes of bureaucratic control, consent and resistance are contextualised by the concept of a 'regime', which becomes a legitimate framework to understand state evolution and interpret regime formations. Regimes allow for an examination of the conduct, guidelines, procedures, protocols, rules and systems associated with the management of quality. Utilising regimes as a device for ordering material facilitates an exploration of the management of FE with a specific emphasis on the role of quality and coincides with regime formations being identified. Firstly, *traditional* regimes whereby relations are characterised as part of the post war consensus with professionals having more self-control over notions of quality. Such regime values also means considering the role of bureaucracy in public sector workplace relations. Secondly, *disruption and reconciliation* regimes, establish a rationale to more actively monitor professionals, with quality becoming associated as a legitimate basis for control by the state within the institutional modes of operation. Thirdly, *transformative* regimes, with management as a solution illustrates the marketisation and incorporation of FE institutions around managerial modes of operation. Finally, *consolidated* regimes, explains how the focus has shifted towards ownership of quality in institutions with evolving governance and accountability. In such circumstances evaluation, regulation and target setting are prominent.

The notion of transformative settlements emerging as a consequence of hegemonic regime shifts (Gramsci, 1971) is one way of interpreting organisational change as part of a transformation process of the wider economy. Hegemonic regimes shed light on the power of the dominant official quality discourse presented as common sense, to encourage forms of control and consent. Clarke and Newman's (1997) derived regime categories, provide a framework for organising material to understand organisational transformation in FE. Also by incorporating informal

factors of bureaucracy Gouldner (1954) it is possible to assess Weberian bureaucratic formal control clashing with the value systems of employees. Expanding on consent models (Burawoy, 1979) acknowledges how professionals are capable of self-regulating in the acceptance of quality. Utilising Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) model illustrates that FE professionals could resort to misbehaviour and resistance, which questions success stories about the public audit regime.

Chapter Four then outlines the research philosophy, research questions and methodology for the fieldwork. The chapter establishes a rationale and approach to undertaking research in the thesis within the critical realist philosophy of social science. The chapter contextualises the research and then outlines the rationale for particular phases of fieldwork, distinguishing between different actors in FE organizations. Corporate agents or more senior FE managers (as structural modellers) are considered as having certain resources available at their disposal to initiate and establish structures in regimes. Primary agents (middle managers and lecturers) are more likely to be constrained by organisational regimes due to being less able to harness change mechanisms. The data collection is predominantly qualitative in nature and based on a case study approach across three Scottish FE colleges, being designed to address the aforementioned themes.

Chapter Five begins with an introduction, which explains how the fieldwork material is organised. The results employ several levels of analysis through the configuration of a *regime matrix* (adaptation of Clarke and Newman 1997, derived regime categories) which allows an interpretation through various mechanisms. Firstly, *sources of regime articulation* concentrating on forms of legitimacy (e.g. legislative structures) with forms of affiliation (i.e. actor attachment to the regime) and forms of transmission (e.g. decision making). Secondly, *levels of analysis* (e.g. externalities and internal operations influencing the regime). Thirdly, *agential projects* (to use a term from critical realism signifying the strategies, actions and perceptions of actors) focusing on involvement and perceptions of quality (e.g. corporate agents-senior managers and primary agents-middle managers/lecturers).

Fourthly, *indicative forms of control*, whereby several control devices are employed to explain regime events (e.g. market control).

Chapter Five utilises the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three specifically identifying regime characteristics and operations. The thesis illustrates how the regime establishes a legitimate basis for operation through the various meta and macro structures. Forms of agent or actor affiliation and influence within the regime are illustrated as are the demands placed on agents through the transmission of the regime. Various forms of control (bureaucratic, corporate, economic, ideological, disciplinary and regulatory) are translated through the specific levels of meta, macro, meso and micro operations and demands of quality. Chapter Six illustrates some of the impacts of quality on agents, and considers levels of acceptance of quality regimes. Emphasis is again placed on the interplay of structures and agents.

The findings consolidate on a key theme of the thesis which is addressed by identifying what agential projects are manifestly involved in initiating, establishing, diffusing, reproducing, yet also resisting the regime. In keeping with the research philosophy it is possible to illustrate the contingent cross-cutting nature of the regime through the perceptions of the different groups of actors (senior managers, middle managers and lecturers) in the management of quality. A final summary incorporates some comparative factors in regime formation.

The aim in Chapter Seven is to interpret the relevance of the findings to the literature and highlight the implications of this study with regard to our existing knowledge of quality in the FE sector. Finally, Chapter Eight will conclude this thesis with some reflections on the research before developing a summary of the key arguments and distinctive contributions of the thesis. The conclusion will also suggest some future areas of research before discussing a series of wider policy options open to the sector in the light of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: DETERMINING THE IMPORTANCE OF 'QUALITY' IN FURTHER EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

The aims of this review are to discover what kind of literature makes reference to quality audit regimes in FE and evaluate the significance of the written material, in terms of content and method. Emphasis is placed on how the post incorporation FE literature has a constituent basis to initiate new directions in research.

At the outset, it must be stated that the review of literature is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of academic works on quality systems and all the work that can be placed inside a box with 'quality' marked on it. More importantly the focus is on how academic literature in FE has emerged that primarily focuses on the impacts quality audit regimes have on the sector. Quality as a feature of managerialism has become an important driver of evolving managerial practice, which means establishing an appreciation of how writers have conceptualized the structural devices.

This chapter has several substantive sections and establishes various levels of analysis with which to examine FE. Beginning with an examination on a meta and macro level the chapter illustrates the political, economic and social shifts that have influenced the development of the UK and Scottish FE policy context. Employing existing policy papers, documents and literature provides an illustration of how FE has developed, but also why quality audit has become an important feature of society. Secondly, quality can be contextualized and defined as a prominent driver of New Public Management (Pollitt, 1993; Farnham and Horton, 1996) which has shaped change in the post 1993 FE sector. Thirdly, given incorporation and the transformation at meso or institutional level, this chapter explores the orientations of, and impacts on, professionals at a micro level suggesting that practitioners have been vulnerable to transformative forces. Fourthly, it is evident that a series of events have influenced actors leading to contested debates, which focus on mechanisms or forms of control. The final section and chapter summary assess the weight of contribution

made to date, but also how themes can be developed from debates. The chapter creates scope for the construction of a conceptual framework to interpret the development of the management of quality in FE.

The result is that most of the existing FE literature simply does one of two things, and rarely both. First, much of the FE academic analysis about quality in some form or another has predominantly concentrated on the earlier post –1993 period of incorporation. This state of affairs would suggest that various assumptions about quality audits need to be addressed. The legitimate basis of quality propagates the notion of standards and good practice, in line with professional judgments. However the 'new' legitimacy of quality, as a bulwark of good management and managerial ideology, appears to disarm professionals and dissolves attempts at a critique.

Despite the threat to professional autonomy posed by business process models espousing an economized (market based) quality, the guise of quality regimes remain relatively hidden and undervalued to the researcher, as a specific mechanism to effect organizational change in FE. Such a state of affairs warrants the development of an analytical framework to understand the evolution of the quality regime in FE. For this thesis, it provides an opportunity and substantiates claims for more empirical attention to be paid towards the role of the quality audit as a change mechanism.

2.2 A policy context for the literature: meta and macro influences

The genesis of FE can be traced to the nineteenth century, working class 'self-help' movements and the Mechanics Institutes which provided cultural enrichment, technical and vocational courses (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). The origins of many colleges lie in the part-time vocational training originally provided by the Institutes. (Huddlestone and Unwin, 2007). From the beginning of the twentieth century there was a steady growth in state involvement with Local Education Authorities (LEAs) becoming increasingly responsible for the provision of technical education. The 1960's and 1970's witnessed expansion in the FE sector, both in terms of vocational, but also professional and academic provision. Global recession from the late 1970's influenced the evolution of FE colleges, to their present position as more inclusive

institutions and providers of general education and training (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). In turn, 'new vocationalism' in the 1980's established that education should prepare young people for working life (Avis et al, 1996) with new vocational qualifications being a feature of the FE curriculum. Government policy from the early 1990's propelled the FE sector to be responsive to the needs of employers and the wider community (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). The philosophical position of government generated the conditions and assisted the development of quasi-markets.

2.2.1 *The road to and from '93: towards the quasi-market in Scottish Further Education*

Policy documents and a general literature commentary facilitate an understanding of transformation in the Scottish FE sector setting a scene to assess change mechanisms i.e. the quality audit. The main policy drive of the Conservatives in the 1980's was to engineer reduced public spending. One of the mechanisms to achieve this purpose was to devolve power from central and local government to macro driving forces formed as executive agencies and quangos.

For Leech (1998) the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and Self-Governing Schools Act 1989 in Scotland, while primarily focused on the schools sector also provided for the reformulation of college councils to have more employer representatives. The intentions of the Conservatives to remove colleges from local authority control, was brought into sharp focus during mid 1991 with the White Paper: *Access and Opportunity* (Cmnd1530, Scottish Office 1991). The ideas of change were combined with a definitive vision (in the case of UK FE) whereby institutions would sprout into responsive corporations with independent status. The Further & Higher Education Act (1992) removed colleges from the hands of local authority control into that of a funding body, the Further Education Funding Council in England and Wales (FEFC) followed by the Learning Skills Council (LSC), from 2001.

Initially, in Scotland, the F&HE (Scotland) Act 1992 resulted in the removal from the local authorities to the Secretary of State for Scotland with the incorporation for

43 of Scotland's 45 colleges in 1993 (Loots and Whelan, 2000). Colleges took up their responsibilities on 1 April 1993, with newly formed Board of Management structures.

The importance of changes in Scottish FE is identified by Leech (1998) in official policy documents, *'Mission and Vision'* (Ministerial Speech., Scottish Office Sept, 1992) and *'Quality and Efficiency'* (SOEID, 1992). The main thrust of policy was to improve FE in Scotland and develop a more highly trained and qualified workforce. While an intention was to raise education attainment of 16-18 year olds and contribute to the expansion of Higher Education, improving efficiency and obtaining value for money through the enhancement of quality were other elements of policy direction (Leech, 1998, p 51). In his book *The Modernity of Further Education*, Frank Reeves (1995) points to mass further education being "redefined and restructured" (Reeves, 1995, p 4) as a result of being in the service of the economy. Macro forces operating within the field developed a funding regime (e.g. Funding Council) which had a significant impact on the purpose of colleges.

The responsibility for funding colleges (in Scotland) was initially with the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID), through the Scottish Office. The colleges were made accountable directly to SOEID, which provided an annual grant-in- aid on a formula basis. Following the SFEFC (Establishment) (Scotland) Order 1998, the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) a non-departmental body at arm's length from the executive was given control of funding Scottish FE. All agencies (in theory) are subordinate to the Scottish Parliament and can be called to give evidence to the Parliamentary Audit Committee (PAC). Hence, public sector auditing has implications and begs questions about the distribution of authority and control in society (Power, 1997).

The pivotal role of FE from incorporation was established through the creation of targets, emanating from policy reports and papers. Clear examples of FE (as a provider of education and training) linked to the economic and social needs of Scotland are found in, the Scottish Office Green Papers, *Opportunity Scotland*

(Scottish Office 1998) and *Opportunities for Everyone: the strategic framework for further education* (Scottish Office, 1999). Threads of the earlier Scottish Office approach were picked up and consolidated in the Lifelong Learning strategy, *Life through Learning Learning through Life* (Scottish Executive, 2003). Policy direction has resulted in changed funding, new award frameworks and a consolidation and development of quality models. As part of the new public management agenda, 'good management' is viewed as both the instrument of delivery and solution to issues. Loots and Whelan (2000) stress that the reconfiguration of FE from incorporation, meant the development of new structures and managerial practices, alongside processes to ensure value for taxpayers' money.

> Not only has what FEI's [further education institutions] do changed, but so to has where they do it, when they do it and how they do it and very importantly, why they do it (Loots and Whelan, 2000, p 414-15).

Documentary evidence indicates that, while currently Ministers have a statutory duty to "secure adequate and efficient provision in Scotland" (Audit Scotland, 2003, p 30) many of the powers have been delegated to the Funding Council including overseeing the duty of ensuring the function and management of quality. Further, from October 2005, a Tertiary Council incorporating Further and Higher Education assumed responsibility for managing funding and quality in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2004) although the sector is largely controlled by central government. The regulatory role of the state is translated through various structures or executive agencies, described by Ainley as a 'quango' or 'contract state' (Ainley, 1995, p 6) which has implications for accountability across the FE sector. The Funding Council would be the government's key agency in the management of the 'new' FE through the mechanisms of funding, inspection and quality control (Shain, 1998). Despite the appearance of an 'arms length' less intrusive approach in Scotland, the Scottish Executive oversees that the Funding Council strategic aims support Scottish Ministerial directions.

A closer reading of the literature illustrates the ramifications of changed funding arrangements in FE institutions, forcing colleges to operate with a more business like rationale. Writing on the Scottish sector, Loots and Whelan (2000) illustrate various outcomes in FE including pressures to increase student numbers without increasing staffing; new course developments and generating additional income; proactively responding to the requirements of the external environment and competing with other institutions on 'business-like' terms; demonstrating adherence to the quality initiatives of Government (in the form of the Funding Council and other external awarding bodies, through performance criteria) (Loots and Whelan, 2000, p 416).

Incorporation gave colleges' legal autonomy as corporate entities and individual institutions became responsible for staffing, asset maintenance and financial management (Fertig, 2003). As with the wider public sector, devolution conferred a certain freedom which was characterised by decentralisation in education (Farnham and Giles, 1996). Colleges could manage their affairs with a focus on meeting the needs of the local community and business. The transformation of institutions also propelled a change to the face of industrial relations in the FE sector.

Pre-incorporation colleges had had a relationship with local authorities and national collective bargaining arrangements featured in the Scottish sector (and across the UK). The Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) established a Further Education section in 1971 and became the main trade union for lecturers. In the Scottish sector terms and conditions were enshrined in the 'Blue Book' (Silver book in England and Wales) which prescribed specific teaching loads and other responsibilities. Following incorporation The Board of Management (in Scottish Colleges) became responsible for strategic direction, finance, personnel, and audit at institutional level, being subject to Funding Council financial memoranda (as a condition of grant) and policy guidance. While there was an understanding that terms and conditions would transfer with incorporation colleges (Boards of Management) were in a position to re-negotiate contracts and pay deals at a local level. The Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) was also set up and by definition became the representative body of college Principals in giving advice on various matters. Colleges had an option to opt

into the association for an annual subscription and a Principal's Forum developed to discuss policy matters related to FE.

The outcomes of a changed industrial relations landscape was the demise of national collective bargaining with college Boards of Management free to agree pay deals (some over three years) with local branch officers according to spurious market forces. Within the EIS (in 2003) members of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Association (SFHEA) joined and a new association (EIS-FELA) was formed for lecturers. At institutional or meso level, a whole host of 'new' management posts started to develop over the period to support operational functions (Loots and Ross, 2004, p 20). The quality function was central to post-incorporation modelling in colleges, which had an effect on structures and working practices.

2.2.2 *Defining the Quality function in Scottish Further Education*

In Scotland, (from 1993) quality control is placed in the hands of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMIe) who became an executive agency of the Scottish Parliament, in 2001 following devolution (Huddlestone and Unwin, 2007). The HMIe have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Funding Council to inspect and report on quality in the FE sector, on behalf of the funding body. In 2004/05 the agreement was worth over £1 million, £810,000 in the main budget with a further £245,000 ceiling on activity associated with the Associate Assessors. Such actors (AA's) are recruited from groups of managers in FE colleges on secondments to work for the HMIe during inspections of colleges, alongside full-time HMI's (Circular letter, FE/38 04, SFEFC).

The weight attached to quality and improvements is notable in the £2.75 million 2003-04 Quality Improvement Grant, as part of the Main Recurrent Grant from the Funding Council to colleges (SFEFC, Bulletin, April 2004). Also, funds of £ 2.6 million for Quality Improvement, in 2004-05 were increased to £2.7 million for 2005-06 (SFEFC, 2005). From August 2004, the revised SFEFC/HMIE review methodology *Standards and Quality in Scottish Further Education: Quality Framework for Scottish FE Colleges* was introduced. This methodology was

intended to ‘produce a lighter touch’ for most colleges in line with the progress the HMI believed colleges were making in developing quality assurance. The FE Circular letter noted:

> A key priority for the sector is to continue to improve the quality of provision… In support of this aim there is now in place the revised approach to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) reviews, based on a revised quality framework, and new activities aimed at supporting continuous quality improvement. (27 April 2005 - *Circular letter FE/17/05* 2005-06 Main Grant Letter: Allocation of main grants to colleges).

At the end of 2008 further revision of the quality framework focused on consolidating on the principles of quality linked to performance improvement, particularly in relation to supporting learning and teaching.

From incorporation FE institutions were obliged to produce Strategic Plans and Operational Plans, which were approved initially by the SOEID through the Executive and later by the Funding Council. Plans were contextualised by, and had as a focus on incorporating a vision, mission, mission statements and the values of an institution. Important aspects of plans included national and international developments; Scottish Executives five year lifelong learning strategy; key Funding Council publications and plans; the establishment of key national bodies and initiatives. Other factors influencing plans were an increased involvement of Scottish Parliamentary Committees (e.g. Audit Committee which reviews the sectors financial health) and European Union Structural Fund Programmes.

Quality improvement forms a key element in any colleges planning process and so is an integral part of the Strategic and Operational Plan. Target setting and prospective outcomes tend to feature in plans. Quality improvement is predominantly influenced by a variety of performance indicators which have also evolved since incorporation. Notable examples include Student Retention (SRR) at various points on a student’s course; Student Achievement by Units (SARU) which identifies performance on a

module basis; Student Outcomes (illustrating programme success) Student Satisfaction (SS) normally administered through surveys to elicit feedback. Also, the proportion of staff with a Teaching Qualification (or equivalent) with 'good practice' aims being a feature of some strategic plans. Sets of performance data are now released by the Funding Council benchmarking colleges' performance.

Since the end of the 1990's the principles of governance and accountability provide sterner challenges for devolved FE institutions. The new mantle of accountability is evidenced by reporting frameworks in the context of a regime of audit. To put this into perspective, Scottish FE colleges fall within the remit of the Auditor General, (provided by services from Audit Scotland a statutory body set up in April 2000) who is responsible for ensuring value for money and the highest standards of financial management in public bodies. This situation of accountability and heightened need for improvements in performance is summed up by the Auditor General:

> In the years since devolution [1999], we have been successful in building a public audit regime that is objective, rigorous open fair and effective (Audit Scotland, 2004, p 3).

Also, due to a likelihood of slowing growth rates and rising costs:

> Public bodies must demonstrate that the additional funding is leading to improvements in performance (Audit Scotland, 2004, p 4).

The normative functions of Scottish FE institutions are configured by continuous quality improvement, which is considered to demonstrate value for money in a 'more for more' funding regime. The quality function is represented in the guise of protecting the public purse.

Commentators (Gleeson and Shain, 1999) from the English sector, suggests the post-incorporation funding formula was coercive meaning that failure to comply would

result in the clawing back of monies by funding providers. This is perhaps exemplified, in the case of Scotland, by the Audit Scotland Report (2003), '*Scottish Further Education Funding Council: Performance Management of the further education sector in Scotland'*:

> Where colleges fail to meet quality standards, SFEFC may claw back grant payments (Audit Scotland, 2003).

The modernization agenda of New Labour with an emphasis on targets (Clarke, 2004) is evident because from the inception of the SFEFC (1999), the pace and level of scrutiny in the Scottish FE sector has been manifested in the shape of audit or quality initiatives with a revamping and a strengthening of the information base of the Funding Council on quality. The focus on quality was to more adequately reflect, meet with and address, one of the four Ministerial priorities (*Quality Improvement and Modernisation*) following various criticism about the efficacy of performance indicators in Scottish FE (Audit Scotland, 2003). The role of the Audit Commission operates explicitly as an agent of New Public Management (NPM) by encouraging the development and operation of performance measures to ensure managerial accountability (see Power, 1997, p 50). The importance of structural mechanisms supporting transference practices from the private sector is identified by Holloway (1999) in assessment of the role the Audit Commission in England. Holloway advocates a 'legitimation of coercive and mimetic processes of isomorphism' has taken place in FE (Holloway, 1999, p 241).

In summary, the intentions are clear for Scottish FE colleges (as with the wider UK) that they will be subjected to a strengthened analysis of the 3 e's (economy, efficiency and effectiveness) of public spending. More attention is likely to be focused on the users, to demonstrate improving and better services. The evolution of Scottish FE can be characterised as post- incorporation Scottish Office (SOIED), post incorporation Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC), with a merged Scottish Further and Higher Education Council (SFC) from October 2005. More recent ideas about a 'lighter touch' style quality in Scottish FE suggest a

hands-off, tension-free, consolidated regime. Conversely, the inference that the official structures of quality are somewhat benign is misleading.

2.3 Bringing Quality 'In': configuring the quality explosion

Broadly speaking, the organizational and material realities brought about by the fiscal crisis of the state (Apple, 1993) have involved management as a solution. Having noted that the quality function in FE has become more prominent in line with a shrinking yet regulatory state it is necessary to more fully expose some of the driving forces underpinning an understanding of quality.

This section will briefly address the rise of managerialism, because located within the spectrum of managerialism (as a central plank of New Public Management) are the solutions for understanding quality and audits in FE. This approach is important as it exposes meta and macro (policy and agency) drivers for a transformation in organisational arrangements, which have influenced the orientations of actors at a local level. Stressing the 'audit explosion' (Power, 1997) through increased activity, will facilitate analysis at meso and micro college levels later in the chapter. This section will also provide the basis to understand the meanings associated with quality and examine the orientations of professionals while considering the contested nature of debates in the post-incorporation era.

2.3.1 *A driver for New Public Management*

Events shaping FE are similar to the wider public sector as the meta and macro driving forces of state and government have played a significant role in the reordering of welfare services, with a changed style of public administration (Power, 1997; Mooney and Scott, 2005). The claimed inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucratic control has been replaced by the ostensible efficiency of market mechanisms. State withdrawal as a direct service provider towards devolved control also meant increased external scrutiny and state regulation through funding bodies and the development of internal institutional structures (e.g. audit) to monitor performance.

Having indicated some of the characteristics of change in the wider public sector, contextualized by changed modes of rationality, the rise of managerialism has been well covered in broader literature debates (Pollitt, 1990; Farnham and Horton 1993, 1996; Clarke and Newman, 1997). According to Farnham and Horton (1996) while a number of definitions exist of new models for managing the public sector, the essence of *New Public Management* incorporates certain components which can coexist. These ingredients are: the ideological roots of managerialism, techniques from private business, plus methods for transforming bureau professional into a more, "efficient, responsive and consumerist" (Farnham and Horton, 1996, p 25) entity. Managerialist drivers are manifested in the form of greater budgetary vigour, combined with responses to consumer influence, which are underpinned by more robust management and audit systems. The rationale, economics and generic approaches (Farnham and Horton, 1996, p 26) of the private sector, have been adopted and transmitted to FE

Academics agree that quality in the contemporary public sector is a mechanism to ensure public accountability (Farnham and Horton, 1996; Clarke and Newman, 1997; Davies, 2003). Also, quality presents a challenge to the traditional bureau-professional models and this theme is well documented by Clarke and Newman (1997) who note that the "epidemic of quality" (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 76) provides just such a confrontation. Likewise, Davies (2003) refers explicitly to the education sector when noting that the locus of power in organizations has shifted away from practicing professionals. For some, the joint forces for change of the quasi-market and managerialism would appear to be driven by rhetoric on quality and student or client empowerment (Avis, 1996).

Commentators explain the increased market and strategic direction, incorporating management information systems, accounting and quality assurance systems in the FE sector (Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Alexiadou, 2001; Mather and Seifert, 2003) The analysis of FE by Reeves (1995) depicts the construction of colleges as corporate entities with explicit goals and systems, which has undermined the expression of personal values. A driver for

this change in colleges has been standardisation through best practice, with quality assurance being one of the main areas of attention. As a result, more standardisation requires different monitoring regimes, which in effect is a key to why the organizations characterising post –incorporation UK FE need to develop certain mechanisms of control.

Reeves (1995) illustrates that new rationality in colleges is characterised by firstly, the introduction of a management style, which is reflected in a more business orientated approach. Secondly, management is by objectives whereby organisational goals are formalised, to align with the driving force of the funding agency. Thirdly, accountancy and audit mechanisms are instituted which focus on the practice of accumulating evidence as part of a quasi –technical pursuit. Fourthly, the commodification of education has occurred with payment to colleges linked to user numbers and outcomes. Fifthly, information technology is utilised to monitor, control and determine the pace of work tasks. Sixthly, contractual frameworks are introduced which significantly affect work relations with the funding council, staff and services. Seventh, quality systems govern more and more detail of college activity and serve as proof of worth for external bodies. Finally, the idea of professional vocation is challenged by the concept of a career which is characterised by instrumentalism and is intended to enhance commitment to the new FE culture (Reeves 1995, p 37-52).

The significant structural changes identified by Reeves (1995), suggests potential outcomes at a meso (institution) and micro (classroom) level. Thus, incorporation brought with it institutional transformation, which posed a threat to lecturers autonomy and control over the teaching process. Integral to an understanding of management, managerial interests and forms of control, is that of quality.

By examining the features of corporate managerialism, predicated on economic rationalist principles, it exposes management as a quasi-technical process. Unveiling the spectrum of performance indicators, targets and audits exposed through the demands of governance and accountability (Power, 1997) provides a rationale for investigating quality issues in FE (Avis, 2002). Organizations and individuals are

made accountable because audit is considered to be a benchmark for legitimacy through internal and external official recognition and guarantees. The contribution of Power (1997) provides a platform to establish how audit and quality can be defined separately, although a synergy occurs through a convergence of both aspects in practice. Audits are used because they enable and demand quality is measured and verified in a public sense. So, quality assurance models by definition require forms of audit mechanism to measure performance and ensure that quality systems are working well.

If we examine various consequences of the drive to reform (through NPM practices) public services, it is possible to suggest that business process models with associated economized outcomes e.g. audit and quality practices, can often conflict with the world of education. Additionally, by acknowledging Meyer and Rowan (1991) certain trends can be identified, which question the success of an economized approach to audit and quality. On the one hand, *decoupling* occurs, whereby audits are ineffective in organizations due to concentration on the rituals of practice (the ceremonial) rather than the substance under study. On the other, *colonization* suggests that audit mechanisms are effective but in unintended ways i.e. leading to the opposite of what was intended.

While colonization may be an explicit objective of NPM to curb the discretion and power of professionals such change can also result in outcomes that resemble decoupling. Despite the usefulness of Meyer and Rowan's model, certain issues arise due to the measurement and evaluation of performance in accountancy terms. Power (1997) points out that a binary classification precludes other outcomes (e.g. cooperation) and that the effectiveness of audits and associated practices are not easy to calibrate.

The business process models of post incorporation FE drive economized systems of quality and measurement, whereby efficiency and economy outweigh more difficult concepts such as effectiveness and performance. The onus appears to be on the researcher to disentangle and dismantle the 'package' of managerialism. Hence,

'quality' in its various forms and guises e.g. as an audit tool, becomes a rudiment worthy of attention. The contribution of Power (1997) is helpful for this thesis as it assists an appreciation of how concepts of quality are constructed. Forming questions about the operations of quality opens up avenues to consider the demands of governance and accountability in institutions.

2.3.2 *Orientations of quality in FE: a factor in establishing economic control*

The earlier, important and somewhat overlooked philosophical input in the post-incorporation era by John Halliday (1994): *'Quality in education: Meaning and prospects'* considers that the use of the term 'quality' in educational institutions has ramifications for funding, educational quality and institutional accountability. So, Halliday provides an understanding of how discourse can become embedded in institutions and is interpreted according to the location of agents within an organization.

As with other contributors (Esland, 1996; Avis, 1996) Halliday acknowledges the link between education and economic prosperity, contextualized through education as a service. 'Quality' is enmeshed by monitoring and performance measurement, suggesting the need for audit mechanisms. Halliday believes that the application and prior understanding of the term quality, in a service-industrial context, creates semantic and epistemological difficulties, which have practical implications, within educational institutions.

For Halliday, the 'factory' or 'service' model of education promotes a 'quality profile' of an institution, which is focused on effectiveness and efficiency with more quality delivered at less cost. While the language of production is a prominent characteristic of the understanding of quality in education, it is "forced and inapplicable" (Halliday, 1994, p 37).

The drive for a quality education delivered at minimum cost to the state requires judging policy success and desirability of policies. Such assessments are based on quantitative measures. Quality can embody different ideas about the purpose of

educational institutions and mean at one time a high or varied standard, or used according to a ‘fitness for purpose’ (Halliday, 1994 p 39) criteria.

Power relations determine the evaluation of quality as indicators of success are established on whether those not involved in policy formation freely adopt the policy language. For Halliday, the success of a policy is questionable if peoples’ use of language is dependent on some kind of reward or sanction distinguished between normal and forced descriptions i.e. those used to secure funding or comply with an economized quality process.

Halliday (1994, p 40) distinguishes between three groups of actors concerned with educational quality. Firstly, policymaking agents allocate funds across various institutions. Secondly, administrative agents (corporate managers) are charged with meeting funding requirements within institutions. Finally, students, teachers and other agents, form another interest group with an institutional focus on education development rather than primarily administrative enlargement. The motivation and interests of agents are important aspects to understanding the process of establishing quality.

By utilising Habermasian concepts Halliday (1973; 1984) considers it possible to distinguish between ordinary discourse and other discourses distorted by power relationships. State employees are encouraged to use certain types of language within a shared tradition with those controlling the allocation of resources having power to influence speech and action. Resources can be tied to appropriate actions and approved speech, which becomes part of an established familiar practice associated with the term ‘quality’. Any new policy can be seen as an extension, of familiar traditions, although the policy formation and the type of language used may distort its translation by other groups. It is in the interest of the policy maker and administrative agents to have an ongoing fusion of ideas reached through a process of debate and clarification. Conversely, teachers and students are hampered because they are not able to affiliate with policy makers or meet on the same terms. The context and definition of quality being one of fitness for economic purpose is

engineered by powerful corporate agents moving policy and producing models to comply with the meta level prevailing philosophy and policy.

Despite such a diagnosis, Halliday identifies that the problem of 'quality' is couched in dispute and disagreement, agents being fully aware of an alternative position. Matters become an issue of government asserting control through the mechanisms of managerialism with quality infused with financial instruction. This leads Halliday to suggest that externalities (meta and macro level) significantly influence organizational interpretation of quality:

> The problem with educational institutions might not reside so much in the failure to assess adequately their own quality, but in a failure to assess the quality and wisdom of government policy towards preferred criteria for the use of the term 'quality' (Halliday, 1994, p 46).

The strength of Halliday's (1994) contribution to the quality debate is through acknowledging the complexity in interplay between agents and the role of discourse and policy frameworks, which can facilitate or inhibit actions. Such outcomes could distort general notions of quality, whereby accountability through performance measurement clashes with professional decisions about the construction and delivery of the curriculum.

In later work Halliday (2003) notes that Scottish policy documents indicate "an overriding concern with efficiency and quality procedures in FE" (Halliday, 2003, p. 633). Symptomatic of an efficiency driven environment is, "a culture of continuous quality improvement" (Halliday, 2003, p. 634).

Many of the important questions raised by Halliday are evident in the body of academic work that emerged from 1993, primarily because writers determine that quality is related to aspects or mechanisms of control, linked to the effectiveness and efficiency of educational institutions (Elliott, 1993; 1996 a; 1996 b; Avis, 1996;

Shain, 1998; Moreland and Clark, 1999). Within the public sector it becomes apparent that:

> Quality has contributed to the installation of managerial modes of coordination (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 119).

Elliott (1996) identifies the quality movement as part of the government-inspired steer towards increased efficiency in education with parallel trends across the public sector e.g. health. Elliott (1993) writes:

> Quality assurance is a powerful concept which permeates the ethos and operation of post compulsory education today (Elliott, 1993, p 14).

The earlier post -incorporation case study by Elliott (1996 a; 1996 b) of a creative arts department in an English college illustrates that quality is determined by the logic of the market using market ideology (Elliott, 1996 b). Marketisation is often perceived as having triggered adverse consequences with a serious dilution in quality.

For Elliott (1993) the economic rationalist approach does not see any contradiction between notions of efficiency or competition in education, and quality of learning. The market solution is envisaged as being the provider of a better deal for customers/students, although practitioners considered the market to be an inhibitor of the work they were doing in the classroom, (Elliott, 1996 b). Extracts from interviews with lecturers enables Elliott to illustrate disenchantment and resistance to business process models:

> People are trying to graft on to education, which is a different beast, models that are inappropriate for it. As long as people try to do that there will be no change… (Elliott, 1996 b, p 15).

Elliott (1996 b) indicates that the ideological basis and impact of quality regimes has resulted in many lecturers feeling that their autonomy is increasingly being undermined by managers. Symptomatic of this process is the proliferation of meetings for quality assurance (Elliott, 1996 a) marketing and business planning, linked to strategic corporate objectives/mission statements. Also, the development of new work practices which are both 'uniform' and 'dependable', tied to gathering proof for funding purposes. The findings of Elliott illustrate resistance to evolving business process regimes, with the methods for assessing quality in FE organisations perceived as undervaluing the aspects of work that are not easily considered visible. In short, the audit mechanism thwarts creativity and innovation.

Similarly, Ainley and Bailey's (1997) study findings of institutions in England note the reduction of qualitative judgments of value by numerical formulations, devoid of substance or meaning. Ainley and Bailey illustrate how lecturers feel they are increasingly controlled by audit mechanisms and associated bureaucracy, as a response to the requirements of external funding bodies. Despite a culture and a funding system that demands measurement by results the performance indicators in use are no more than approximations, which are open to manipulation (Ainley, 1998). Loopholes exist for respective agents to misbehave through reinterpretation or reconfiguration of information.

According to Moreland and Clark (1999) in a study of Quality Management Systems (QMS) attempts are made to create unified administrative and management systems, due to changes in the structural and material conditions of institutions. Such systems are manifested in behavioural consent through adherence to procedural frameworks, resulting in changed working practice. Quantifying what lecturers actually do highlights any non- compliance or forms of resistance to macro and micro policy. Moreland and Clark acknowledge improvement through quality, although they identify potential "grave consequences" (1999, p 7) for collegiality and teamwork. The reconfiguration of the contractual framework of lecturers aids modes of coordination, which are legitimated by quality management systems.

Accounts of the earlier incorporation period identify technicist, assurance based models (Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b; Moreland and Clark, 1999) which tend to assume that hard models of quality (assurance driven) continue to thrive. However, Hodkinson's (1998) analysis of English Vocational Education and Training (VET) examines the paradox between post Fordist empowerment rhetoric and government policy suggesting contradictions. The rhetoric of post Fordism, within post bureaucratic organizations appears to espouse the development of the professional lecturer as fundamental to a thriving learning organization. But, Hodkinson (1998) considers that policy subjugates the professional to a technicism that has more in common with a neo-Fordist approach where technicism is dominant, but legitimated by post Fordist rhetoric. It would appear that hard and soft approaches to policy are being employed to ensure the engagement of practitioners and enlist forms of commitment and consent.

Evidence of a shift from quality assurance towards a more cultural emphasis on continuous improvement is illustrated by Laird's (2002) work on the Scottish FE sector. Laird (2002) charts the development of quality models in the Scottish sector from a position of limited audit to one where high levels of external regulation are a burden on colleges. Laird notes that:

> From the period of incorporation there was no advice or models to measure or judge performance of FE Colleges in Scotland in any robust comparative way (Laird, 2002, p 14).

The establishment of colleges as corporations driven by a market model encourages quality mechanisms, to reflect the downward pressure on budgets resulting in "more robust evidence to judge quality objectively" (Laird 2002, p. 56). From incorporation performance indicators and benchmarks started to become features of the 'quality regime' (Laird, 2002, p. 157).

Changes in the management of quality in Scottish FE are identified by Laird with the introduction of performance indicators, which are initially found in The Audit

Commissions (1985) work *'Managing Colleges Efficiently'*, followed by delivery focused indicators developed by the HMI *'Measuring Up'* (SOEID, 1990). Since 1993 Colleges have been required to report basic performance indicator information (*'On Target'*, SOEID, 1993) in college plans, budget information and Annual Reports. Laird illustrates that it was only in 1997 that a joint Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) and HMI project, *'Quality Improvement through Self-Evaluation* (SFEU, 1997) saw the use of performance indicators for institutional quality improvement assume a real level of importance.

The establishment of the Funding Council (SFEFC) in 1999 further heightened the need for what Laird describes as, "more robust PI [performance indicator] and benchmarking data" (Laird (2002, p 76) being a way of strengthening its base on quality. The Self-Evaluation model (reflection and assessment of course team and wider college function performance) was intended to internalize quality ownership at an institutional level, but was subjected to external inspection by the HMIE on behalf of the Funding Council. Hence, Laird (2002) detects an evolution and movement in Scottish FE from control to consent based quality enhancement. Despite this shift in emphasis, using performance indicators in Scottish FE appears to be driven by external requirements, visible in evolving internal college systems and quality cultures. The rhetoric of ownership is present, although Self-evaluation reports form the basis of external inspection/review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Funding Council. However, Laird (2002) suggests discord when acknowledging that further developments need to be sensitive, because external influence creates particular tensions at institutional level.

Importantly, Laird's (2002) work attempts to address the impasse of attention on quality in the Scottish sector, illustrating a change in cultural emphasis in quality language from assurance based models to those based on improvement. Despite this credit, Laird appears to adopt an apologist's approach in relation to problems and difficulties with quality systems in Scottish FE. Consequently Laird's work has a technicist feel whereby the wider social political and economic context tends to be

overlooked. While Laird (2002) appears alone in noting the development of a 'quality regime' (Laird, 2002, p, 157) little precise explanation is forthcoming on what constitutes a quality regime. Additionally, the impact of business process models on professional autonomy is glossed over, suggesting passive agents subjugated to structural systemic conformity. It is necessary to explain how notions of professionalism have been developed in the FE sector, to more fully understand how incorporation has impacted on practitioner autonomy.

While the specific literature on quality in FE is fairly limited what does exist contributes to this thesis in the following manner. Firstly, the literature establishes a framework of understanding to define the purposes of quality in the FE sector. Secondly, the literature demonstrates how organisational arrangements for quality are configured. Finally, the literature illustrates impacts on the professional practitioner in the FE sector.

Having said this, it is important to concentrate on meso and micro forces (those working in FE organisations) and the influence of lecturers and managers. This thesis will consider what is meant by professional autonomy and outline how the literature has depicted outcomes in colleges for agents.

2.4 Orientations of professionalism in the Further Education sector

The bulk of the comment on the FE sector has treated quality as part of a managerialist package and has developed a debate on the general impacts of managerialism (as a feature of NPM) on professionalism. According to Clarke and Newman (1997, p 92-3) the new discourses of managerialism offer new subject positions and identities – managerial in opposition to professionalism. This is important for this thesis, because while quality is worthy of attention in its own right it is difficult to embrace quality without consideration of the interplay of factors.

This section initially establishes an understanding of professionalism, linked to the status of FE practitioners before considering that professionals have been made vulnerable in the post incorporation era. Concentrating on the debates over FE

professionalism demonstrates a lack of consensus about the transformation of lecturers work. The importance of this literature is that it illustrates diverse impacts across various groups from lecturers to managers, which in turn suggests differing levels of acceptance over changing working practices of agents in post-incorporation organisations. Overall, scope is created to consider the type of questions this thesis needs to address in understanding quality management.

2.4.1 *The professional practitioner: a vulnerable actor?*

Writers illustrate that FE practitioners have faced a struggle to achieve professional recognition, given the diversity of provision and the different constructions of professionalism (Clow, 2001). Such variety has perhaps made it more difficult for FE teachers to organize effectively. According to Johnson (1984) there has been a failure to establish the sector in the classical medical and legal conventions. Location also made FE teachers more vulnerable to a loss of autonomy through state restructuring in the sector (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004). While professionalism may be an occupational ideal, the threat of 'routinisation' in the context of bureaucratic organisation is a more likely outcome for FE practitioners. Such a prognosis would appear to be at odds with ideas of professional autonomy whereby professionals gain control over their labour process. The traditional definitions of a profession stress an occupational group whose skills are scientific and abstract, which is constituted in levels of control or a monopoly over particular working practices (Friedson, 1994). The level and length of education are of significance when considering the status of professional groups, although part of the equation must also include maintaining high levels of quality in working practice. For Johnson, (1984) professionalism:

> Entails a sustained attempt to constitute a privileged relationship with the state by way of official systems of recognition, licensing, regulated recruitment, and monopolistic practice (Johnson, 1984, p 20).

Professional autonomy will vary for an occupation depending on the areas of independent action (Johnson, 1984). Additionally, Friedson (1994; 2003) believes a 'professional dominance' explains how professions such as teaching are subordinated

to higher dominant professions (e.g. law, medicine) so actions are limited by the state, or perhaps another occupational group. While other professionals are divided within occupations as a consequence of factors such as income and status, a cohesive view of professionalism exists, which is absent in FE (Clow, 2001).

While professions can be considered to be heterogeneous, Johnson (1984) identifies a common political strategy enabling a particular profession cementing relationships with the state. To some extent, this explains the development of management posts in FE institutions following incorporation. In the context of the business process model, accountants (and other non-teaching posts) have become prominent agents at strategic and operational levels, focused on achieving organisational goals (Davies, 2003). In comparison, professional classroom practitioners are influenced by normative codes, which are constituted by extra organisational value systems, often through previous occupational ties rather than as Clow (2001) points out, a professional code of conduct in FE.

2.4.2 *A series of impacts and outcomes in post incorporation Further Education*

Establishing the importance of quality in this thesis also provides an opportunity for a reappraisal of how commentators have interpreted general events in FE. Earlier post-incorporation contributions (as previously commented on in this chapter) illustrate lecturers defending professional and pedagogic values (Elliott, 1996 a). There is a tendency with Elliott to reject notions of professionalism in favour of the 'reflective practitioner' (maintaining forms of self-regulation) as a means to understand the work of lecturers. Further attempts to make sense of the impacts of managerialism on traditional bureau professional models are found in Randle and Brady's (1997) important contribution (a case study of a large FE college). The research demonstrates how the new modes of rationality, with changed contractual arrangements have impacted on individual lecturer's professional autonomy. Randle and Brady point towards the increasingly dominant role of audit and quality in understanding a 'paradigmatic' shift between professionalism and managerialism (Randle and Brady, 1997, p 130).

External state forces have been able to institutionalize mechanisms supporting managerialist ideology, e.g. changed notions of quality linked to economic rationalist principles. Randle and Brady (1997) offer various reasons why it is difficult to cast college lecturers as a powerful group. For example lecturers do not have a powerful representative association where they can ensure market closure. Therefore lecturers are not well placed to limit entry into the profession.

However, Randle and Brady believe (although not just peculiar to professional occupations) it may be more useful to locate college lecturers in the context of an ethical occupation because labour is harnessed for the benefit of the client.

Post-incorporation models have challenged the basis of the public service ethos and it is within a labour process framework, inspired by Braverman (1974) that Randle and Brady suggest proletarianisation through deskilling is a 'possible outcome' for college lecturers. This leads Randle and Brady to write:

> The process of deprofessionalisation in FE not only contains recognisable elements of the degradation of work, but also represents a systematic deskilling of the lecturer (Randle and Brady, 1997, p 134).

Randle and Brady, point out that power relations have been redefined in colleges as managers control the core elements of the lecturer's labour process. Managers can more easily stipulate what is required on a day to day basis and therefore use this as a foundation for securing compliance in the workplace. Also, quality mechanisms become the legitimate technologies, (ascribed pseudo-scientific status through forms of statistical measurement) which influence how practice should be conducted and become acute instruments for increasing surveillance (Randle and Brady, 1997). Routinisation and deskilling is a lived reality for many in FE, as the when, where and how tasks are performed form part of labour utilization, which is increasingly determined by specialist managers (Randle and Brady, 1997). Contemporary FE is characterised by the efficiency gains required by government pointing towards the need for a, "new breed of academic managers" (Randle and Brady 1997, p 126). This

leads Randle and Brady to note manifestations of resistance and conflict within the new FE by writing:

> …that the traditional weapon of proletarians, the strike has been employed with increasing regularity serves to both underline the degree to which lecturers are coming to terms with their changing status and the limitations of traditional forms of professional control in the sector (Randle and Brady 1997, p 137).

The contribution of Randle and Brady's (1997) is useful in that it provides a framework to suggest why lecturers lack power as a professional group, which has led to a diminution of working conditions propelling certain responses. Others (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004) in later work illustrate reasons for new cultural pressures arising from managerialism having contributed to low status of FE professionals. Robson (1998) identifies a professional culture in FE as being 'thin', fragmented and defensive (Robson, 1998, p 602). The underpinning discourse of professionalism, embedded with a form of specialist knowledge, plus autonomy to make judgments (significant in defining a professional) is identified by Robson (1998) as limited in FE. Robson believes the boundaries of the occupation are uncertain, as is the nature or value of professional knowledge. Accordingly, the FE profession is struggling to develop, "collective status or identity" (Ibid). The influence of external and institutional forces, plus the absence of other factors that protect and secure professional recognition could point towards an explanation for levels of conflict in FE. Robson et al (2004) agree with Randle and Brady (1997) that traditional forms of resistance i.e. the strike, are increasingly being employed because lecturers lack other resources.

In a later study of vocational teachers, Robson et al (2004) illustrate that the rationality of the curriculum has been used to deskill teachers (as artisans) rather than embed professional empowerment (Robson et al, 2004, p 186). Despite FE teachers' vulnerability to organisational shifts, Robson et al demonstrate that resistance to external prescription is evident amongst vocational teachers, who add value to their

teaching. Enhanced value is achieved through imparting technical expertise to students above and beyond curriculum prescription, encompassing theoretical learning with technical and practical skills. Robson et al identify a strong allegiance to occupational identities established by lecturers before entry into FE, which are retained within the sector. Such suggestions are sometimes seen as a factor why few common strong bonds and collegial relationships exist within colleges, due to the diversity of occupational allegiances.

Robson et al (2004) supports findings elsewhere (Randle and Brady, 1997) about practitioners holding onto public sector values, with teachers as guarantors of quality and practice. Despite evidence that lecturers use a certain amount of discretion in adding value to work this is subject to intensification and extensification. Robson et al (2004) identify that lecturers are working harder, teaching above curriculum prescription (adding value) in maintaining levels of competence required by vocational standards. Too much emphasis on collegiality can give the impression that there was a 'Golden age' of Further Education (pre-1993) characterised by lecturer autonomy and a 'truly' professional era, which in many ways has now been lost. This perhaps creates a false picture, because for some FE has provided, "little evidence of any substantive collegiate culture" (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998, p 443).

The lack of power to determine state policy has been a major factor in explaining the weak market position of FE professionals. By definition, weak culture (Robson, 1999) and an inability to develop a 'distinct role' and occupational strategies to gain the type of rewards bestowed on older professions has left FE practitioners exposed. Greater expectations by policy makers, with the introduction of quasi-market principles have in turn informed consumer choices. The claims that FE teachers may have to any kind of knowledge base, grounded in training and education within the job has been severely restricted by the 'encroachment of the consumer' (Fertig, 2003).

By comparison, Dent notes that the medical profession is in a stronger position because doctors still "have control over location, content and essentiality of these

tasks" (Dent, 1998, p 208) although increasingly under the organisational control of the state. Further, FE professionals have been less successful in dominating policy, due to being marginalised across the education sector (Robson, 1998). Left with mainly defensive tactics (Ferlie et al, 1996) professional goals are subordinated to managerial goals and policies. Robson suggests:

> FE teachers appear as an anomalous group, with an ambivalent status and an unclear identity (Robson, 1998, p 586).

The different interpretations of events in FE, has sparked a more lively debate in recent years. Clearly, the ramifications of market based, managerial strategies and solutions around control and consent also serves to 'flag up' a thin culture and weak basis for professionalism, either succumbing (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004), diverging (Sachs, 2001) or potentially converging (Briggs, 2004) with managerialism. The themes of bureaucratic control and intensification of working practices are interpreted by commentators in various ways. Particular trends are identified with certain outcomes for professionals; towards proletarianisation (Randle and Brady, 1997), shifting professionalism (Avis, 1999), re-professionalism (Gleeson and Shain, 1999) or deskilling of workers (Mather and Seifert, 2003). Such debates suggest themes of control, convergence of professional identities, with a contested arena in FE.

Building on the literature (Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Ainley and Bailey, 1997) James Avis (1999) is sympathetic towards the plight of the lecturer as 'harbinger of state policy', but feels that the impacts of managerialism are more complex than those advocated by Randle and Brady (1997). For Avis, the "lived experience of teachers" (Avis, 1999, p. 246) is set against the dominant discourse informing change. The transformation of teaching, learning and professionalism is part of an on-going process forming the basis of a new treatise, which according to Avis is infested with rhetoric and embedded with strategies of control. The new marketed concepts of flexibility, diversity and choice are in close association with controlling the professional (Avis et al, 1996/2000, p 7).

Professionals are being usurped as exponents of an intellectual tradition and constructed as technical proponents of state-driven policies. Avis identifies aspects of work causing concern which include a loss of control: an intensification of labour, an increasing administration, a reduction of the importance of teaching and also a reliance on the use of measurable performance indicators to assess lecturers work (Avis, 1999, p 251).

Resistance is explained through an 'incorrect organizational culture' of earlier decades (Avis, 1996). The new culture of quality, accountability, performance indicators and systems of appraisal, have (according to Avis) assisted the formation of a common sense of pedagogic relations. Post –compulsory education (PCE) is subject to the process of formation of a social bloc allied to a new educational settlement, which is held together by various ideas and constituencies. Avis feels, that such a social bloc and settlement can be explained, whereby the interests of various groups are presented as universal. Avis (1999) recognises the direct affect on the labour process has been to change modes of teaching, with lecturers now seen as facilitators of learning (Avis, 1999) and managers of resources. The perception is that consumers/clients have more control over the teaching process in FE organisations with significant alterations designed to make professionals work more efficiently in line with private sector practices.

In short, relations are within the context of what Avis terms as a "hegemonic ideational framework" (Avis, 1999, p 254-6) which is taken for granted as a tool of conflict resolution. The conflict between needs of learners, communities and industrialists relies on the ideological acceptance of the common sense of market and capitalist relations.

The literature suggests control mechanisms at meso and micro level, which constrains professionals in certain ways. This thesis acknowledges the importance of control although challenges the 'over-controlled environment' viewpoint and advocates a re-think on matters. Stories which conclude with one-dimensional outcomes are challenged by Gleeson and Shain (1999) who are critical of the

proletarianisation thesis as being 'premature' (Shain, 1998) due to an oversimplified analysis of organisational behaviour (Gleeson and Shain, 1999, p 461).

Managerialism is a controlling force, yet its hegemonic nature is also contested. The heterogeneous occupational character of FE provides a basis for the rethinking of professionalism (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). Coinciding with claims of complexity is that of managers sharing the goals and values of new managerialism, indicating forms of homogeneity (Shain 1998, Gleeson and Shain, 1999).

The contribution from Gleeson and Shain (1999) is inspired by the *Changing Teaching and Managerial Cultures in FE (CMTC*) project (fieldwork from 1997-1998, across five Colleges, in the West Midlands of England) and is suspicious of the view that external changes in FE have necessarily had deterministic organisational impacts, independent of actors. Furthermore, in an article *'Managing ambiguity: between markets and managerialism'* Gleeson and Shain illustrate the responses of middle managers to change in further education (Gleeson and Shain, 1999, p 474-86). For Gleeson and Shain, the application and acceptance of market models do not go uncontested and so it cannot be assumed that middle managers form a homogenous group in their reactions to the new FE.

Gleeson and Shain (1999) identify various responses from middle managers in their study with *willing compliance* (p 474-79) being a trademark of those managers who have fully embraced the commercial environment of the new FE. Such managers support the re-articulation of professionalism, with corporate managerialism being a focus for constructing a professional identity. Secondly, *unwilling compliance* (p 479-82) is fostered by those managers who are more disenchanted with the new ethos of further education. The unwilling complier is characterised as being frustrated, because of loss of status through being overlooked for promotion, demoted because of re-structuring or disillusioned with the lack of business direction in the organisation. Lastly, *strategic compliance* (p 482-87) is regarded as a majority position which reconciles professional and managerial interests. Strategic compliers do not envisage a passive acceptance of commercial quality models with an emphasis

on output. Also, the notion of professionalism is not perceived as being predetermined by service delivery.

What is clear is that acceptance of the new FE is not a foregone conclusion, although managers in this category are well aware of being consumed by managerial discourse. Constraints are accepted by managers but there is an ethos grounded in students receiving a quality education. However, Gleeson and Shain write:

> Unlike willing or unwilling compliers, such middle managers demonstrate a broader interpretation of their work, which is less defensive, optimistic and obsessive (Gleeson and Shain, 1999, p 486).

New professional identities evolve from the ambiguities of the workplace and managerialism does not in itself determine identities and responses, although it influences their shape. No matter what things may look like on the surface Gleeson and Shain (1999) feel that there are real tensions in polarising interests between lecturers defending professional values and managers towing the managerial line. While there is some concordance with other critics on FE, Gleeson and Shain are reticent to present FE as an over controlled environment.

Additionally, Gleeson and Shain do express concern that there has been a tendency by researchers on FE to examine the ambiguities of control and support in the relationships between managers and lecturers within the same 'managerialist imperative' (1999, p 462). The outcome of a narrow research focus can obscure aspects of resistance and reality. The unevenness of experiences that Gleeson and Shain illustrate becomes a focus to concentrate on actors, establishing a wider understanding both within and across groups in the FE sector. Central to this locale is suspicion about homogenous experiences being the norm across all professional interest groups in post-incorporation FE.

Likewise, Alexiadou's (2001) study of two FE colleges in the South and Midlands of England also illustrates evolving managerial identities as responses to a 'quasi-

market' within FE. A distinction is made between *'responsive managers'* characterised by pragmatic responses to market driven change and to market values (Alexiadou, 2001, p 417). The concern is with educational values in relation to pedagogic values, whereby in this model the parameters of budgets are translated through a pedagogic discourse. In comparison, *'pro-active managers'*, were considered as having a greater acceptance of post 1993 FE, tending to relate pedagogy to market reform. Alexiadou, does exemplify the right of managers to manage in a policy driven environment and (as with Gleeson and Shain, 1999) illustrates variety in the evolution of post 1993 FE.

In an appraisal of earlier contributions, (Elliott, 1996 a; Randle and Brady, 1997) Loots and Ross (2004) dispute the idea of straight divisions between managers and lecturers. Findings from a Scottish survey of Principals and Senior Mangers carried out by the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) are interpreted by Loots and Ross (2004) to suggest more common backgrounds between senior staff and lecturers. A rationale for Loots and Ross (2004) confirms many senior staff having spent the majority of their working careers in the FE sector, being lecturers at one time. Loots and Ross advocate "educational values are more likely to be in congruence than opposition" (Loots and Ross, 2004, p 19).

Additionally, Gleeson (2001) notes more inclusive management styles are becoming evident in FE, rather than the persistence of macho management. Further variances in research outcomes are evident as Briggs (2004) casts middle managers as 'New Professionals' with room for convergence and similarities to evolve between managerialism and professionalism. However Briggs (2004) does suggest that more harmonious relationships do require coherence across the FE sector. The issues of tension and polarization between lecturers and managers are questioned due to an absence of research having been done pre 1993 in FE, although little evidence exists to suggest a dilution in managerialism.

In the light of the aforementioned account, forms of control appear as greater financial dependency and more regulatory burden on organisations. In this context,

FE professionals become susceptible to notions of an externally imposed changed professional identity. This is characterised on a meso and micro level by, institutional accountability, yet also, 'teacher performativity' (Avis, 2003) constituted by target setting and monitoring at college and individual levels. Perhaps as Cousins (1987) and others (Halliday, 1994) suggests, that retaining any form of professional autonomy may reside in the type of contribution a professional group can make to state interests rather than threaten them (Cousins, 1987, p 98).

2.5 Reflecting on limitations in the Further Education literature

A literature appraisal of FE reveals limitations, marginality and an absence of conceptual frameworks for the analysis of quality regimes. In general, the growing body of authoritative opinion that the lecturer is being de-professionalised or re-professionalised has tended to assume a managerial ascendancy, in an environment dominated by managerialism. A closer examination of tensions in the workplace will perhaps avoid a one dimensional approach, which envisages dominant structures controlling passive actors. Approaching FE from the viewpoint, that management has become more effective at controlling behaviour doesn't really provide the complexity that has shaped post- incorporation events. Some exceptions do cast doubt on the effective control scenarios in an over-controlled environment (Gleeson and Shain, 1999) suggesting traditional forms of resistance from agents (Randle and Brady, 1997) or the development of a counter culture (Elliott, 1996 b).

To make way for an effective analysis of the quality regimes in FE this thesis will pick up on the themes of managerial control (Elliott, 1996 a) and place them within a tighter critical theoretical framework. This means taking care to avoid an exposition of descriptors of observed phenomena and an exaggeration of the impacts of management practices. It also requires undertaking an examination of new forms of auditing, which characterise the rationality of the managerialist approaches and form part of the conflict and contradictions the public sector faces. Recognition needs to be given, as Halliday (1994) does to an examination of the quality debate and the ways different interest groups are contributing to, and experiencing, quality policy, processes and structures in the post- incorporation era. Such approaches will assist

this thesis in shedding light on the mechanisms, which underpin forms of control, consent and resistance, whether it is quality as control or indeed quality as liberation and empowerment.

From incorporation, the necessity to engender models of conformity within the new FE has demanded that the normative basis of professional conduct is imbued with a new common sense discourse. It is in this vein of thought that the evidence in the literature proposes the application of market-like principles has created a changed form of educational governance. Fairly tenuous traditional notions of professional status have been undermined coinciding with attempts to improve efficiency and quality of further education. Such principles serve the purpose for Avis of highlighting and accommodating the fiscal crisis of the welfare state (Avis, 1996) or 'new structures of rationality' (Reeves, 1995). Enough empirical evidence exists to suggest that traditional forms of professionalism and associated practices are no less important (Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Robson et al, 2004). This thesis challenges accounts which depict the ease with which management appears to be successful.

The extent of collegiality in FE life is in many ways illustrated by (in what has been described elsewhere) the extent to which groups have 'responsible autonomy' or 'professional autonomy' (Dent, 1998). Evidence indicates that the FE teaching profession has been vulnerable to managerialism because of a culture based on its history, its composition and its marginality in the education system (Robson, 1998). Professional discourse is exposed to external forces, which attempt to reconstruct professionalism, with the quality function as a vehicle of transformation. More recent talk of similarities and convergence (Briggs, 2004) or 'discourse variation' as a source of tension (Loots and Ross, 2004) tends to underplay managerial interests. It is possible to envisage that the logic of management rhetoric could be turned as a double-edged sword to suit the developing identities and subjectivities of agents through various forms of compliance and resistance.

Such scenarios sit alongside 'new conflicts', resulting from excessive demand made on individuals as a consequence of the new diversity in further education. The development of FE professionalism, professional authority and identity are important for this thesis as they are perhaps contingent on meeting with managerial priorities and practices. Important consequences are evident for the legitimate authority of FE teachers together with their influence and involvement in decision making, agenda setting and the operation of quality regimes. It is only by considering the variety in contributions that FE writers make, that the weight of causal powers can be examined. More scepticism is required to question whether managers are in the ascendancy and have total control over passive agents. Examining the type of commitment that professionals have towards quality initiatives would assist in a more in-depth understanding of what is happening in FE. The crux is examining events, as part of the interplay between meta, macro, meso and micro level scenarios.

2.6 Development of research themes

The review of UK Further Education literatures has incorporated a Scottish policy context to allow ideas to be embedded against, and make sense of, a changing policy environment. Creating a structure allowed a mapping process to take place of some of the current debates concerning the transformation of public sector work. The ideological and logistical features of managerialism are evident in the literature with quality prominent, but obscured as a specific factor.

The literature mentions, 'a quality debate', 'quality systems' (Elliott, 1996), 'quality profile' (Halliday, 1994), or when quality is referred to as a 'regulatory framework' (Moreland and Clark, 1998), implying the existence of regimes. Quality is presented as a feature or 'driver' of managerialism (Avis, 2002) but perhaps this is too simplistic, hiding a more complex affair. While the discourse can have causal powers, some writers have perhaps over inflated or made general assumptions about the development of quality (see Avis, 2002) and avoided explicitly contextualizing 'quality' as a regime. The lack of in-depth empirical investigation in Scottish FE requires more critical empirical attention as a challenge to official stories, which tend to suggest more quality equals better quality. Dismantling the managerialist package

warrants clarity, with quality regimes being a complex entity in their own right, assisting an understanding of how the wheels of managerialism have rolled forward.

Having acknowledged the merits of the current empirical evidence and grasped an understanding of professionalism in FE, it is instructive that further analysis is needed by applying more unfamiliar or less frequently applied literature territories. Certainly, the themes of control and consent are appropriated through the labour process debates to enhance an understanding of work in relation to the FE sector and wider society. Such debates have in the past been popular when examining the work of teachers (Ozga, 1988) or academics in the Higher Education sector (Wilson, 1991; Parker and Jary, 1995; Pritchard and Willmott, 1997) but less familiar in FE (albeit see, Randle and Brady, 1997; Mather and Seifert, 2003).

The building of a conceptual framework that incorporates distinctions between state and private sector employees will mean gaining more of an insight into how quality policies become part of the common sense way of seeing things in FE organizations. An avenue for understanding the interpretation of regimes through the adoption of common sense ideas can be facilitated, through hegemonic settlements (Avis, 1999).

A theme for this thesis will be mapping out the characteristics and development of regimes to assist in understanding why quality has become so prolific in the sector. Developing a framework to understand how quality continues to manifest and consolidate a presence through the maturation of FE is of prime concern for this thesis to interpret events. It is possible to build on the accounts from this chapter and identify literature types informing a multi-level conceptual framework. Scope is created for asking critical questions about quality in FE. The issue of regime formation requires a fuller understanding of what previously existed and the structural causal mechanisms propelling change.

From the above account it is possible to identify broad areas and themes of research. Firstly, it is possible to identify the characteristics of quality. Secondly, it is possible

to identify the demands of quality. Thirdly, it is possible to identify the impacts of quality. Finally, it is possible to identify the acceptance of quality.

From these broad themes questions can be developed for the fieldwork. However, the task at hand is to consider the type of conceptual framework that would adequately frame the development of quality management, interpret modes of operation, incorporate strategies of control, but also acknowledge resistance. Hence, a multi-level conceptual framework would need to answer the following questions. Why are different levels of analysis important in understanding events in FE? Why is the state a key influence on FE? What is the location of FE workers? What is the relationship between structures and agents?

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING THE REGIME AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK IN FURTHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bridge the current lacunae in FE research by defining and considering quality in the context of a regime. In doing so, the potential is created to enable more reliable assessments and predictions about the potency of quality audits as mechanisms of control and consent in Scottish FE institutions.

If the concept of the regime is being adopted to explain the development of quality (audit) and suggestions are made about regime changes, it is necessary to map out more clearly certain characteristics that facilitate interpretations, but also differentiate regimes. The literature on public management (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1993; Farnham and Horton, 1996; Clarke and Newman, 1997) previously outlined in Chapter Two provides scope for locating the idea of a quality regime within macro regime drivers. Additionally this chapter proposes a multi–levelled conceptual framework to enable the location of the empirical and conceptual stories about FE. Using a selection of theoretical devices allows the scoping of structures and actors in the development of quality.

The chapter begins with an initial focus on the conceptualising of a quality regime before identifying and embracing the regime to map out the development of quality. It is projected that the significant themes of bureaucratic control, consent and resistance are contextualised by the concept of a 'regime', which becomes a legitimate framework to understand state evolution and interpret regime formations. The role of quality is interpreted and coincides with regime formations as *traditional* (self-control by professionals), *disruption* (rationale to monitor by the State), *transformation* (tool of managerialism as a solution) and *consolidated* (regulation and evaluation). So rather than a taxonomy of regimes, a case is made which proposes an analytical framework of research to interpret the quality regime in FE.

The chapter illustrates the state-professional relationship, plus the importance of bureaucracy, in an explanation of traditional organisational settlement. The critical theorists assist the interpretation of regimes by providing the tools to understand public sector work relations and overcome the problem of location of agents. Such theoretical devices also facilitate an understanding of disruption or reconciliation regimes. By contextualising the fiscal crisis of the 1970's a rationale is constructed to explain the position of professionals, plus the difficulties the state faces in cost containment in the public sector. Examining quality management control strategies, engages with critical labour process applications providing an important framework for the study of work organisation and its links to wider society.

The chapter continues by employing the regime construct (Clark and Newman, 1997) as a tool to explain processes of change and dimensions of power in transformation regimes during the 1980's and 1990's. Moreover forms of quality regulation have a tendency to appear as hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) and part of the ordinary way of seeing things (common sense) for professionals in FE.

Having exposed quality through the interpretation of traditional, disruption and transformation regimes this chapter then makes the case, that New Labour modernisation has precipitated a period of consolidation. To fully appreciate or anticipate whether regimes have become consolidated or remain contested, further specific analytical tools place more emphasis on how actors initiate, establish, diffuse, reproduce, yet also resist the regime. These events in FE have become salient when assessing the effects a system of bureaucratic control and rules clashing with the value systems of employees (Gouldner, 1954). Also how managerial systems attempt to manufacture consent (Burawoy, 1979) in the consolidation of quality. Employing Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) model to explain actor behaviour within high/low trust regimes, links with forms of regulation and allows an understanding of the interplay between different interests in the FE sector.

3.2 Why a quality regime?

Defining and considering quality as a regime is intended to assist more critical understanding of quality management in Scottish FE institutions. To take stock, the conceptualization of the regime begins by looking for what Ackroyd and Thompson describe as, 'categories of conduct, rules and procedures' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p 75). Using the term, 'regime', adds weight to an explanation of the nature of organizational characteristics and features, but it also exemplifies the behaviour of actors (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Also, Clarke and Newman (1997) advocate the use of 'regime' in providing a framework for understanding organisational transformation. The regime is a useful device to illuminate power and relationships as productive through particular dimensions of managerial regimes. Clarke and Newman note:

> [Regimes] represent a point of sedimentation of economic and political interests: the managerialisation of welfare both provides the means through which the interests of capital are pursued (through the containment of public spending) and the legitimating framework for a politically driven project of state transformation (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 60).

Additionally du Gay (2000) refers to the regime values in the public sector being imposed by the constitutional and political environment and so subject to externalities. To be more precise, the function of a regime provides the basis for normative methods and codes of conduct of workers in the pursuit of social objectives (du Gay, 2000). For example, the shift from bureau-professional (traditional regimes) towards business process models (transformative regime) necessitated a change in regime values. Such values are as Halliday notes "…held by individuals and groups and they are communicated through talk, writing and action" (Halliday, 1998, p 4).

The debates from Chapter Two depict the principles and values of organizations in FE to be contested. Market values are to a large extent, expressed by corporate agents (senior managers) while many primary agents (practitioner professionals)

consider it undesirable to model conduct too closely on those of the private sector. The reinvention of quality and professionalism in FE has been constituted in attempts to make actors adhere to regime values. By utilizing the normative measure of the market traditional regime values of 'big' bureaucracy as burdensome were confronted. The fundamental differences in FE regime values have created conflict rather than a culture incorporating shared values (Halliday, 1998). For Halliday (1998, p 4) the presentation of regime values tends to be through the technical terms (those linked to efficiency) as derivatives of science, which dilutes and avoids discussions on such values.

Adopting the concept of 'regime' means making an assessment of whether there is an identifiable type of quality regime in FE, one with pre-existing structures, which influences and shapes the behaviour of professionals. While professionals contribute to the maintenance of regimes it is necessary to consider whether as agents they are able to make transformations. Understanding the characteristics of regimes means examining the structures, systems and procedures, but also how the behaviour of individuals and groups can make a difference. It is important to construct a framework to interpret particular regime values, which precipitated quality auditing from the period of incorporation in FE. To clarify, according to Martinez Lucio and Mackenzie (1999) quality management can be seen as a new way of legitimating organisational change. The principles of regimes become the resources for transformation. The following sections examine the characteristics and values infused in the context of regime interpretation and a case is made for a model to make sense of events in FE.

3.3 Traditional regimes

The following section provides the basis for an interpretation of *traditional* regimes, with quality being an individual and internalised concept determined in the context of professionalism. Such arrangements illustrate that the post-war welfare state arrangements were hinged on a range of wider political/economic, social and organisational settlements (Clarke and Newman, 1997) forged as a common framework. Post war traditional regimes are characterised by consensus

arrangements and government commitment towards rising welfare expenditure, which has been described as the ‘golden age of welfare’ (Fergusson and Hughes, 2000).

Clarke and Newman (1997) provide a framework to interpret how a range of settlements (political, social and organisational) are formed, which assist in the identification of certain characteristics of traditional and other regime formations. According to Clarke and Newman (1997, p 1-8) notions of the post war settlement are embodied in a range of overlapping fixed arrangements with distinct elements. A *‘political settlement’*, underpinned a consensus in welfare policy. The post-1945 welfare state was underpinned by social democratic philosophy propelled by Keynesian economics. The crux of the aforementioned welfare was governmentally induced to support the reduction of inequality and encouragement of social citizenship (Farnham and Horton, 1996; Pollitt, 1993).

The *‘social settlement’*, focused on the family, work and welfare as institutions, which sponsored state patriarchy. The post-war welfare state was thus based on a certain expectation of stability, which maintained the welfare insurance principle. The identification of welfare recipients was based on professional perceptions and associated with the structured divisions in British society of family, work and nationhood.

The *‘organisational settlement’* incorporated the protocols of bureaucratic administration and impartial professionalism. The bureaucrats would ensure rules and regulations were operationalised with objectivity and impartiality resulting in predictable outputs. Professionals would (as autonomous experts) make expert judgments on welfare content. In education, professionals were the guardians of the curriculum and subsequently what happened in the classroom including issues of quality.

Traditional regime features are: a neutral and impartial state, arrangements constituted around ‘impartial’ specialist knowledge, professional expertise and

bureaucratic administrative procedures (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Shain's (1998) assessment of changing notions of professionalism in FE identifies the immediate post war period as a time when teachers were in a strong market position due to a shortage of qualified teachers and the public demand for increased educational opportunity. Teacher autonomy was strengthened in the 1950's and 60's, through as Shain notes "the rhetoric of indirect [state] rule, partnership and professionalism" (Shain, 1998, p 2).

Randle and Brady (1997) identify traditional arrangements in FE as being characterised by relative control over the content and delivery of the service within a public service ethic. There were six main practitioner characteristics in pre-incorporation FE. Firstly, the lecturer had expert tacit knowledge and skills. Secondly, the lecturer had professional autonomy in relation to decision-making and its implementation. Thirdly, the lecturer was engaged in socially useful work that was implicitly anti-commercial. Fourthly, while power resided with the professional this was in the context of a relationship with the client imbued with loyalty. Fifthly, practitioner goals related to high standards as a measure of quality in work related tasks. Finally, relationships were collegial fostered by mutual respect amongst colleagues (Randle and Brady, 1997, p 127). In this environment quality opportunities for students became central to provision.

The features of pre-incorporation in FE were structured by relative autonomy for lecturers, established due to reciprocal external relationships with examination boards and professional bodies conferring control over course content and teaching methods in the classroom (Randle and Brady, 1997, p128). Evaluation was more holistic and informal, being based on more qualitative input about content and teaching approaches. In education management, Davies (2003) is clear that 'benign leaders' engaged with professional practitioners at a distance. A reciprocal relationship was characterised with colleagues, by a strong connection to either occupational interests or a desire to make an input to knowledge in their discipline. The traditional regime ensured bureaucratic forms of predictability and standardisation of processes, while professional intervention was constituted by

expert judgement in the accommodation of a variety of social needs. The professional laid claims to an irreducible autonomy, with a standardisation of skills fortified by externally controlled training and education. Traditional regime normative values instilled professionals as responsible for the self-control of quality (Pollitt, 1990, p 435). Under those systems of management, accountability was in part self-imposed (Davies, 2003) through self-reflection and introspection in a professional state (Power, 1997) subject to direct control through local authority funding and direction from political masters. In FE, with a more fragile professional base, previous occupational allegiances (from outside the sector) were a significant factor in progressing and imparting expertise (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004).

Despite acknowledgement that the FE practitioner engendered a public service ethic, including notions of collegiality and autonomy (Randle and Brady, 1997) various accounts from Chapter Two indicate that the history, composition and marginality of the FE sector (Robson, 1998; Clow, 2001) alongside evidence of little history of collegiality (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998) would eventually make FE vulnerable to external interference. The development of FE was hampered due to its profile and level of priority in government policies (See Chapter One). Such a scenario assists an explanation of why a transformation of regime values became easier to orchestrate during the incorporation of FE.

In summary, Clarke and Newman (1997) identify triple social neutrality encompassed by a settlement or consensus above party political differences. To clarify, a double logic existed around socially engineering bureaucratic knowledge in the public interest, whilst professional knowledge enhanced social progress in the public good. In addition, such arrangements supported an ideological relationship between the state and individual whereby the former acted as guarantor for the public good. The welfare state ordered lives through a 'rational system', which encouraged rational authority (Weber, 1958). The status of public sector actors was through bureaucratic structures associated with a hierarchy of expertise, with deference to the position of professional decision-making being part of an organisational logic. Such arrangements of power, built on hierarchy rather than the private ownership of

capital are important in understanding professional interests over management objectives (Corby and White, 1997). Citizens were placed in a dependent situation in seeking professional advice as power became embedded in the structures of welfare institutions.

3.3.1 *Bureaucracy as an integral feature of regimes*

Traditional regimes have clear bureaucratic chains of command, framed by a rational system of impartiality and equity, which ultimately lead to ministerial accountability through Parliament (Corby and White, 1999). Rational systems or means of administration have origins in the work of Max Weber (1947) and provide some of the chief theoretical categories for interpreting the characteristics of traditional regimes. Weber's account of bureaucratic rationalisation provides a vehicle for more clearly understanding bureaucracy and its spread beyond market relations to FE institutions as contemporary work organisations. The crux of an examination of non-profit and service type organisations e.g. education, is that the dynamic of bureaucratisation is partly independent of capital labour relations. For this reason, concepts which engage with this impasse are bridged by Max Weber (1947) who "provides a necessary corrective and additional resource" (Thompson and McHugh, 2002, p 370).

Examining the changes in FE and the impacts on professionalism affords having a greater insight into bureaucracy and forms of domination within organisations. It is possible to illustrate how structures of quality in FE embed logic of control into processes of administration. Such arrangements contribute to the development of a conceptual framework with which to understand aspects of quality regimes in FE.

More radical approaches (Salaman, 1979; Littler, 1982) do place organisational structures within a wider social and political context (from social democratic to neo-liberal) rather than see them as separate and constituted by their own specific imperatives. Public administration engenders culture specific 'regime values' (du Gay, 2000, p 7) symptomatic of the wider political environment in which it operates. Radical Weberians find partnership with some of the contemporary labour process

theorists who sparked a series of studies on a more micro level, in the emphasis they place on bureaucratic control (Friedman, 1977; Edwards, 1979) and consent (Burawoy, 1979) as management strategies. There is a rejection of the view that bureaucracy is inevitable in FE or other sectors, but rather it must be explained in the wider capitalist sphere that dictates social relationships (Thompson and McHugh, 2002).

The Weberian notions of power, being constructed and legitimised through re-formulating rationalisation of the FE institutions do necessitate an understanding of pre-incorporation FE bureau-professional or traditional regimes predicated on certain guarantees. Regimes have specific applications to notions of authority, legitimacy and power factored by the *means of administration* taking on a scientific aura. Utilising Weberian concepts for examining changing organisational bureaucratic structures in FE identifies the problem of the concentration of power through the means of administration. Weber has specifically remarked:

> The bureaucratic structure goes hand in hand with the concentration of the material means of management in the hands of the master. This concentration occurs, for instance in well-known and typical fashion in the development of big capitalist enterprises, which find their essential characteristics in this process. A corresponding process occurs in public organisations (Weber, 1968, p 980).

Bureaucratic forms are considered by Polan (1984) as a source of analysis in their own right because it is necessary to understand the political controls surrounding these bureaucratic boundaries. Weberian categories (among other conceptual tools) provide the FE researcher with insights to more clearly understand a complex division of the management of competing interests, together with the performance of tasks in the FE sector. Therefore, calculable rule based procedure becomes a method of accounting. Likewise, custom and practice along chains of command demonstrate the activities of bureaucratic groups, being acknowledged as factors in the development of FE quality systems. Power is constructed through rational legal order

of legitimation, with salaried agents, reflecting a necessity to formalise authority through state structures. Additionally, forms of career structure based on professional expertise do strengthen control, through forms of discipline and legitimacy, which are highlighted in rewards from a profession. Calculable rules and organisational procedures are dominant in analysis of the structural conditions which surround the appointment, promotion and dismissal of individuals (Littler, 1982, p 37).

Understanding the bureaucratic motivation of actors in career structures exposes the 'good bureaucrat' (du Gay, 2000, p 4) and informs agency within regimes. However, it is important to acknowledge that certain arrangements i.e. collegial as a form of democratic control (Cousins, 1985) can overcome bureaucratic authority. The idea of consent to bureaucratic authority also poses questions about whether calculable rules can stifle or impede creativity, autonomy and create tensions, which has been a consistent critique of traditional regimes (Corby and White, 1999).

Despite more recent debates on other mechanisms of co-ordination i.e. markets and trust, with an acknowledgement of critiques on 'big' bureaucracy (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005) the procedures and rules associated with organisations are powerful indicators of how normative activities assist organisational elites in shaping the use of power. Such arrangements can clash with the value systems of employees (Gouldner, 1954) (addressed later in the chapter). While the state bought the compliance of education professionals in traditional regimes, through various forms of involvement and participation it also created a capacity for disruption because professionals are deemed to have an expansionary effect on welfare services (Offe, 1985).

3.4 Disruption and Reconciliation regimes

The factors of control over public sector workers, which certainly appear to be less of a constraint to professional groups in the traditional regimes, became more prominent from the mid-1970's, as welfare costs spiralled and the Keynesian social democratic doctrines were subject to interrogation (Shaoul, 1999). A growing disenchantment with the political settlement to maintain social democratic welfare

principles, contributed to a decaying belief in Keynesian economics, but also created uncertainty for the social and organisational settlements. This section interprets disruption both as an arrangement that precipitates reconciliation with the populace, to ensure legitimacy of government, but in doing so impedes the accumulation of capital. Also, by examining the factors that disrupted consensus arrangements it is possible to interpret the rise of quality management to incorporate input and output dimensions (delivery costs and service to customer). This is important from the 1970's as the state is forced to look for other means to organise regimes with quality mechanisms contributing to organisational control mainly through cost input (Martinez Lucio and Mackenzie, 1999). Later, as part of transformation regime values, a focus on output becomes integral in the FE post-incorporation settlement.

Despite the burgeoning welfare arrangements in the 1970's due to among other things the new universities and the raising of the school leaving age with the associated employment costs (Corby and White, 1999) it is the macro economic crisis which explains the initial fracturing of the post war political consensus. Corby and White identify faltering incomes policies, the oil crisis, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervention, with growing industrial conflict (Corby and White, 1999, p7) as contributory factors in disruption. While the traditional regimes were increasingly subjected to cost containment as a consequence of macro-level government concerns (Martinez Lucio, 1999) state professionals were implicated in fiscal crisis. Such a scenario assists an explanation as to why in the organisational settlement (later) managerialism became a solution in education. Controlling expenditure in education became a priority because in 1977, it was one of the government's most expensive programmes (Shaoul, 1999, p 34).

This section will examine meta and macro drivers for control strategies (utilising labour process applications) as a factor in regimes, although it is initially necessary to establish the 'criterion of rationality' or logic, which governs the location of professionals in the further education sector. The legitimation theorists (O'Connor, 1973; 1984; Habermas, 1976; Offe, 1975; 1976; 1985; Offe and Heinze, 1992) provide some conceptual armour to examine regimes in FE because there is an

acknowledgement that public sector work is governed by a distinct rationality and has different relations of production. Explaining the role of the state and how drivers towards cost containment in the 1970's were influenced by macro-level government disquiet in social welfare structures provides the basis for *disruption* or *reconciliation regimes*. Additionally, the explanation by Offe (1984; 1985; 1992) provides a rationale for the internal modes of operation which assist in understanding the role of quality systems in education.

To explain adequately the relationship between the state, government and the economy in a post-industrial society, it is necessary to contextualise the position of education in disruption and reconciliation regimes. Education policies are informed as a consequence of particular 'fields of problems' Ball (1994), permeating political discourse in the capitalist state. The critical and legitimation theorists (O'Connor, 1973; 1984; Habermas, 1975; 1976; Offe, 1984) illustrate the core functions of the capitalist state are to ensure the conditions for successful *accumulation* and economic efficiency. The provisions of education and training support state functions in the production, *reproduction* and harnessing of labour power. However, *legitimation* of state activities becomes tied to an 'instrumental rationality' (Habermas, 1975) as a consequence of securing a mass consensus, avoiding excessive social unrest, through the provision of welfare and the legitimate flow of consumer goods. In this context, welfare activities are central to all functions, although primarily in the reproductive and legitimation aspects (Lee and Raban, 1988). Costs (public spending and planning) have become fundamental to understanding policy (Ball, 1994) and also provide an explanation of why control is necessary in regimes. The critical theorists argue:

> State provision of welfare is a form of production which not only produces capitalist social relations but also negates them by introducing new and additional social relations of production (Cousins, 1987, p 3)

Relationships in the state sector are governed by a different 'criterion of rationality' (Cousins, 1987, p 50) and the issues are not just about capital exchange and wage

labour, suggesting that there is room for a range of managerial strategies in the organisation of activities. What the critical theorists do is ascribe specific social relations surrounding capital and labour in the state and private sectors, as being divergent. State provision can be a response to factors that don't necessarily work in the interest of capital but ensure legitimation (Habermas, 1976).

Capitalism is faced with particular sets of dilemmas. On the one hand, a 'legitimation crisis' if cuts are imposed on public sector expenditure. On the other, a 'fiscal crisis', if welfare spending becomes a particular burden on capital and significantly impedes accumulation. The critical left (O'Connor, 1973; 1984; Offe, 1984) explain chronic budgetary struggles, and crises, which envelop capitalist states. Such struggles are due to the endless stream of demands and the inherent contradictions of capitalism. The provision of state services are therefore governed by different incentives with objectives centring on the competing groups and actors, involved in a policy process manifested by cost constraints. This policy process, with its imbalance of power relations is described by Halliday (1994) in education, whereby changing interpretations of quality are used as the control mechanisms of managerial regimes. State activities, fulfils the role of correction legitimation rather than mere accumulation, although increasingly difficult to manage, because it is subject to capitalist economics (Offe, 1984).

State provision, is not governed by the profit maximisation of the private sector but is dependent on revenue from this sector, because of state reliance on the economic resources from private ownership. The market regime determines the shape of the public sector, by shackling the state. As Thompson and McHugh note:

> Capital can utilise its resource power to place unique pressure on the state's economic management processes (Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p 81).

Disruption is significant in regimes as popular pressures conflict with business interests (Offe, 1984, pp. 119-21, p 244). Conversely, regime development can be

conceptualised as a cost – benefit analysis in a reconciliation process, serving as an efficient conflict reduction mechanism (Offe, 1984).

> The welfare state is indeed a highly problematic, costly and disruptive arrangement, yet its absence would be even more disruptive (Offe, 1984, p 288).

The state can exacerbate the fiscal crisis of a government(s) but also become a focus for political and social conflict over the way resources are utilised. Disruption facilitates an understanding of how and why education and welfare professionals are controlled in the context of regimes.

3.4.1 *Internal modes of organisation for the state*

Establishing the modes of operation related to state provision (in this case to education) further illustrates a rationale for control through restraint of the economic profligacy, associated with professional provider groups. For Offe (1985) professionals and other interest groups involved in the welfare process are able to apply ideological strategies that influence state spending in some way. In responding to social needs, spending exacerbates the fiscal crisis of the state as it becomes a source of conflict in the way resources are utilised. One solution for the state in the fiscal crisis of the 1970's was to create structures of control that underpinned normative systems to ensure more docile and passive professionals (Cousins, 1987). Quality started to become a legitimating function to control the labour process. Halliday makes the point about quality in the education sector:

> It may be suggested that governments do not trust academics and seek to control them in various ways that are disguised under the widely accepted banner of 'quality' (Halliday, 1994, p 45).

The transition period for welfare regimes in the 1970's is characterised by political and economic tensions culminating with the Labour administration instituting various cash limits on public spending (Shaoul, 1999). Also, Corby and White (1999)

identify unsustainable cost implications for capital of supporting welfare expenditure, which led to the predilection of regimes driven by the indicators of cost effectiveness and income generation, in a later era. For that reason, state workers (in particular manual groups) became more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of quality management. Hence, Lucio Martinez and Mackenzie (1999) acknowledge that the engagement with quality was a central feature of negotiations over remuneration, industrial relations and employment activity in the public sector.

The state 'muddles through' (Offe, 1984) in that it cannot use the same type of planning capacity available to the private sector. In this sense, economised quality mechanisms alleviate a deficient logic, whereby the state's internal modes of operation are increasingly pressured to balance functions with accumulation. Quality, through input and output measures, is a mechanism to (either) justify spending and/or sponsor work intensification.

For Cousins (1987) an examination of the state allows discussion on the purposes and form of control, (which welfare workers are subjected to) rather than take them for granted. With this in mind, Offe (1975; 1985) provides scope for this thesis to understand the modes of intervention and activities of provision. *Allocative* activity refers to state resources gained from taxation e.g. social security. Also, *productive* activities, (e.g. education) require inputs of raw material, finance and labour. It is here, that the state must take cognisance and reconcile the demands of accumulation with those of political democratic processes to ensure legitimation. The state activities are organised according to three modes, which influences allocation, although the state is hampered by the contradictions of welfare, manifested as inherent 'fault lines' in each form of operation (Offe, 1985).

The *bureaucratic* mode is orchestrated by rules and hierarchy, although is flawed by the inefficiencies of bureaucracy. In a critique of Weber, Offe (1985) questions the veracity of bureaucratic, legal rational or Weberian ideal-types of administration. The parameters of 'feasible policy making' and the impact of powerful actors (e.g. education professionals) influence the sphere of administrative action (Offe, 1985, p

8). The *purposive rational* operation embeds some form of technicisation into the process, which means introducing goals and objectives, performance indicators and planning to activity. The education sector is flawed by a deficient planning and profit logic because it is unable to use clear measures to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness in the same manner as the private sector. The state uses alternative measures to control professional groups, through forms of bureaucratic, regulatory and technical control. So, a rationale is created for quality management as a tool to evaluate performance.

The *democratic* mode is based on forms of political conflict and consensus, although plagued for capital by the dangers of unlimited demand on services, which subverts the general accumulation process creating a dilemma for the state Offe (1975; 1985). The answer was to question the underpinning social democratic welfare philosophy and subsequently change regime values, through macro political and economic drivers. Offe (1985) acknowledges that the basis of state privileges afforded to education professionals because of their contribution to reducing risks on behalf of the state (central to status in traditional regimes) was disputed, as were final outcomes or quality of welfare services (Cousins, 1987). Disruption is exposed in two senses, both in terms of accumulation, but also in the search for measures that both facilitate, but also conceal cost containment, while maintaining quality.

The issue for the management of the state at a time when traditional relationships were crumbling in the 1970's was reconciling a relationship with professionals who are identified by Ham and Hill as being integral to successful policy implementation (Ham and Hill, 1986). The state was faced with buying off opposition to changing policy direction or carrying out policy objectives at the expense of dissenting groups from across the spectrum of involvement (Offe, 1985). The solution has been the 'application of technical rationality' (Cousins, 1987) which was manifested by changed financial relationships and management as a solution with the incorporation of FE. Also reconstructing the curriculum and addressing the management of quality. Strategies started with forms of regulation and financial incentives and have

continued towards isomorphic tendencies (adopting private sector solutions) through the removal of politics from state activities.

In a critique Cousins (1987) considers Offe to be less clear in his understanding of the coercive control that state managers can employ. The distinctions between bureaucratic and purposive modes of coordination could mean that purposive modes or characteristics drawn from the private sector actually lead to more bureaucratic modes or tendencies. Unintended effects could be an outcome with the proliferation of quality audits (during the 1990's) in FE illustrating this point.

The importance of the critical theorist's contribution is in drawing attention to particular inherent contradictions in the nature of state work. The legitimation of state policy is complicated because it is drawn with certain pressures in mind. Without the option of abolishing welfare the state has to engineer more stringent measures to monitor input and output. In FE quality issues become part of technocratic management control structures to reconcile input and output through forms of measurement. Responses to social, economic and political change means redefining roles, so the internal modes of operation (the traditional institutions and practices are questioned). The result is that they effectively become part of a contested arena of what constitutes 'quality' (see Halliday, Chapter Two). However, in the operationalisation and redefinition of quality there is a potential for disruption through forms of resistance, by professionals. The impact of modifications to FE as a consequence of quasi market arrangements later in the 1990's is differentiated by factors like institutional history and policy formation, but solutions are linked to economy effectiveness and efficiency.

The explanation by Offe (1984; 1985; 1992) is useful as it facilitates an overview of the internal modes of operation, necessary to begin to conceptualise the genesis and pursuit of particular models of quality in education. There is also an idea that the operational forms of welfare provision, including traditional Weberian bureaucratic models (previously integral to state organisation) impede efficiency, not suiting the unpredictability, instability and the need for innovation (Thompson and Alvesson,

2005) in an era of flux. By this from the 1980's state organisational regimes find it increasingly difficult to reach a balance between inherent functions and the accumulation process. Also, the critical theorists provide tools to understand the location of FE professionals and the basis of state control, which overcome some of the critiques levelled at labour process theory. Having established a sound rationale to proceed, this thesis will develop labour process applications to examine management control strategies.

3.4.2 *Mechanisms of control: utilising labour process applications*

While the location of state workers has been clarified and regime transition illustrates the mechanisms necessary to control professionals, labour process analysis characterises the methods of increased control, consent and compliance through the management of education. The majority of studies that have followed the seminal contribution of Braverman (1974) have concentrated on the conditions of exchange in the private sector, factored by a structured antagonism, which generates surplus value. However, there is disagreement over whether state employees create surplus value. It has been argued by some (Gough, 1979; Corrigan, 1991) that the private sector does benefit from surplus both directly and indirectly produced by the labour process in the public sector. Clarifying the relevance of labour process theory to public sector organisations essentially means avoiding casual and unproblematic transfers which disregard the special context and circumstances of education (Reid, 1997; 2003) by illustrating the modes of rationality governing the sector.

The critical theorists illustrate state motivation for cost control within the evolution of control regimes. Also, from the 1980's the principles underpinning public and private provision have become increasingly blurred with the introduction of styles of management predicated on increased control. In education (as with other welfare services) while professionals in traditional regimes assumed a 'privileged position' (Braverman, 1974, p 407) cost control necessitated the application of Taylorist principles (Cousins, 1987) to intensify the work-effort bargain in the public sector.

Disruption regimes illustrate the threats to the 'logic of accumulation' for capitalism, which in turn spawn the seeds to the solution to a problem through technical and market rationalities. Later, such mechanisms create the pressures for bureaucratisation and work intensification via the conduit of the 'control imperative' (Thompson, 1989, p 243). The outcomes are a weakened market position for education professionals. While there are applications of Braverman evident in FE studies i.e. proletarianisation thesis (Randle and Brady, 1997) or deskilling (Mather and Seifert, 2003) uncertainty arises between Taylorism as a system of control and management control in general. Such ambiguity has tended to revitalise questions on the role of managerial strategy (Thompson and McHugh, 2002).

Notwithstanding the importance of Braverman, issues arise because human subjects become a passive economic category, which disregard the interplay between structure and action. The zero sum approach by Braverman suggests that once workers have lost control they will not be able to regain it (Cousins, 1987) ignoring the micro politics of misbehaviour and other forms of recalcitrance. Single variable applications sacrifice the potential to explore resistance in regimes, as a consequence of organisations in transition with new policies and practices, which attempt to consolidate the role of the quality system as a bureaucratic, regulatory and technical control mechanism.

To follow Braverman's approach with total conviction would tend to deny the complexities and contradictions, in effect saying, that quality systems as a feature of Taylorist forms in FE, are mechanisms of control and professionals in institutions passively accept, or are at odds to resist. Similarly, while strike action is and has been a very overt form of resistance (see Randle and Brady, 1997; Williams, 2003) it is one legitimate option amongst others against the degradation of work. Being totally convinced by Braverman (Randle and Brady, 1997; Mather and Seifert, 2003) also suggests deskilling and degradation in FE are inevitable. Having said this, new organisational forms don't necessarily contain the need for overt control, which may be manifested through revitalised forms and mechanisms, adding complexity, without denying valuable contributions that illustrate intensification and deskilling.

According to Reid (1997) there has been an inclination to neglect teacher agency, merely reducing them to 'pawns'. The central thrust for this thesis is to construct a framework that is directed to understanding both the effects, purposes and forms of control. Embracing Braverman wholeheartedly perhaps invites the problem for FE (as with other education research) of ending up down a cul-de-sac (Reid, 1997).

Perhaps more scope is provided by examining the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1928) whereby there is a dynamic created between control and resistance, as a consequence of variable management responses to worker creativity (Thompson, 1983). From this point, deskilling becomes one of a number of possible consequences of control in the managed organisation. This angle of discussion is more fruitful in making sense of the FE environment through different regime interpretations. Thompson (1989) points out, that for management to have a monopoly of conception: "runs against a parallel requirement for some level of creative participation" (Thompson, 1989, p 133).

The development of conceptual tools means considering other post Braverman debates (Friedman, 1977, 1990; Edwards, 1979) suggests that management can select from a range of control mechanisms. Such instruments are juxtaposed with other factors such as the strength of the workforce and various external market pressures and workplace change, reflecting socio-economic conditions. Friedman's analysis of forms of control as 'strategies', to deal with any particular management problems (Thompson, 1989, p 134) suggests elements of flexibility. Friedman (1977) illustrates *direct control* as burdensome, while the strategy of *responsible autonomy* attempts to give workers authority and responsibility. Friedman suggests that responsible autonomy is applicable to privileged and skilled workers (associated with FE practitioners). Occupational groups in FE could be subject to control through responsible autonomy because particular professional norms and values become the subject of control.

While Edwards (1979) illustrates simple and technical strategies, it is the emergence of bureaucratic control that objectifies the labour process by establishing formal rules

and procedures (Edwards, 1979, p 132). Some promise is evident for applications in FE, although there appears to be a failure to discuss control structures in their 'combined forms' (Thompson, 1989, p 150). Manifest in Edwards' approach appears to be an unproven assertion that control becomes somewhat 'unproblematic' (Smith and Thompson, 1999; Callaghan and Thompson, 2001). Bureaucrats create the arena where the struggle occurs, by attempting to ideologically transpose the discourse of science (Wardell, 1990, p, 167). Such action, in effect, does not account for informal organisational practices or agents transforming structures.

Both Friedman and Edwards tend to forgo the informal factors in the workplace i.e. how workers identify blind spots in the system to their advantage (Callaghan and Thompson, 2001) in favour of more efficient forms of compliance. Understanding the levels of professional autonomy in the context of quality regimes requires an appreciation of how the formal and informal fuse. Trust in the professional within traditional regimes, alongside more collegiate associations or cooperation (Friedman, 1990), are important elements in understanding responsible autonomy as a form of control. Giving actors scope and encouragement to adapt in FE organisations provides certain incentives to co-operate and comply with systems in quality regimes.

In discussing professional autonomy in the health care sector, Dent (1998) identifies strategies to enhance forms of discretion that some professional groups strive for in performing work orientated tasks. Dent (1998) identifies that some professional work groups have gained concessions, reflected in the medical profession by clinical autonomy due to the complexity of tasks within the labour process. Also, privileges may have been granted at the expense of other groups, due to market position, (Cousins, 1987). Other studies have identified a decline in discretion amongst professional groups in the private and public sector (Felstead et al, 2004) and FE professionals provide an example of a group being more vulnerable to relative regime norms and values.

It is evident that the state may limit the actions of professionals, yet regime strategies and polices in the traditional regime were more likely to be determined in conjunction with professionals. The increase in bureaucratic management control is apparent in the transition from disruption to transformation of FE, which has led to challenges to professionals in work design and structures of organisations.

In education, Reid (1997) advocates that the state needs to organise teachers to reach required political outcomes through the curriculum, which is central to the process of operation (its aims, sequence, method and assessment). This (for Reid) goes to the heart of why the state wants to control teachers, because having purchased the labour of professionals it must also ensure costs support capital accumulation. The political nature of teaching means meeting the economic, ideological and social requirements of the state.

However, Reid's single variant focus on the curriculum, as an instrument of control, could result in an obscuring of other variants e.g. quality issues that are equally important, but somewhat overlooked in the development of understanding. Curriculum control does enable a focus on the management of quality constituted in technical control. Combining such measures embraces the wider sphere of teacher control as it provides a level of scrutiny being in the public interest by safeguarding, taxpayers money.

Familiar themes of control are also evident in the assessment Smyth et al (2000, p 39-46) make of teachers, with various mechanisms having a significant impact on professionals. Therefore, *market control* encompasses factors of competition, market and consumer demands, with work evaluated through measured outputs against costs. The maintenance of *technical control* is engineered through various mechanisms e.g. externally imposed curriculum frameworks or quality requirements. The structures of institutions embed hierarchical power, with *bureaucratic control* establishing a mechanism for the 'career' to become a source of control. Managerial corporate objectives as a solution, to the running of organisations, illustrate economic rather than social factors as a mission in *corporate control*. Forms of *ideological*

control construct a common sense (hegemonic) understanding of the 'good' professional by attempting to embed certain externally imposed norms and values. Also, *disciplinary control* ensures certain behaviour and normative codes are developed with sanctions evident in cases of professional non-compliance. Forms of control are cross-cutting, being more overt or subtle, although outcomes reveal processes of intensification in the workplace.

For Reid (1997) embedded in educational settlements are systems and strategies which justify a hierarchy of control. It is precisely because teachers are told how to teach and subjected to forms of evaluation incurring strategies of compliance and consent that state education is littered with ever changing *control regimes*. Such regime mechanisms enforce and maintain control although management does not go unchallenged.

The nature of the 'control debate' has itself been subject to a critique on the grounds that management will not necessarily always try to find models of control to solve problems (Thompson and McHugh, 1995). Different control strategies are manifested as a: "set of mechanisms and practices that regulate the labour process" (Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p 113) providing a useful lens, although not all-inclusive one, to examine FE and work organisation through an interpretation of quality regimes. Perhaps the contingency factor evident in management means in reality that the likelihood is a multi-strategic approach to control, favouring the long-term needs and purposes of accumulation and legitimation.

Further questions are posed in the development of a framework of analysis for this thesis because to concentrate solely on control and envisage FE as an over-controlled environment is something other commentators have critiqued (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). Workers are also capable of 'self-regulating' and so, controlling themselves (Thompson 1989, p 153) through the generation of *consent* (Burawoy, 1979; 1985). Agency can be reintroduced into the analysis of the labour process by examining informal rules and work patterns. Informal working processes can be a way of coping with working life. Subjective consent within more favourable working conditions

brings agents into the equation with a focus given to the place of work. For Burawoy (1979) consensual relations are influential when constructing the invisibility of capitalist power in eliciting co-operation from workers, who consent because they consider it in their interest.

These notions of consent are consistent with the ideas of Gleeson and Shain (1999) when they talked of 'strategic compliance' and with Alexiadou (2001) who emphasised the 'responsive manager'. Returning to the ideas of Burawoy later in this chapter will provide scope for understanding how quality regimes in FE have evolved, but also balance the equation of control, consent and compliance. Managerial attempts to harness worker commitment and internalise quality management in institutions can be appreciated by examining forms of consent. Conversely with the transformation of regimes management needs quality confederates (regime supporters) and has to cede certain forms of discretion. The next section will consider how regimes took on transformative characteristics in FE during the 1990's. In an attempt to stabilise the disruption of accumulation neo-liberal philosophy challenges traditional models of the public sector (Chomsky, 1999).

3.5 Transformative Regimes

The idea of overloaded government became part of the neo-liberal interpretation of the fiscal crisis of the state in the 1970's. To explain, the demands of welfare outstripped the capacity of government to meet the needs of accumulation, which was compounded by a slowing down of economic growth worldwide (Corby and White, 1999). Encouraging wealth creation had to coexist with reconciling social demands (Hobsbawn, 2003). In an attempt to address the disruption to the accumulation of capital, the Conservative Thatcher administration (from 1979) advocated the restructuring of welfare as part of the transformation process of the economy (Cousins, 1985). During the 1980's the hope of the New Right was to shift agents to accept market principles with all other positions by definition being ruled 'illegitimate' (Gamble, 1986, p 52).

However monetarist economic philosophy advocating cost containment in the public sector did little to alleviate resource demands which remained high into the mid 1980's. The need for financial probity prompts Martinez and Mackenzie (1999) to acknowledge that deterioration in services became a reality. In counteracting such trends, new forms of public sector governance, manifested in quality regime management came to the fore (Pollitt, 1993; Farnham and Horton, 1996; Wilkinson et al, 1998).

The ideas of transformative settlements emerging as a consequence of hegemonic regime shifts (Gramsci, 1971) is one way of interpreting organisational change in the field of education. The success of the New Right can be interpreted in the light of the power of the dominant hegemonic discourse to mould a new settlement through a combination of taken for granted ideas (Avis, et al 1996) that encourage forms of control and consent. This thesis does acknowledge that an over emphasis on the power of discourse to influence actions in the workplace tends to miss out on an understanding of agential resistance. Adopting the framework of Clarke and Newman (1997) provides scope and substance to further formulate particular analytical tools with an appreciation of internal modes of operation exposing factors in regime operation.

A coercive New Right operational strategy, for implementing changes to the management of welfare services included: incorporating tighter financial controls, changes to internal management, with the control mechanisms in the shape of quality and audit, together with forms of privatisation (Cousins, 1987, p 147). The traditional regimes were a focus for criticism, while public sector professionals were considered to be wasteful and self-serving (du Gay, 2000) being significant contributors to disruption and guilty of compounding social, political and economic problems in the UK. One solution was 'good management', with fiscal crisis being replaced by fiscal discipline plus a tightening of managerial control in line with accountability and compliance to targets (Exworthy and Halford, 1999). The reconstitution of bureaucratic and normative control systems through the spread of market relations in

the state sector has been a powerful force in reshaping work (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998).

The features of transformation and the central policy of shrinking the public sector (Shaoul, 1999) have also been characterised in the rise of new public management (as outlined in Chapter Two) of which several definitions exist (Farnham and Horton, 1996) incorporating a shift in regulatory styles and a rise in quality assurance. In a critical account, Lucio Martinez and Mackenzie (1999) identify four reasons why quality has been a fundamental factor in management intervention and feature so prominently in transformation regimes. First, quality is a base element in the adoption of private sector techniques promoting commercialisation and marketisation of the public sector. Such techniques are infused with a quality discourse invoking the needs of the customer, but used to control working practices. Second, quality is part of new public governance, marked by measurement of performance in the context of a shrinking state. Third, quality techniques focused on being a 'good provider', which replaced notions of a 'good employer', prioritising the consumer over producer. Finally, quality techniques contributed to control over the labour process of professional provider groups. Other accounts (Wilkinson et al, 1998) chart the political nature of quality (at this time) as having more focus on cost control than service quality.

Changes in the forms of rationality by which professionals can establish their legitimacy and authority (as previously explored in Chapter Two) are identified by Fournier (1999). Defining the conduct of professions is through the techniques of marketability, budget control and audit, with a broadening of the area of accountability. While a great unevenness across professional occupations in transformative regimes (Clarke and Newman, 1997) is clear, differentiation is also evident within professions, with other studies illustrating that managers do not necessarily form homogeneous groups (Mulholland, 1998). In this context, FE professionals do not have a particularly distinctive role or high social status compared to other traditions in the public sector i.e. medical professions.

The reinvention of public sector governance (concerning the effectiveness of market based controls) in the 1990's has for Power (1997) promoted customer sensitive working practices along with systems of control requiring, "constant vigilance and improvement" (Power, 1997, p 40). It is possible to speak of empowerment through FE incorporation, although governance and control rely on the principles of new public management, regulation and quality initiatives (Power, 1997).

To further enable a framework of analysis the radical theorists acknowledge the state as an arena of loosely connected structures signified by conflict between dominant and less powerful groups (O'Connor, 1984). The asymmetric political relationships of FE, determined through 'quango or contract state' arrangements by Ainley (1995) characterise the transformative regimes. A feature of such contract arrangements are dominant policy implementation groups, which are faced with the problem of creating consent and an equilibrium in the FE sector.

In the context of disruption regimes (underpinned by social democratic doctrines) various welfare concessions were deemed necessary, to foster legitimate accumulation. The state could resolve issues through hegemony, as competing interests were reconciled through a common welfare consensus. In a similar vein, Avis (2002) illustrates how the lexicon of neo-liberal ideology, economy and pursuit of competitiveness have become hegemonic – society needs to contribute to this goal – failure to do so is countered by increasing control and regulation i.e. audit (Avis, 2002, p 79). Hegemony does not require universal consent, because dominant ideology is underpinned by the institutions of civil society and the state (Levitas, 1986). Specific economic (contracts), cultural (values) and command arrangements (rules) directed by the wider supporting structures of economy, education system and legal system combine in a process of de-legitimation of counter ideologies. The state can use a number of strategies to ensure that state policy becomes the public interest (examples include: coercion, control, consent, compliance, sanctions).

For the purposes of this thesis, state policy is presented as serving the general public interest through a hegemonic discourse (Gramsci, 1971) which configures economy,

industry and education as vehicles for national competitiveness, which are achieved and maintained through the creation and recreation of common sense (Reid, 1997). In relation to hegemonic quality audits, they come to saturate FE and become central to an understanding of value for money, being part of the lived experience of agents through dominant meanings, values and actions.

While societal power is dispersed in different tiers and agencies i.e. education systems, the persuasiveness of common sense discourses establishes and moulds cohesiveness across sites. Nonetheless, the movement from traditional to transformative managerial regimes in FE characterised by a clash of paradigms in the sector (Randle and Brady, 1997) between competing groups (managerial/ professional) has meant that hegemonic dominance has been the disputed.

Counter hegemonic forces in FE supporting more traditional frameworks of collegiality and trust have been restrained due to the organisation of overarching *settlements* (Clarke and Newman, 1997) which support an economised, market driven transformative regime structure. Such analysis assists in understanding the restructuring of the state as a series of 'unstable equilibria' (Reid, 1997) because settlements or agreements while being formed are: "contradictory and contested creating instabilities" (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p, 141). The state may incorporate conflict, although various contradictions generate disagreement (professional/ managerial) which have the potential to usurp the settlement.

The transition from disruption regimes to transformative structures sheds light on New Right intervention in an attempt to resolve the fiscal crisis through settlement formation. As previously mentioned in this chapter Clarke and Newman (1997) feel that the multiple settlements which supported and led to the development of the post –war welfare state (political, economic, organisational and social) provide a focus for understanding the process of restructuring in the public sector. While economic and social settlements dominate, education is considered as having some autonomy, due to its prominence in society. However, the parameters for education are strongly influenced by the economic, cultural and political arenas (Reid, 1997). In the case of

transformative regimes the link between education and industry emerge with new vocationalism in the 1980's and are consolidated throughout the 1990's.

As previously in Chapter Two, Halliday (1994) identifies that minority groups may have some success in shaping the direction of education policy although more generally the dominant groups (those with more authority in the decision –making processes of government and the state) assume the ascendancy. Indeed, this process of production and maintenance of settlement is considered as being an attempt to resolve multiple crises in the shaping of the state. This thesis is an agreement with Clarke and Newman, whereby the state structure "treated managerialism as the basis of a new equilibrium" (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 141).

The embedding of audit in quality regimes during the 1990's has been part of the consolidation of common sense approaches to the management of FE and the wider public sector. Such a mechanism provides an insight or some understanding of how transformative regimes are maintained. However, the problem is that teachers may have structurally determined privileges (Offe, 1984) but are considered untrustworthy due to political beliefs, whereby there is a potential for a compliance deficit. Professional groups can both assist the state and be an obstacle to settlement implementation.

The construction of quality regimes as common sense entities in FE allows one route to understanding how managerialist hegemonic discourse promotes consent and resistance. Despite Gramsci (1971) providing a general theory of society in the development of hegemony, such a lens can also assist an explanation of the everyday fabric of social life in the FE workplace (Avis, 1996). It is possible to demonstrate transformative settlement shifts in FE but also gain an important insight into how quality is manifested as common sense by actors. While commentators have illustrated how new forms of surveillance e.g. audit mechanisms have conspired to support the tools of managerialism (Clarke et al, 2000) there is often a failure to anticipate the prospects of resistance.

Also, it is possible to suggest that discourses of professionalism embed discursive power through values associated with self-regulation, but this denies other sources of power. This thesis does not condone a Foucauldian dominant discourse (Foucault, 2000) position as a single variable causal factor and acknowledges other sources of power, with resistance against dominating discourses (Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p 144) on more than one level. To expand on the example, bureaucratic power exists as one source of power in an explanation of the interplay between control and resistance in FE organisations.

Opportunities are afforded to examine actors or *agential projects* in the governance of FE. Embedding complexity is necessary in any understanding of how audit structures support state policies and assist in maintaining cohesiveness in FE. A factor in understanding the development of managerialist quality regimes will be whether they become part of the ordinary way of seeing things and therefore contribute to the manufacturing of consent in FE.

3.5.1 *Changing organisational regimes: a conceptual tool of analysis*

So far this chapter has introduced the idea of regimes and established certain precepts for the thesis. The location of state workers and internal modes of state operation through a critical theorist appreciation (Offe, 1984; 1985) are aspects which contribute to a framework of analysis for FE. Having established a platform for understanding public sector work it is possible to employ labour process applications of control. A Gramscian overview provides some understanding of how and why the state controls teachers, plus how changing settlements have become manifested in hegemonic regimes supporting the economy. Albeit, there is a health warning that hegemonic discourse is but one source of power. Managerial regimes assist in understanding the nature of control in FE. While there is scope to understand the features and development of quality in the context of regime orientation (missing in the general literature on FE) it is necessary to build a framework which can begin to grasp the characteristic elements.

Employing the framework of Clarke and Newman (1997) provides more scope to understand the shift from bureau-professional, through disruption-reconciliation towards transformative organizational regimes. More attention is given to internal modes of operation as contributory factors in institutional regime operation: *'modes of attachment'*; '*decision making, agenda setting* and *normative power*'; '*legitimacy'*; '*relational power'* Clarke and Newman (1997, p 61) explaining dimensions of power, in post-incorporation FE organizational regimes. It is worth explaining such categories as they form a basis for comparisons between bureau-professional and managerial regimes in relation to FE.

To begin, (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 62-3) explain that *'modes of attachment'* provides a 'new' sense of identity and belonging in organizations. A movement occurs away from traditional, stable, professional roles with collegial modes of association and a loyalty to the profession. Commentators on FE (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998; Robson, 1998) have pointed out that there is little historical grounding in collegiality, with loyalty tending towards an original vocational occupation. The managerial modes are linked with (as explored in Chapter Two) corporate culture identity, missions and shared objectives, combined with performance management and the measurement of what management considers important.

Next, *'decision-making'* (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 63-5) in the traditional regime is articulated as professional discretion in line with specific rules, whereby in education, pedagogic systems of teaching constituted in a body of knowledge assume the professional knows best. The managerial regimes embody management as the solution, with a right to manage being a prerogative. Limits are set through legislation, and centrally through cost curbs and targets, from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC); translated in devolved power down, both to, and within post-incorporated organizations.

Also, *'agenda setting'* in a bureau-professional regime was constituted around the capacity to organize, make, and apply expertise to the decision making process in

meeting legitimated needs of citizens. Conversely, in managerial regimes the focus is on meeting organizational objectives with cost implications for failing to meet performance measures. With *'normative power'* the internal modes of operation seeks to maximize efficiency and performance through the use of budget control. The idea that users have more freedom and power is distilled within the needs of business process objectives operationalised by managers, using the focus of strategic engagement and financial prudence.

An overarching *'legitimacy'* (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 65-7) within the bureau-professional regime was characterised by lines of hierarchy and direct accountability upward to politicians. In the transformation regime of FE, agencies have assumed legitimacy through memoranda of understanding in more asymmetrical arrangements. An example of such a relationship in Scottish FE is the Funding Council contracting out its responsibility of quality to the Inspectorate (HMIe). The legitimacy managerialism aspires to, is grounded in notions of transparency with managers being prudent with public resources, either accountable to policy makers through performance and audits; or, directly to users. The role of the Funding Council in publishing public documents, generated from college returns together with Student Satisfaction surveys are all part of the evaluative methods open to users i.e. performance criteria and satisfaction ratings. Forms of accountability are focused down to professional practitioners to drive forward change and continually improve standards.

The regime of bureau-professionalism is legitimated by the application of expert power for the public good. With managerialism, legitimacy is achieved and dependent on using public resources prudently based on calculative power – through a non-partisan rationality, identified by Reeves (1995) in an explanation new modes of rationality in further education (see Chapter Two). So, the calculative (rational/ technical) nature of managerialism is inscribed with quantitative and evaluative technologies, which depict managers as neutral in the context of auditing and regulation.

Finally, *'relational power'* describes power within and between organizations, whereby groups and actors are placed in structured relationships. This could mean an examination of the balance of power amongst groups, across the FE sector. For Halliday (1994) variable influence exists between managers, bureaucrats, FE practitioners and students in the decision making process. Relational power compounds the asymmetric relationships in FE as being legitimate. A constellation of interlocking relationships exists between civil servants and the upper echelons of FE management. Additionally intra-organisational committees influence policy direction, in arrangements which also foster instrumental career enhancement within the FE sector.

For Clarke and Newman (1997, p 67-73) the relationships of power are translated as different organisational orders. The *traditional* order is characterised by bureau-professional regimes, whilst the *competitive* order is located, and, has a primary location with the market solutions. Also, the *transformational* order is constructed through the principles of customer service; culture change and quality as central features. Models or orders are multi-dimensional, complex and contradictory, which at times is a source of confusion for actors. Significantly, both the competitive-transformational mix in FE are factored as being post -1993 scenarios, but seeking similar public sector outcomes, 'the intensification of labour' Clarke and Newman, (1997, p 75).

Further, Clarke and Newman (1997, pp 76-81) illustrate three ways managerialist regimes has transformed the public sector; First, *displacement* with performance, couched in a calculative, managerialist framework. Also *subordination* through budget driven requirements supersedes professional judgment. Such transformation features can be illustrated in the earlier periods following FE incorporation, while it is evident that *co-option* and the colonizing of professional discourse are likely factors in consolidation. Economized quality concepts which attempt to embed professional practice as evaluative performance indicators have been features of later developments in quality regimes. So, self-evaluation models are underpinned by notions of continuous quality improvement.

Clarke and Newman (1997, pp 76-81) also establish external transformation of the state to a delegated, devolved and contracting state synonymous with a shift to a business culture has had a powerful impact. Noting an interplay and absorption between internal and external environment, Clarke and Newman identify core managerial ideas, whereby *core business*, is a narrow definition mapped in corporate plans, with everything being confined to measurement. Also, *ownership* as a commitment to missions budgets and targets. *Audit explosion* is linked to internal structures and internal evaluation being configured as one best way of running and delivering a service. This leads Clarke and Newman to suggest:

> The growth of audit, in its many forms contributes to the isomorphic tendencies in the current system, pressing organisations to the idea that there is one best way of running things (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 80)

Further education organisations are encouraged to have comparable systems, which will enable the creation of comparable information, leading to a more prescriptive agenda about what is expected of organisational systems (e.g. benchmarking). Performance has become an institution's responsibility, creating dysfunctions, as resources are transferred from service delivery into the process of audit. The determination of priorities could be subverted by the need to meet the requirements of quality audit type activities (Clarke et al, 2000; Clarke, 2004). Such transformation means practitioner professionals could be placed in a situation whereby they are pursuing objectives and targets that bear no resemblance to activities in the classroom.

The changes in the relationship between the state and its agencies place managerial regimes at the centre of such transformation. Managerialism may provide a 'cement' (Clarke and Newman, 1997, p 81) linking the component parts although the devolution of responsibility or arms length governance has come with an increasing centralised control over resources and evaluation. The multi-level governance in FE means that government and Funding Council can play at being the 'honest brokers'

in this relationship collecting and disseminating information on comparisons between organisations, while ensuring effectiveness and efficiency. But, conferring local autonomy means that difficult issues are for college management to solve within a tight externally imposed framework.

The advantage of utilizing Clarke and Newman's (1997) approach is that it provides a vehicle for a more complex understanding of the internal orders of organisations in the context of transformative quality regimes**.** Albeit, that this framework can only provide a general explanation of developments. The framework constitutes management as the new command business process system, where business managers, quality coordinators, internal audit staff are considered as key actors. Also, managerialism has been installed as new regimes of power, structured through the various facets of domination, which include decision making, agenda setting and normative power.

The depiction of transformative regimes enables the development of a conceptual framework, which acknowledges that discourses do have some causal implications, although the role of agency needs more emphasis. A multi-levelled conceptual approach has aided in examining the development of quality across regimes. Both Offe's (1985) notion of 'internal modes of operation', settlements, with notions of regime shifts, and Clarke and Newman's model contribute to a picture, although neither adequately anticipate agency through worker responses.

The adaptation of Clarke and Newman's (1997) framework allows an understanding of the generative mechanisms in regime formation and the interplay between different interests in the FE sector. While some mechanisms (either structures or agents) may appear to have direct causal powers, e.g. Funding Council directives on college institutions, the relationships are perhaps more complex and more difficult to read straight off – akin to common sense notions of what is happening.

Quality regimes have developed since the establishment of the Funding Council (1999) whereby strategies of regulation and evaluation appear to feature in a

consolidation process. However it is necessary to employ other theoretical devices if we are to avoid the presentation of agents as passive recipients of managerialist edicts. Acknowledging the prospects of control, consent, compliance and resistance within contested or consolidated regimes will be provide more scope to understand actor perceptions.

3.6 Consolidated regimes

While restructuring did not affect FE until the early 1990's, the growth of quality in colleges has been rapid since incorporation and characterises the development of transformative regimes. Successive New Labour administrations from 1997 combined with Scottish devolution from 1999 have been framed by a 'third way' mixed economy. Neo-liberal philosophy and the modernisation of public services has continued, with what has been characterised by authors as a minimum reversal and more of a continuation of previous Conservative policy (Mooney and Poole, 2004; Mooney and Scott, 2005). In many ways, the previous policies of the New Right have been radicalized by New Labour (Callinicos, 2001).

Some refinement has taken place since 1997, although other factors in the management of public services i.e. New Labour's obsession with measurement (Corby and White, 1999) with a focus on quality and targets (Clarke et al, 2000) have been accentuated and intensified. The normative glue for FE is still target driven but attempts to blend control systems based on adherence to strict procedures with evaluative quality regimes. The work of Laird (2002) in Chapter Two on the Scottish sector illustrates the development and momentum towards Self-evaluation in colleges. Both regulation and evaluation appear to feature in what could be described as a consolidation process, whereby managerial strategies of control and consent are present.

This section will consider whether the regime values contained in transformative structures continue or whether the 'Third way' politics of New Labour have brought change to political, social and organisational settlements. The notion of business process models with high performance regulatory systems, characteristic of earlier

transformation regimes could tend towards structurally determined outcomes, whereby the agents go missing. This section will also make a case for other conceptual devices which are required to appreciate the subtleties of quality regimes and how agents accept the rules, routines and procedures.

The informal factors of bureaucracy (Gouldner, 1954) in FE are salient when assessing how a system of bureaucratic control and rules clashes with the value systems of employees work. Also, expanding on consent models allows more room to re-incorporate Burawoy (1979) to explain how professionals are capable of self-regulating in the acceptance of quality. The model developed by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) enables the mapping out of the acceptance of quality, whereby FE professionals are not merely docile, passive agents, but could resort to misbehaviour.

The features, which suggest consolidated regime values in FE, are grounded by a New Labour modernisation programme, framed by a 'third way' political and economic settlement. A third way philosophy advocates neither, a 'total' free market or return to a comprehensive dependency state (Giddens, 2000) concomitant with the New Right (transformative) and social democratic (traditional) juxtaposed positions. The middle way is an attempt to reconcile issues of neo-liberalism with factors of social justice in a mixed economy of welfare. So, Giddens (1998; 2000) advocates political and social settlements focusing on reconstructed concepts of citizenship, community and nation. The features of such arrangements are defined by new relationships between the individual and community, incorporating a redefinition of rights and responsibilities (Giddens, 1998, pp 64-5).

While FE is at the heart of New Labour lifelong learning policy (Hyland and Merrill, 2003) it is also plagued by the conflicting demands of an economized sector. The demands of the market need to be reconciled with requirements to accommodate diversity across society by providing a quality education and training (Hyland and Merrill, 2003).

As such, the organisational settlement under New Labour has seen the continuation of managerialism as previously outlined. The entrenchment and intensification of quality with an emphasis on benchmarking in FE (Audit Scotland, 2004) are features in the consolidation of regime values. Intra-organisational benchmarking clubs are encouraged in Scottish FE which further illustrates the obsession with measurement and a continuing evolution of institutional targets. Partnership and sharing quality information has been encouraged (Audit Scotland, 2004) to replace the worst excesses of competition, although standardisation across colleges is a common theme. The discretion of the professional practitioner over quality matters has appeared to come under further stress as target driven environments and more audit appear to result in a reconstitution of organisational and working priorities (Clarke, 2004).

In transformation regimes, bureaucracy (dominant in traditional regimes) is no longer considered the prime mechanism in relation to hierarchies (authority emanating from the top down). Dispensing with hierarchies and producer group dominance in favour of being responsive and accountable to management, state and funding bodies alongside customer needs are all features of a changing organisational ethos. Such ideas are acknowledged by Alvesson and Thompson (2005) who point out that bureaucracy has come under fire, with certain pressures in the public sector to legitimate reform. However, sources advocate that the traditional tension between bureaucracy and professionalism has been reformulated rather than eliminated (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). Also, Alvesson and Thompson (2005) do suggest that new quality has inherited, or incorporated many of the classic Weberian processes of calculability, predictability and quantification. The notion of lean, post bureaucratic organisations driven by missions rather than rules in FE as a consequence of restructuring and corporate status perhaps remains contested.

While the Marxian -Weberian hybrid provides a useful tool with which to express the continuity of social relations in and beyond large-scale organisations in a capitalist society (Thompson and McHugh, 2002) there are issues with Weber's treatment of certain ideas. The evocation of legitimacy in organisations is taken for granted by

Weber, although this is addressed by Gouldner (1954). Also, Weber does not distinguish between bureaucratic and professional authority, which is important in the context of control in FE. This underestimates the various methods used to ensure the co-operation of professionals. The distinction between bureaucratic authority and professional authority is characterised in the latter being based on tenure and hierarchy, determined by position. Professional authority is encompassed by knowledge and expertise, with obedience being due to specialist knowledge rather than position. It would appear that conflict is inevitable when these two forms of authority coincide with each other and an organisation's sphere of activity encompasses professional work as in further education.

Regulatory and evaluative measures, grounded in accountability are characteristic of a contested field of quality in FE because of a clash in values. One example of relevance to this thesis is Gouldner (1954) *'Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy'*, which illustrates the key role of systematic non-compliance and how sources of authority can generate or thwart consent. The concept of mock bureaucracy Gouldner (1954) may offer a device for understanding issues in FE quality regimes whereby implicit rules are instituted by more informal means. Therefore, managerial attempts to introduce changes in colleges over how quality is formalised and assumes worth could clash with what it means to the organisation and professionals. Hence an affront to established values, meanings and practices of quality, that potentially can lead to conflict.

The study by Gouldner (1954) concentrates on variant bureaucratic patterns (1954, p 182) of internal compliance to organisational rules. There is a challenge to Weber's contention that authority was given consent because it was legitimate. In Gouldner's view this is more problematic in that legitimacy itself stemmed from evoked consent (Cousins, 1987). So, in everyday working life Gouldner illustrates bureaucratic paraphernalia, which is disregarded by most employees. This pattern of overt non-compliance (*mock bureaucracy*) involves certain rules but management and employees make few attempts to adhere to them and because of a deficient legitimate means they are not enforced. The crux is, that rules must be legitimated (in terms of

'group values') and they will be more readily accepted if they are seen having a distinctive function to further their own ends (Gouldner, 1954, p 185). It is possible to suggest that mock bureaucracy can develop in FE organisations and within the context of quality regimes because rules are of little intrinsic value with violation having few negative consequences. Such rules and regulations are not enforced by management or obeyed by workers and this has a potential, and can produce a consensus between groups. Also, *representative bureaucracy* is illustrated by rules enforced by management and obeyed by workers because of a legitimate attachment to their own key values. For FE organisations it is logical to suggest that at any given time groups of rules will be characterized either by patterns of mock or representative bureaucracy.

While Gouldner's study has an industrial setting there are similarities to the examples and potential applications with the perceived clash of paradigms in FE between professionals and the introduction of managerial regimes (Randle and Brady, 1997). Also, Halliday (1994) and Elliott (1996 a; 1996 b) among others in Chapter Two, note the introduction of quality regimes based on industrial models, which conflict with educational values in FE. Making a case for a consolidated regime means being aware of the extent that official and formal organizational missions and rules of FE colleges are frequently subverted in particular ways by professional groups, which devise and enact divergent sets of goals and values.

Despite Gouldner suggesting that legitimacy itself is enough to ensure compliance, the legitimacy of rules, by themselves, may not be sufficient to ensure internal compliance owing to a whole web of complex institutional pressures. Such tensions can provide interplay between internal and external factors combining to produce mock bureaucracy. Additionally, it is important to locate factors in the wider social and political context. The consideration of a quality regime in FE needs to incorporate relational aspects, including the role and interest of various external stakeholders, economic and management ideology, together with a heterogeneous occupational culture. Given the normative actions in the FE organisations room exists to consider quality regimes couched in representative or mock bureaucracy.

More precisely, it is possible to examine notions of legitimacy, agenda setting and decision-making, together with the clusters of rules and procedures characterising the workings of quality.

The relationship between control, consent and acceptance also incorporates issues of worker self-regulation and so, self-control (Thompson, 1989). Such an appreciation has potential as a model with which to view the operation of the quality system in FE. It is possible to examine subjective consent together with informal rules and work patterns as a way of management securing co-operation in quality regimes (Burawoy, 1979).

The historical development of what Burawoy (1979) terms 'games', encourages aspects of worker agency, giving rise to forms of active consent. Actors become part of their own subjugation in FE, by the very fact that they 'play the game'. Some actors 'get on' because on one level they are more adept or prepared to 'play the quality game'. Consequently actors play by the rules and desire certain outcomes (Burawoy, 1985, p 38). One such outcome could be career progression. By allowing some latitude, post incorporation FE management is able to pursue its own corporate agenda of resource accumulation. The criteria for evaluation in FE, is circumscribed by economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the sector rather than profit loss in the strictest sense. Management in FE need to use persuasive techniques to encourage practitioners to view positively the merits of economised quality models (market driven) consent being nurtured in hegemonic regimes. Having said this, it is important not to confuse regime shifts in FE with how professionals respond.

Practitioners may be satisfied by utilising certain devices to cope with the saturation of quality (sardonic humour may be an example) while management considers securing cooperation and meeting targets as being essential. Although, this thesis acknowledges Burawoy's 'subjective dimension of labour' (Burawoy, 1985, p 39) is useful what appears to be missing is a more in depth understanding of the motivations of actors (Spencer, 2000).

For Burawoy the actual character of the labour process is a reflection of the type of regime that exists and the sector where it is occurs. In FE the economic forces of the regime were initially accentuated through traditional arrangements (pre-incorporation). Disruption in the wider economy propelled the manifestation of transformative regimes (post incorporation) which emphasise market models. The marketisation of the public sector encouraged the management of quality (as a measure supporting market models) to feature in a swing towards strategies of control.

Certainly, with Burawoy's analysis it is interesting to note that in contemporary Britain restructuring in both the private and public sector has called into question the procedural consensus of the past based on collective bargaining (a feature of pre incorporation FE). The meaning of consensus in post incorporation colleges has shifted whereby constructs are based on the mission and the development of an individualised corporate identity. With the dismantling of the state sector and the invigoration of market forces in public services (such as health and education) there is a perception of a dominance of managerial strategies. Evidence from FE is clear that despite talk of new work relations, the reality is one of mixed outcomes (Hodkinson, 1998). Notions of consent contained within Burawoy's influential work facilitate avenues to explore the contradictory nature of quality systems and audits in FE. Therefore, the relationship between control and consent becomes integral to the building of consolidated regimes.

Some FE commentators have appeared more optimistic about potential outcomes, while suggesting the need to rediscover working relationships, incorporating a "shared language and common sense of purpose" (Loots and Ross, 2004, p 33). In this environment of a cultural change to values and norms with building forms of consent important, commentators appear to suggest that taking the rough edges off events is the toughest undertaking facing FE principals (chief executives).

The task of interpreting contested and consolidated regimes is more straightforward by further understanding the relationship between control, consent and acceptance.

The concept of a regime previously mentioned leads towards looking for categories of conduct, rules and procedures linked to policy formation. The regime becomes an arena for defining acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, because quality is considered as a regulatory regime, with conformance and non-conformance factors built into the construction of regulation. At the same time there is recognition of tools that can accommodate the informal and formal aspects of regimes. Ackroyd and Thompson illustrate the managerial regime, strategies of control within a range of parameters and how forms of misbehaviour are generated. Management is in a position of authority and has the power and discretion to define behaviour as acceptable or unacceptable. What is particularly useful with Ackroyd and Thompson's contribution is that they identify and formulate categories and procedures for identification of misbehaviour. The prognosis is one of distinct forms of misbehaviour being characteristic of distinct managerial regimes.

Given the placement and manner of quality audits, an appreciation of regulation is necessary. In keeping with Ackroyd and Thompson, they identify low trust and high trust regimes associated with high and low regulation (FE is increasingly highly regulated through the mechanisms of quality). The advantage of this is that varying forms of misbehaviour can be seen as incorporating a combination of *recalcitrance/militancy*; *indulgency pattern (irresponsible autonomy); controlled autonomy; responsible autonomy* (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p 88) across different workgroups. There is a clear appreciation of Friedman's managerial strategies of control, yet room is created for resistance because workers are not simply docile, but on the contrary, defend their autonomy. Additionally, with this model it is possible to incorporate professional autonomy as part of a continuum. Quality in post incorporation FE is contextualised and can be interpreted through managerial regimes, while acknowledging the specific importance of quality. The FE quality audit systems viewed through the model of Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) have economic and normative dimensions, whereby structures and practices are instituted to reduce non-compliance and other forms of disruption. Such arrangements are legitimated and incorporate the dialectic of the work effort bargain

between actors in the organisation. Winning hands and minds through ideological means is considered as integral in regime compliance.

Also, Ackroyd and Thompson distinguish low trust regimes, characterised by suspicion and surveillance but also high trust regimes with more pronounced confidence and normative value systems to suit. The use of regime allows illustrations of a blend of practices to adapt to manage a range of behaviours. Nevertheless, trust and regulation tend to pull in different directions, although signify management strategy in combination with particular conditions of the organisation (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p 88).

Central to the suggestions that Ackroyd and Thompson make is that autonomy forms a particular feature and distinct characteristic of managerial regimes. Particular combinations result in more conflict i.e. low trust /high regulation equates with direct control, which in turn interacts with the capacity for self-organisation to produce recalcitrance and militancy. Workers resort to 'making out' (Burawoy, 1979) although the unintended consequences and unseen costs of such a regime are substantial. Management in the aforementioned scenario tends to resort to bureaucratic control measures to insure adherence to a rule bound culture.

Furthermore, Ackroyd and Thompson identify low trust, low regulation regimes along with high trust, low regulation which equates with irresponsible and responsible autonomy respectively. The application of Ackroyd and Thompson's model in FE organisations could be in the context of high regulation, high trust. Nevertheless, employees could construe high regulation for a lack of trust, with subsequent erosion into more low trust regimes. The success of corporate quality policies in FE organisations could hang on regimes, which rely less on regulation (through control systems) and more on consent with an emphasis on Self-evaluation. Certainly, where professional workers operate within a framework of normative rules and specifications of values and behaviours (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p 89) 'controlled autonomy' appears more appropriate for such regimes. It appears that management may consider the costs and benefits of certain strategies because the

introduction of new schemes to evaluate quality in FE could also have various unintended costs. While, enhanced degrees of autonomy and self-regulation may be a perception of management with Self-evaluation and other quality measures since incorporation there is the sense of an "overburdened profession" (Avis, 2001, p 61). In saying this, the notions of consolidated quality regimes intersect with contested quality regimes.

What the aforementioned model anticipates is worker behaviour, which when harnessed to understand transformative regime characteristics becomes a powerful tool to explore regime acceptance in FE. Ackroyd and Thompson's model makes room for the agency that compliments Clarke and Newman's (1997) exposition of a framework for organisational regimes. By exposing regulatory control concepts, Ackroyd and Thompson are able to construct how regulatory regimes produce misbehaviour. Yet, impulses by management to control, coincides with managers interacting with the self-organisation of professionals in FE.

3.7 Chapter summary: reflections on regime interpretations

The purpose of this chapter is focused on establishing an analytical framework for the study of quality management in Scottish FE institutions. An examination and interpretation is proposed whereby certain characteristics and features are mapped out that differentiate regimes (See Table One, Interpretation of Regimes). In addition, this chapter develops a multi–levelled conceptual framework with a selection of theoretical devices, which facilitates the scoping of questions for the fieldwork.

While the concept of a 'regime' becomes a legitimate framework to understand state evolution and interpret traditional, disruption, transformative and consolidated regime formations various other actors are taken into account. Establishing a logic governing the location of state professionals and also determining types of control that have a significant impact on agents illustrated 'control regimes' as mechanisms of power embedded in educational settlements. Examining the management of quality control strategies facilitated a critical appreciation of labour process

applications, providing an important framework for the study of work organisation and its links to wider society. This research accepts a structured antagonism in the FE workplace, and recognizes that state sponsored relations require forms of co-operation and consent, with compliance, across all periods of regime development.

Having exposed quality through the interpretation of traditional and disruption regimes this chapter proceeded to employ the derived categories used by Clarke and Newman (1997) to explain dimensions of power, in organizational regimes to explain transformation and translate evolving post 1993 quality functions in FE. While control appears as a rationale for change in the transformation of FE, managerialism has moved forward and there are suggestions of consolidation within an overarching framework of New Labour modernisation. This thesis also advocates that an over-controlled environment misses the configuration of the micro politics of resistance. Other specific analytical tools reconciled actors and structural determinants.

Table One

Overview of regime formations

Traditional regimes (1945-70) **General features:** - Professionals guardians of the curriculum and classroom - Quality as an individualised concept determined in the context of professionalism. - Consensus arrangements/government commitment towards rising welfare expenditure ('golden age of welfare'). - Ideology (social democratic philosophy) - Keynesian economics. - Reduction of inequality and encouragement of social citizenship - 'Impartial' specialist knowledge, professional expertise and bureaucratic administrative procedures	**Disruption/Reconciliation regimes (1970's)** **General features:** - Macro-level government disquiet (1970's) in social welfare structures = basis for *disruption* or *reconciliation regimes* - Welfare costs spiralled and Keynesian social democratic doctrines questioned. - Rise of quality management to incorporate input /output dimensions (delivery costs /service to customer). - State professionals implicated in fiscal crisis /structures of control underpinned normative systems = more docile and passive professionals - Quality (mid-1970's) becomes a legitimating function to control the labour process
Transformative Regimes (1980-1990's) **General features:** - Neo-liberal interpretation of the fiscal crisis = overloaded government. Break post war consensus on welfare by shrinking the state. - New Right ideological strategies (monetarist economic philosophy) for restructuring welfare impacted on the internal management of services (primacy of market principles, efficiency and effectiveness). Reduce size/expenditure of	**Consolidated regimes (Later 1990's present)** **General features:** - New Labour administration (from 1997)/Scottish devolution (from 1999) contextualised by a 'third way' mixed economy. - Modernisation of public services has continued (minimum reversal and more of a continuation of previous Conservative policy) underpinned by neo-liberal philosophy

the state, plus taxation cuts. - Education and training = panacea for economic renewal and prosperity. -New Public Management = new forms of governance with control mechanisms (quality and audit) fiscal discipline/tightening of managerial control (accountability and compliance to targets) over labour process. - Impacts of restructuring did not affect further education until the early 1990's but growth of quality has been rapid since incorporation (characterises transformative regimes).	- Obsession with measurement with a focus on quality and targets (accentuated and intensified). - Regulation and evaluation co-exist with managerial strategies of control and consent. (Consolidation process). -Regime remains potentially contested as managerial formalisation of quality (intensification processes) continues to clash with the values, meanings and practices of professional practitioners

A multi-level conceptual framework will enhance a critical appreciation of regimes in several ways. Firstly, a multi-level conceptual framework will acknowledge the location of FE employees and the criterion of rationality (expressed by the legitimation theorists), that determines state sector work as being different from private sector arrangements. Secondly, by employing labour process theory this accepts a structured antagonism and the control imperative in the employment relationship, plus provides an important framework for the study of work organisation and its link to wider society. Thirdly, a multi-level conceptual framework illustrates Neo –Marxist hegemonic shifts due to transformative settlements as one way of interpreting organisational change within the wider economy. Fourthly, by applying derived regime categories this provides a framework for understanding organisational transformation in FE. Finally, by illustrating other theoretical devices this exposes the politics of regulation and informal aspects in organisations allowing for expansion on consent models. There is an acknowledgment of self-regulation in the acceptance of quality regimes which also exposes misbehavior and resistance. Hence, links between structure and agency are possible by examining how agents initiate, establish, diffuse, reproduce, yet also resist the quality regime.

The above framework makes specific contributions to this thesis. Firstly, the conceptual framework illustrates the overarching political, economic, social and organisational philosophies determining the flavour of regimes (traditional, disruption, transformative and consolidated). Secondly the conceptual framework acknowledges the importance of bureaucracy in state relations. Thirdly, the conceptual framework incorporates strategies of control in to the analysis of events. Fourthly, the conceptual framework locates state workers in regime development. Fifthly, the conceptual framework incorporates modes of operation for FE organizations. Finally, the conceptual framework reconciles an insufficient conceptualization of events in regimes and employs other devices to interpret agential orientations and responses.

The quality regime also offers the potential for the development of various themes in the fieldwork. Firstly, the quality regime allows for reflection on the configuration of post-incorporation FE. Secondly, the quality regime enables exploration of the tensions in FE organisation over the management of quality through an examination of conduct, guidelines, procedures, protocols, rules and systems. Thirdly, the quality regime facilitates an insight into, and links forms of control and consent, exposing such concepts as part of the management, employee relationship. Finally the configuration of the quality regime challenges official stories about the uses of and development of quality in the FE sector.

In dealing with matters at the level of the regime it provides the analytical tools to understand what has underpinned the transformation in the specific field of FE. It also facilitates looking for the obvious indicators of quality regime construction and how this has been installed.

The multi–level conceptual framework facilitates themes and research questions enabling the reconciliation between structure and action in quality regimes. So, a more in-depth critical understanding and significance can be attached to the importance of quality events as a change mechanism in FE organisations.

The next chapter will utilise the conceptual framework and refine specific research questions to examine quality management in FE before discussing the rationale for the operationalisation of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

To date, this thesis has considered a multi-level conceptual framework for examining the movement from traditional structures and organisation in FE through transformation, to suggestions of consolidated regimes. Organisational changes and the reconfiguration of quality as the leitmotif of managerialism, has provided a focus for an appreciation of regimes. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research philosophy and methodology that underpins the fieldwork in this thesis. The chapter is divided into three main sections concentrating on the philosophical debate, approaches to fieldwork and operationalisation. The discussion begins with a brief reflection on research approaches in FE followed by a consideration of the dichotomy in social research between positivism and social constructivism. It is argued that to deal with some of the epistemological issues thrown up by this debate a critical realist philosophy more adequately accommodates the research design of this project.

Significantly, the framing of the lens with which to view the world of those working in colleges has been reflected in the empirical FE literature by attempts to establish what the perceptions and experiences of actors are in making sense of the movement and shift in working practices. This chapter will advocate that while qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive, a justification for using a critical realist philosophy to inform research overcomes the strict dichotomy associated with positivism and social constructivism. Such a way forward takes into consideration the wider social, political and economic context. The interplay between structures and actors is evident as part of a philosophy for understanding quality mechanisms. As with the adoption of a multi-levelled conceptual framework, which allows for an examination of events on several levels (e.g. macro/micro) critical realist philosophy embodies the feel of a methodological emancipator. A realist philosophy needs to be made explicit if researchers are to begin to build a fuller appreciation of the complex emergent factors in quality regimes at the empirical site while avoiding the quagmire of positivism versus social constructivism.

Having established a philosophy for research design, Section Two concentrates on approaches to the fieldwork with the development of research questions (for this Scottish based study) that emerge from the review of FE literatures and the conceptual framework, in Chapter Three. A consideration of the data collection strategy examines the rationale for case study, and choice of methods. Section Three focuses on the operationalising of the research with a discussion on access issues and the specific methods used in the fieldwork. Also, there is an outline of case study selection and the two phases of research that embody a critical realist philosophy. Finally there is some consideration of how the data is analysed and of the limitations evident in the design of the research.

4.2 Philosophical debate

4.2.1 **Divisions in the field of social research**

Given the established themes from the emerging debates in FE literature (Chapter Two) further analysis, illustrates that the general methodological inspiration has been through the principles of qualitative case studies due to the method being 'ideally suited' (Elliott, 1996 a, p 118) to the types of questions being asked in understanding college life. Adopting the classic qualitative approach familiar with most studies is justified by those researchers interested in the rich detail of college life, whereby there commences an exploration of meanings values and practices. While a common currency, this doesn't preclude focusing on surveys using numerical data sets (Mather and Seifert, 2003) or combining methods (Randle and Brady, 1997).

Some key issues are still in need of resolution, among them that research could become hamstrung by prior commitments to particular methods (Ackroyd, 2004). The more pressing issue is a partisan research rationale that continues to leave the door open for a concerted critique by any researchers who advocate truth claims, by using positivist, scientific, with more quantitative techniques. Social researchers, who favour the scientific applications, critique qualitative approaches believing there to be an inherent difficulty because of its small-scale, unrepresentative material, which is hard to classify.

While more qualitative methods get closer, a central problem is always going to be explicating the representational claims of the study. There will always be a balance to be struck in countering criticisms from positivists about issues of reliability and representativeness. The claims about the prowess of techniques in the qualitative tradition will result in a challenge by a counter epistemology (assumptions about the best forms of inquiring into the social world) made from the quantitative tradition. This debate has particular ontological (assumptions about the nature of reality) commitments and exemplifies the need to examine what theoretical consideration is necessary or obstructs choices made (Fleetwood, 2004). The theoretical debate concerns two divergent epistemic assumptions: positivism –associated with quantitative approaches and relativism/social constructivism associated with qualitative methods. This dichotomy has traditionally been a fundamental element on discussions about the purpose and methods of social science research with the ontology of the natural and social worlds being so distinct that they preclude any version of the 'unity of method' claim (Archer, 1998, p 189).

The crux of the debate becomes the choice the researcher makes, which has the potential to establish a conflict between approaches about the nature of, plus how social reality is perceived. Either empirical techniques (positivism) allow objective discovery of the social world or is not knowable objectively (social construction) but what is known is through the product of discourses

The core epistemological propositions of positivism are associated with promoting the search for order and regularity (Sayer, 1992) with key principles, being to establish objective, empirical data, through patterned events (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). Advocates of the synthesis of natural and social worlds envisage scientists being able to establish 'truth' claims (Bryman, 1989) in the context of a world, which is accessible and partial to cognitive conjecture. For some, there is a preoccupation with establishing 'laws', which operate independently of the human actor, but which constrain actions. There is a 'mimetic process', wedded in the empiricist approach of the observable and the causal, with explanations leading to prediction (Archer, 1998, p 190).

The quantifiable measurement of human behaviour relies on methodological approaches, which themselves are able to replicate events, hence the use of quantitative approaches e.g. survey questionnaires. The emphasis with this approach is to employ data collection techniques, which purport to standardise events and search for order and regularity (Bryman, 1989; Sayer, 1992).

Positivism is characterised by determinism, having an obsession in searching for ways of generalising in the social world and subsequently constructing laws, as a form of the 'truth'. Ideas of 'cause' and 'effect' (i.e. if X transpires so will Y) feature as central factors. Therefore what makes something happen, what generates or determines an event is examined, with validity being established by discounting or cancelling out other alternatives to that under study (Bryman, 1989). The idea that the researcher can extrapolate beyond the confines of the research location, due to the careful selection of a sample, which represents the wider population is an attractive proposition to those actors who advocate the application of precise scientific methods associated with positivism.

Positivism assumes that the researcher can in some way be detached from the situation they are researching and almost become the rhetorical 'fly on the wall'. Assumptions are borne by a need for value freedom, with an elimination of subjective values that in some way may affect the objectivity of the research (Bryman, 1989). This tends to neglect the fact that in the social world many things are going on at once, whereby separating variables becomes less clear-cut.

The positivist approach disregards the idea of 'subjectivity' or feelings and the ontological insistence on verification, neglects what Williams and May (1996) believe to be the value of the 'intangible'. An important critique of positivism is the need to understand the purpose and intentions of human agency, because of its disregard for the legitimate influence of subjective elements in the social world. It is not unreasonable to be sensitive to a more empathetic approach, if human activity is to be more fully understood (Ackroyd, 2004).

The genesis for a rejection of positivism has its roots in hermeneutics (interpretation). A proviso is any position rooted in an ontology that believes the world is socially constructed or determined by the concepts people hold. The subject matter of the social is not considered as being objectively knowable (Ackroyd, 2004). Subsequently, anti-positivism can be considered in terms of a continuum, with several guises and interchangeable contexts, making for at times a terminological miasma. Social constructivism, phenomenology, interpretivism, relativism *inter alia*, find associations with postmodernist and post-structural interpretations. In its most profound form, a counter to positivism is manifested by ideas of 'extreme social constructivism' (Thompson, 2004, p 55). The underpinning assumption of the social constructivist is that science is not wholly rational and has no privileged access to truths about the social world. The predictive mannerisms of positivism are considered as flawed because the nature of generalisation is more difficult to ascribe in the social rather than natural sciences. What this more relativist position does, is confront the marriage between the social and natural sciences. The emphasis for knowledge production becomes subject to notions of social construction (Ackroyd, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

The social constructivist position discounts privileged truth and opens up the possibility of a number of interpretations of the social world, hence there is not one position and route to (as assumed by positivism) the 'truth'. Nor, in this sense is there just one truth, but many realities and contingencies, which may or may not be unearthed (Thompson, 2004; Ackroyd, 2004). In rejecting positivism's science with it comes a series of issues, which have more profound implications for methodological choices.

The qualitative methods associated with social constructivism are symptoms of a more inductive approach to fieldwork and data collection. Techniques are characterised by forms of ethnography e.g. in-depth interviews and participant observation. The main thrust of ethnography is semiotic whereby the researcher wants the participant's views, resulting in a truer understanding of intentions and orientations. To understand the meanings of quality regimes for workers in FE

organizations requires the researcher ‘getting close’ to respondents for an extended period of time to expose the rich features of accounts and materials available at the empirical site. Becoming more aware of the subject matter under study facilitates the possibility of more credibility when suggesting complexity in the responses of actors to everyday events.

Critiques develop, because the quantitative techniques can only really suggest surface tensions and act as a barometer of general feelings (suggesting patterns of events) rather than attempt to interpret the depth and meanings of social interaction. The obsession with reliability and objectivity for those researchers who subscribe to ‘scientism’ can result in an underlying tendency to perhaps forget that researchers working in organisations under study for any length of time (by definition of their role) lose any sense of scientific detachment (Das, 1983). The social constructivist approach to researching the social world rejects the ‘fly on the wall’ scenario (researcher as neutral in the observations they make). In contrast to positivism, social constructivist researchers are proactive in acknowledging the impact they can and do have on research findings.

Some approaches can be categorised as extreme, whereby theory itself tends to disintegrate. Grounded approaches (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) advocate research favouring qualitative methods but without preconceived theory frameworks. The generation of theory emanates from the fieldwork, almost like reserving judgement until the researcher has seen the goods i.e. data. Despite, the inductive grounding of research (Miles and Huberman, 1994) there are doubts about the efficacy of such an approach undertaken in a ‘theory free’ manner i.e. whether it is truly possible (Bryman, 1988). Social scientists cannot begin research without ideas and concepts of their own (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). For without concepts perception becomes difficult and without adequate conceptualisation, observation is impossible (Ackroyd, 2004). This is often a critique of some research in education, which appears to seek improvement in practice (see Elliott, 1996 a; Laird, 2002). While not entirely theory-free there is an apparent failure to adequately acknowledge the

influence of, and locate findings in the wider political structures. The reconciliation of structures and agents is integral to this thesis.

Before becoming too comfortable with the idea that qualitative tools tied to relativist and social constructionist ideals are a panacea for social science researchers, it is worth noting that such emotional attachments are imbued with methodological prejudice. Further critiques by Thompson (2004) of the extreme deconstructivist positions suggests that some scientific laws i.e. those of probability, warrant the deconstructivist being more candid about the social world. In reality, discounting quantitative aspects, because of a prejudice towards the genesis of such techniques cannot be seen as sufficient justification. The danger is with this research on quality regimes that the discourse of actors in the quality regime becomes too prominent. This is not to discount the importance of actors, but to merely emphasise that purely narrative accounts on the quality regime in FE may ignore structures. By ignoring the real influence of structures what goes missing, is the important externalities (meta and macro level factors) which are instrumental in sustaining the financial regimes of post-incorporation FE colleges. Symptomatic of this emphasis is the debate over the previous chapters incorporating emerging themes and the conceptual tools to understand quality regimes, which have significant structural qualities, but in terms of FE need a sound methodological base. The emphasis is on making explicit the ontological status ascribed to social structures. To do so, requires putting aside the prejudicial baggage inherent in the positivist versus relativist debates, because for the toolbox to be effective for the researcher to handle jobs it needs to have more than one option when it comes to deciding on research techniques.

4.2.2 **Critical realism: a strategy for research**

The aforementioned epistemological debate has established the drawbacks of both positivist and social constructivist epistemologies, which in their own ways prevent a unity of method. This research can introduce a more holistic approach that doesn't favour a preference for oppositional practices, holding that neither is superior (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004). Establishing a prominence towards ontology rather

than allow epistemological debates to dominate proceedings is advocated for FE research.

It is the contention of Sayer (1992); Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000) and a growing number of others, that the use of critical realism originally influenced by Roy Bhaskar (1975; 1989; 1998) is a more highly sophisticated variant of realism. Researchers have drawn directly or indirectly on Bhaskar's work (Sayer, 2004) because critical realism overcomes some of the fundamental dichotomy between positivism and interpretivism.

On the one hand, in the debate about the efficacy of epistemologies, Porter (2000) describes the need to make explicit, ontological status ascribed to social structures, evident in critiques of ethnography. Whereas, critical realism purports to accommodate and reconcile the structure/ action problematic that has steadfastly characterised critiques of ethnography. Also, this realist approach avoids the pitfalls of 'scientism' associated with positivism despite not prescribing radical rejections of science (Sayer, 2000, p 3).

The critical realist ontology has a sophistication that is found wanting in the positivism/social constructivist debate (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). As a social science philosophy, critical realism rejects the antithetical position of positivism, the methodological naturalism that espouses searching for objective reality, based on theory-neutral observation and the identification of empirical regularities, in a way identical to those of the natural sciences. This philosophy (critical realism) also rejects the social constructivist notions that reality is a result of subjective interpretation and offers alternative epistemological direction by reinterpreting human understanding of the social world. Yet there is an interpretive dimension to critical realism (Sayer, 2004) which establishes that social events have meaning, which is deeper than notions of patterns, in line with counting events or quantification. The emphasis for the critical realist is on people, institutions and structures being produced by people or 'socially constructed' (Ackroyd, 2004, p 146).

Despite acknowledging the social construction of phenomena critical realists also reject the assumption by the social constructivists that denies any form of certainty or event regularity. Critical realism advocates that social phenomena exist independently of individuals and groups. With this in mind structures and mechanisms despite being observable (or not) to people have independent effects on behaviour, not explained by discourse. Actions can be constrained because of the extra dimension of the political/economic system (Ackroyd, 2004). So, discourse becomes one of many sources of power (Thompson and McHugh, 2002; Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004) which challenges those who believe that discourse is omnipotent (Foucault, 2000 [1972]) or that reality is purely the product of discourses (post-structuralists). For Thompson: "good empirical work helps us to distinguish between rhetorics of the powerful and the realities of power" (Thompson, 2004, p 59).

Critical realism is captured through the idea of 'double hermeneutic' (Sayer, 2004, p 12) whereby the causal explanation or interpretive understanding exist 'asymmetrically'. An example for consideration in further education could be that communication of quality discourse in itself produces change to ways of thinking, but at the same time being a non physical aspect of causation. In effect, reasons are 'emergent elements' in a more extensive network of discourse. Others (Giddens, 1979) have used the idea of a 'double hermeneutic' in the formulation of 'structuration'. Despite appearing as a neat formulation, Gidden's theory flatters to deceive as it lacks the epistemological substance that Sayer (2004) is able to employ in the justification of a methodological position.

Society does not exist independently of human agency instead it is reproduced and transformed in daily life. The critical realist approach is able to consider the wider social, political and economic context for understanding quality regimes. The emphasis is not on cause and effect but more on causal powers or liabilities of objects relations or more generally ways of acting, or mechanisms. Being interested in different levels (meta, macro, meso and micro) and events means the critical realist will approach phenomena in a multifaceted way. Understanding other

phenomena, actors and their reasons, rules particular to an institution and the wider economic system (Sayer, 1992) are integral to critical realism. To quote Porter:

> The basic theoretical assumption of critical realism is that human action is enabled and constrained by social structures, but this action, in turn produces reproduces or transforms those structures (Porter, 2000, p 143).

Unlike the positivists, who concentrate on causation, with an emphasis on regularity and prediction of events to establish laws, in the social sciences, critical realism depends for its explanation on causal mechanism and the type of conditions, which render them active or inactive (Sayer, 2000). The critical realist places less emphasis on the quantitative nature of social objects and more on the qualitative nature of social objects and the relations on which causal mechanisms depend.

The critical realist is more concerned that structures with causal powers can produce different outcomes, whereby there is a contingency factor inherent in an understanding of mechanisms or 'tendencies' (Sayer, 1992, p 106). The fundamental for this research is that emergent forms of truth exist rather than absolutes, which embed certain contingencies in the social world. Suggestions that the quality regime in FE is beyond reproach, one truth regime now exists and resistance has all but disappeared flies in the face of a critical realist appreciation of organisational life. For the critical realist causal mechanisms get beyond what produces change to the point of being able to consider what factors enabled the mechanism to behave in this manner. Contingency, and an avoidance of cookbook prescriptions underpin such thinking and causal powers need not appear as regularities. Rigour for the critical realist comes in identifying 'substantial connections rather than formal associations or regularities' (Sayer, 2000, p 27). In summary, the critical realist gets beyond the idea that something produces change, to focus on what is it about, an object that enables it to do so (Sayer, 1992).

4.2.3 **Critical realism and research design**

An appreciation of critical realism, establishes that a number of differing yet complimentary research methodologies exist, but by implication particular methodological choices will depend on the nature and object of the study. This is where Sayer (1992) provides a comprehensive and useful analysis of distinguishing between *intensive* and *extensive* design. Each approach is primarily concerned with the nature of the questions being asked in the research programme. Also, whether they can be corroborated (intensive) or replicated (extensive). For an adoption of extensive approaches, there is more emphasis on representation of common patterns, with a focus on regularity, producing generalisations; but, lacking in explanation. This approach favours the use of more quantitative methods, with formal questionnaires and interviews. It is larger in scale and affords statistical analysis. Nevertheless, there are question marks over the comparative and relative efficacy of the approach.

The intensive method tends to ask 'what' and 'why' type questions, being focused on ethnographic style methodologies such as participant observation or interactive interviews. The likelihood of patterns emerging from this detail is limited as is the notion of being able to generalize due to the unrepresentative nature of the research. Given the detail of the research, intensive designs are usually on a small-scale.

Critical realists favour neither, intensive or extensive approaches, or for that matter discounts methods being used in a complimentary manner. For this reason, examples of intensive case studies using survey methods and extensive approaches accommodating qualitative techniques are an acceptable currency (Sayer, 1992). This thesis adopts an intensive research design, although utilises other extensive aspects by comparing documentary evidence, across institutions and the FE sector. The rationale is straightforward in that the central ideas of the thesis, does not advance notions of regularity and frequency, which are at home in extensive research formats. Comparative information across institutions is used in an extensive sense, to support some of the 'how' and 'why' type questions, which are features of the research. This research is focused on the perceptions of actors in understanding the

features, operations, impacts and acceptance of quality regimes. The experiences, rather than the attitudes of actors in FE organisations become more important for this thesis in understanding regime development. Employing fieldwork techniques which seek to understand events through the experiences of actors rather than those which advocate the measurement of attitudes tends towards more qualitative approaches.

Considering research data (generated from the experiences of managers and lecturers) from different positions and levels enables a framework for analysis of FE professionals set against the variety of changes affecting them i.e. loss of professional autonomy, new managerialism. For Sayer (1992) different levels examine; issues from actors and their reasons, rules of the particular organisation along with the wider economic system. In Chapter Two Halliday (1994) outlined the leverage different actors bring to the formation and operation of quality policies. To adapt an example from Sayer (1992) managers of FE colleges may find workforces more compliant and could attribute this to a tougher managerialist philosophy without consideration of the conditions that enabled this i.e. redundancy (Sayer, 1992). The critical realist approach lends itself to the development of causal models that has produced that relationship between audit and notions of quality.

The prognosis embodies the suggestion by Reed (2000) that critical realism establishes the most promising social sciences methodological philosophy for conducting a critical in depth analysis of the interplay between social structure and human action as it shapes the reproduction and transformation of social forms. Yet, this is considered with the proviso that other attempts to reconcile structure and action have lacked lucidity in FE research. The lacunae in FE research are filled with the critical realist application, which grounds the logic for ontology on a more assured, and reliable footing.

4.2.4 **Applying critical realist philosophy to a field of research**

The review of literature in Chapter Two considers the transformation of quality in FE, with the available empirical studies illustrating perceptions, which signifies an intensification of work with a deterioration of terms and conditions. Such events

provide the basis of both an empirical and theoretical rationale. Firstly, the empirical rationale is primarily contingent on adding to the literature, which to date has not been forthcoming in the context of Scotland. Little specific critical attention has been paid to the importance of quality (an exception being Laird, 2002). Published Scottish research on the transformation in FE is invisible, allowing official versions of quality to become dominant truths. Secondly, the concentration on English research does provide a useful inventory of debates, as a starting point, to establish a fix for theoretical and analytical avenues and mechanisms, which explain quality matters.

Initially, a theoretical rationale can be discovered through the explanatory power of regimes, which has the potential to contribute to the structure and provide the substance, as a set of institutional practices, facilitating connections within the post-devolution Scottish system. While Avis (1999) considers the managerialist state to be a feature of any societies shaped by the New Right, making connections with Scotland nurtures opportunities to examine the capacity and emergent characteristics of quality as a mechanism for institutional change.

The literature suggests that the meta neo-liberal ideological doctrines have influenced macro policy processes which manifest as attempts to cope with the impacts of globalisation, while enhancing a skills base and creating a more competitive economy are important in shaping the further education systems across the UK. Also, New Public Management is an attempt to solve the perceived bureau-professional issues. Given that structures are not always large and evidently external, meaning a focus is still maintained by looking at quality regimes because such audit regimes are a primary mechanism of how the state is able to embed and implement aspects of neo-liberal priorities through managerialism. By examining the effects of the more powerful explanatory causal mechanisms also means exposing the nature of agency in the construction of audit regimes and changing professional identities. The scope of agency assists in establishing how actors conceptualise particular phenomena and whether there is an acceptance of the ideological persona of quality audit mechanisms (as part of a ‘common sense understanding’) within the complex

structure of working practices. Such questions are significant in relation to a managerialist hegemonic discourse of quality audit regimes, being important to an explanation of how influential a 'new common sense' is across institutions as part of a managerial philosophy in Scottish FE. The assumption is that new management techniques will not have the same identical effect across all levels of FE institutions. Yet there is recognition in a critical realist philosophy that discourses can be 'performative', implying change. Care needs to be taken when making judgements on 'event regularities' (Sayer, 2004, p 17) since the intended effects may not be forthcoming. Added to our appreciation, Sayer notes the need to understand difference through complexity:

> It is surely important for studies of management and organisation to be able to distinguish a number of positions ranging from, at one extreme, mere parroting of elements of managerial discourses without any change in behaviour or ways of thinking, through to complete 'capture' by them at the other extreme' (Sayer, 2004, p 18).

Research questions need to illicit whether the variety of structures with causal powers or causal tendencies, produce distinct effects within the Scottish system. To be more precise, do the institutional and technical practices, embedded within a managerialist philosophy result in particular or different effects, when comparing the current body of English research with the Scottish FE system. This approach, also attempts to reconcile yet clarify, assumptions that outcomes are similar in systems influenced by particular political philosophy.

Despite the appearance of consolidation and continuity in the public sector, the realist philosophy advocates change being less straightforward than simple discourse equalling transformation. Causes can be both internal and external, with all objects having causal powers, whereby, multiple dispersed sources may not be so unequal at times, leading to more complex outcomes and emergent forms (Sayer, 2004). The value of critical realist investigation is that it exemplifies some of these processes and has the potential to distinguish continuities, changes and emergent forms. The

intensification of conditions and manifestation of quality regimes across FE institutions could depend on the interplay of contingencies such as features of management in institutions, lecturer resistance, together with specific input of resources to quality and so on.

4.3 Approach to fieldwork

4.3.1 **Main data collection methods**

The operationalisation of the fieldwork required careful consideration from design to implementation of the research program. The fieldwork consisted of broadly two phases; firstly, managers or corporate agents, (those involved setting goals and monitoring objectives), secondly, practitioner professionals or primary agents (those who are influenced by extra-organisational normative codes and ethics), preceded by the process of generating research questions. This process of refinement emanated from theoretical insights gained from the literature.

The Literature Review: establishing the logic for a conceptual framework

The logic of discovery started with an interest in the type of impacts the post 1993 incorporation of FE colleges were having on the sector. Couched within the stories about the managerial drivers or mechanisms of organisational change, was 'quality'. It is clear from the meagre FE literature that in the sins of omission is a consolidated framework to understand quality regimes. Following on from this, a conceptual framework begins to illustrate how events are affecting FE professionals. Such conceptual tools need to be robust enough to explain the existence of control, consent, compliance and resistance strategies in FE institutions.

By using the concept of changing regimes in Chapter Three (traditional, disruption – reconciliation, transformation and consolidated/contested) facilitates the formation of an analytical framework. The location of FE actors (as state workers) means they are subjected to the laws of bureaucracy, which warrants an appreciation of bureaucratic control. The legitimation theorists acknowledge state workers are subjected to a different criterion of rationality from the private sector, but also illustrate why quality

and audit mechanisms replace strict profit/loss indicators in the public sector. Also, labour process applications are able to adapt well to the contested terrain of post 1993 FE, due to an appreciation of overlapping and coexisting tendencies like resistance, compliance and consent. The 'structured antagonism' and 'control imperative' (Thompson and Smith, 2000) as features of a core theory are suited to understanding quality regimes in a marketised FE sector, given a position acknowledging a different criterion of rationality in the separation between public and private workers.

The critical theoretical underpinnings provide the basis of a specific analysis of quality regimes, with the scope for adaptation to explain the features and workings of a regime. By virtue of the operation of quality regimes, this illustrates the hierarchical structure of bureaucracies requiring an examination of the system of rules and values, how information is gathered and processed. Establishing depth about the operation of regimes will also attempt to illustrate how the flexibility of bureaucracies is limited by their structural characteristics as a consequence of more novel input by agents

A series of main questions and sub-questions incorporates the core themes identified in Chapter One, plus issues arising from the literature (Chapter Two; Chapter Three) which assists the operationalisation of the investigation. Questions will address the characteristics and demands of quality, the extent of development of regimes together with the involvement of actors. The research questions utilised across the research have an emphasis to accommodate various actors and group interests.

4.3.2 **Research Questions**

1. What are the characteristics of and influences on quality regimes?

2. How do managers and employees in FE perceive and interpret influences on quality?

    To what extent is there a shared meaning and understanding of quality in Scottish FE?

To what extent has the language of quality changed?

3. How are quality audits impacting on working practices and professional autonomy?

What has been the impact of a particular quality process i.e. Self-evaluation in Scottish Further education?

Do quality audits lead to a perception of an improved quality of service?

4. To what extent do FE managers and employees accept audit cultures?

How do academic staff contribute to the maintenance of the institutional quality environment?

How and why are quality audit cultures accepted and how do control, consent, resistance and recalcitrance manifest themselves?

4.3.3 **Data collection strategy: the case study approach**

Validation for methodology requires a justification with a case study rationale being in keeping with the intensive design of this thesis. An implicit recognition also exists that the case study approach has some credence with the intensive nature of research design, associated with the critical realist position (Yin, 1994). If complexity is a major consideration then many of the studies incorporated and mentioned previously in the review of literatures will bear witness to the type of depth, which is possible using qualitative devices. The intensive research design seems to favour the 'how' and 'why' type questions, tapping into the experiences and perceptions of actors. Depth of meaning is fundamental in this research and to an understanding of causality.

Richer case studies using more diverse tools from a 'pot pourri of interpretive techniques' (Das, 1983) can be justified as a further appreciation and consolidation of the existing tradition in FE research, although there is a problem when such techniques are couched in prejudicial terms. Employing a critical realist philosophy overcomes the prejudice towards certain techniques as it advocates the triangulation of multiple sources as a way forward for the employment of research tools.

In keeping with the critical realist approach, interviews with actors at various levels in the hierarchy of organisations are combined with documentary evidence of the organisation and the wider FE sector. Employing the case study method has its advantages, when factored into the research design in such detail (Yin, 1994), with the underpinning rationale of critical realism establishing the basis for certain assumptions and a justification for selecting data techniques.

4.3.4 **Limitations to the case study**

While the case study has advantages for this research, there are some well-documented limitations to the adoption of this strategy. Suggestions propose that the case study is suited to certain or several environments, but is limited by this form of exclusivity (Yin, 1994). Despite such accusations against the case study it is argued that this research is keen to provide an understanding of organisational contexts that are important to understanding the FE sector but that have been overlooked i.e. quality audits. Providing an understanding of quality regimes in the local context will enable the embedding of authenticity through complexity to an under researched area.

Issues of generalization mean that when using a case study approach one cannot assume that the research evidence will be able to talk about audit structures in a late capitalist society per se. It is more realistic to suggest that matters are complex and evolving; further study can only provide substance for more reliable assessment given the inherent problems of being able to predict specific phenomena using any particular research processes. Operationalising more than one case study can lead to replication logic and confirm just how robust results are (Yin, 1994). The advantage of several cases is in keeping with the critical realist logic to enhance understanding through the depth of explanation, being particularly relevant for illuminating the characteristics of generative mechanisms (Ackroyd, 2004). Examining features across institutions adds the facet of comparison, meaning that divergence can be explained in relation to internal and external factors (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Being able to suggest ‘why’ and ‘why not’, certain structural conditions impact with

the consolidated interplay that takes place, again justifies the critical realist position, overcoming some of the criticism about the efficacy of case study research.

4.3.5 **Choice of data collection methods**

The intensive design of the research (Sayer, 1992) is reflected in the type of tools of research being generally qualitative in their nature, while being careful not to privilege particular data. The advantage of such an approach to research (as noted previously) is in capturing the complexity and rich detail of events. The critical realist researcher is also able to consider notions of causality within, across and outside organisations; in short to illustrate, the operation of mechanisms is important (Ackroyd, 2004). This methodological position is more steadfast because the researcher makes the conscious compromise between the extreme positions. Hence there is recognition of interplay between social conditions and human constructions (Easterby-Smith, 2002).

Choosing research techniques required reflection and consideration of a broad spectrum of data collection issues as a consequence of access to organisations. Different methods are applied including, semi-structured interviews with some documentary sources, while avoiding particular personal bias that stems from single methodologies (Denezin, 1989) to maintain the integrity of the fieldwork.
The research is brokered by levels of access across organisations. Being a Board of Management member in one institution, while having part-time lecturing work at another organisation provided opportunities for the research. In a sense, the role of, 'researcher as employee' (Easterby-Smith, 2002, p 110) is adopted as a role, despite interrupted involvement.

Despite developing an association with two colleges, several factors determined a sense of detachment. Not being able to view events on a day-to-day basis, across the wider institutions, infrequent contact and involvement in quality 'type' matters across all institutions are among the issues influencing involvement. Other factors included; some of the reported problems associated with cost and time, combined with issues of researcher bias and recording data. The opportunity (at times) to report

from the ‘inside’ (Yin, 1994) is invaluable and assists in providing certain pictures when clarifying aspects of the research as it progresses.

Ethical factors are evident in the role of ‘researcher as employee’ in one context, (i.e. at meetings of the Board of Management or as a part-time member of academic staff). Various gains and losses are considered by some academics as being central to decisions made about research strategies in the organisational setting with associated costs and benefits. Hammersley and Atkinson write:

> Ethical and strategic considerations must be traded off against one another in whatever manner is judged appropriate given the purpose of the research and the circumstances in which it is carried out (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993, p 72).

Being an active participant on one level, as a part-time lecturer and Board of Management member on another did facilitate significant observations being made during the course of the fieldwork, as did the numerous site visits made across all three institutions.

A pragmatic contingency for any ethical considerations is openness in all institutions, meaning people being aware of the purposes of the research or generally forthcoming when it is explained. Ongoing contact helped to continually re-structure these relationships (Maxwell, 2005). A possible drawback is deciding when the researcher is active or passive, although ‘soaking up the atmosphere’ is integral to the process.

At this juncture it is worthwhile establishing a certain underpinning logic to the fieldwork. The foremost tool of investigation was the interview, considered as one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 1994). The key issues for the critical realist, is not necessarily the qualitative tradition but more informed qualitative questions (Ackroyd, 2004).

The interview is an essential source because it focuses on human affairs through the eyes of the interviewee, assisting in providing a history of events and identifying other factors not immediately evident to the researcher. This research utilised the semi-structured interview, with interview agendas shaped by the operationalisation of research questions. Although not as flexible in nature to the open ended unstructured interview, there is nevertheless a distinct application to the conceptual focus with the qualitative aspect of the study, one which has been commented on by researchers (Bryman, 1989).

Initial meetings enhanced by follow-ups to seek clarification on a number of issues, facilitated a more in-depth understanding. When supported by a tape recorder, the interview can provide accurate information, which can be transcribed and systematically listened to. Data collected from interviews translated into accounts of interviewees establishes a story about quality, with the semi-structured format being flexible enough to allow for changes in direction.

Additionally, 'semi-structured exploration of defining moments' (Miller and Crabtree, 1999, p 19) gears towards identifying practices rather than attitudes e.g. where staff are presented with unusual or difficult problems in relation to quality issues. Interviewees exemplifying incidents in delivery, decision making, workload, together with the implementation of new policies and procedures, (e.g. Self-evaluation) assists in the evaluation process. Such a technique has the potential to provide an insight into the complexities of control, consent and resistance within the context of audit structures.

Despite the usefulness of interview data it has not been without its critics of late. Hammersley (2003) acknowledges that some researchers doubt the veracity of interview data in establishing authenticity and accurate representations from fieldwork. 'Radical epistemological scepticism', suggests there is romanticised support for the interview heralding more caution (in this research) about what interview data can and cannot provide.

Embedding intensity within the mainly qualitative methods attempts to compensate for criticism and leads to a more triangulated approach (Easterby-Smith, 2002). More specifically, in relation to quality regimes, this includes the application of relevant note taking from informal conversations (as a consequence of researcher presence in organizations) with short meetings prior to individual interviews with managers. Also, open blank sheet questions on perceptions of quality and management expectations from curriculum leaders, senior lecturers and lecturers conducted using pairs and group interviews.

Semi-structured pairs and group interviews form part of the fieldwork, although interviewing was generated from a sample due to the size of the organisations. Some of the issues of accessing staff, i.e. getting them together in one spot over several interview sessions proved too difficult, because respondents with teaching commitments are less easily accessed. Individual interviews are too time-consuming and also less likely to yield certain information that an interactive situation does. Utilising pairs and group sessions of up to five participants, overcomes issues related orthodox focus groups, while still attaining depth and coverage in data collection. Although some of the consequences evident in the pairs and group sessions are familiar to the traditional focus group i.e. being able to initiate and moderate (Yin, 1994) the flow of interaction. The semi-structured interview approach did bring order and focus to the sessions. The interview format was defined by prompt questions, but the participants in the group interaction were free to tell a story meaning that it was less controlled than more structured individual interviewing. Morgan notes that group sessions provide: “a valuable insight into complex behaviour and motivations” (Morgan, 1997, p 15).

Existing secondary sources, in the research included; Strategic/Operational Plans, minutes of meetings, quality policies, manuals and wider FE sector circulars and documents. Such sources are most important in corroborating and augmenting evidence from elsewhere. Clues are provided in building up the picture of quality as systematic searches played an explicit role in data collection during the case studies (Yin, 1994).

4.4 Operationalisation of the research

4.4.1 **Selecting case studies, gaining and establishing levels of access**

The research agenda is focused on the case study approach, being 'inherently multi-method in their design' (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004, p 132). Criteria for case study selection are necessary, notwithstanding the impact that practical issues can have on such decision-making. The field of research was Scotland for the reasons outlined earlier, although combined with this were geographical, access and time constraints complicating any comparative study encompassing England and Wales.

Initial plans concentrated on one large Scottish FE college with several sites to compare the operation of quality. Complications over access and the efficacy of such a single case study, in embedding complexity relevant to the earlier debates in this chapter, meant going back to the drawing board and considering a different approach.

An inherent problem of any organisational research is gaining access to the empirical site, which is often followed by ongoing attempts to gain deeper levels of access once in an organisation, through negotiation and re-negotiation (Bryman, 1988; Maxwell, 2005). This research was no different, requiring multi-layered access across several institutions. The delicate web of relationships has to be negotiated to fulfil specific research objectives i.e. negotiating access with gatekeepers on topical but also at times sensitive issues. Negotiation is important as it can tell the researcher a great deal about the study site.

Having decided against a single case study organisation across several sites, attention focused on access to three FE colleges, although more complicated, would add another dimension and more complexity to the study. Work commenced on deciding the rationale for selecting particular case studies by making use of contacts in the FE sector. There was an adoption of the techniques advocated by Buchanan et al (1988) who favour the 'opportunistic' approach to negotiating access. Buchanan et al offer five specific pieces of advice on negotiating access: allow for a time consuming

element, use contacts, employ non-threatening language to explain the nature and purpose of the study, deal positively with any reservations respondents may have and offer a report of findings (Buchanan et al, 1988, p 56).

Having approached the Chief Executive/Principal of a large college in East & Lothian region of Scotland towards the end of January 2003 permission was gained to conduct research in the college. To observe protocols, it was necessary to submit the research proposal and make an application to undertake research (known as College A in the findings). Several issues had to be addressed when making an application: self-selection, student learning was not impaired; observing confidentiality and adhering with the Data Protection Act and a copy of the findings to be made available to the college on completion.

To facilitate issues during the course of the research and establish further forms of access a member of management acted as a 'mentor'. This contact consolidated an understanding of events in College A being an invaluable source of information over a nine month period. Having a mentor who had spent a number of years at College A was beneficial in a number of ways as it opened up access to documents, the setting up of meetings, advice on college structures, to do with the roles and responsibilities of staff, providing a history of re-structuring and the development of quality. Being able to discuss specific quality issues at College A over several meetings informal and formal assisted in clarifying aspects of the research.

Buchanan et al (1988) note the use of contacts and despite attempts by the Chief Executive of College A to enrol the support of other institutions and create a 'snowball effect' this resulted in either no response or negative responses from other organisations to participate in the research. This coincides with the Buchanan et al (1988, p 55) who identify that public sector organisations are under increasing economic scrutiny and have little time to devote to non-productive academic research activities, which may be seen to disrupt normal operations. The status of quasi–public organisations and their future development will no doubt continue to influence decisions about the area and location of FE research, primarily focusing on whether

access to the inside structures of the institution can be gained. For organizations that are deluged with requests for information from outside bodies, researcher access may be of low priority.

In conjunction with the initial contacts, several opportunities arose to gain access to other FE colleges, which overlapped the first case study. Two colleges in the West of Scotland were accessed as a consequence of being a member of the Board of Management in one (known for the purposes of this study as College B) and a part-time member of the lecturing staff in another college (College C). The time period to establish all levels of initial access spanned from February 2003 until September 2003, which again exemplifies the approaches of others (Buchanan et al, 1988; Crompton and Jones, 1988*)* about the importance of building access into time schedules.

Following the initial access and continuing negotiations in two additional institutions, other issues were addressed. Bryman acknowledges that researchers need to be: "sensitive to the ethical and political dimension of the study" (Bryman, 1989, p 3) because what is 'research project' for the researcher is an intrusion into the lives of others (Maxwell, 2005). Maintaining the support of allies to the research is essential and consistently negotiating access across several levels of three different organizations, both within and across departments was ongoing.

The role of the insider meant a whole array of vested interests needed to be assessed and accommodated under the umbrella of what can be loosely termed impartiality. This in reality is more difficult considering the political environments of FE colleges and the potential for the "dirtiness of real life data" (Hornsby-Smith, 1993, p 56). While a potential stumbling block, the role of insider can facilitate access to various managers and other staff on a regular basis that ordinarily would not be possible. For this research, being able to access areas of two establishments more easily, made more intensive contact possible and facilitated added researcher freedom. Establishing a researcher role, which was clear to members of the participating organizations, perhaps assisted in dispelling confusion over the purposes of the

study. In College B there was a danger of the research being perceived as a tool for the purposes of management, due to Board of Management membership, although a consistent informative approach, detailing the research was for doctorate purposes tended to suffice as an explanation. Being an insider in certain contexts, studying the FE institution in a systematic way enables contact with people in the organisation, because of insider knowledge, a task it could take an outsider many more months to negotiate.

Despite advantages, the insider can be too close to the evidence, which inhibits an insightful theoretical account because of an over familiarity with the field site and source material data. Researchers cannot assume to be detached from the research situation but are involved in the construction of reality. Although, the limitations of embedding subjective opinion and bias into the research programme, is a constant in any study, where there is an element of being an insider for a longer period of time. For this research it was felt that levels of access were complimentary to the research agenda, with a sufficient level of detachment to avoid losing sight of the research goals. Having access to enough event building material to add authenticity and levels of representation to the analysis are fundamental to the critical realist researcher. What it did mean was wearing different hats at different times in two of the research sites, but being careful to distinguish when in a research capacity and when not.

From a practical point of view many things can be learned (as an insider) in making contact with people and how they react to such advances (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993). It becomes easier to change interview schedules and take opportunities to interview respondents on the off chance. Again, the critical realist philosophy is well placed to consider not only the semantics of research findings but also the whole process of being an insider within an organisation.

The researcher cannot detach themselves from the structures because quite simply they are part of the minutiae of social life within the organisation. Promoting an understanding of the environment leads to a more comprehensive analysis of working practice. Conversely the quantitative approach projects an image of the

objective, value free investigator, (scientist) making a pure attempt to understand the world. It is not just a case of focusing in on a particular problem, to extract an understanding of social life in an impersonal fashion. The researcher participates in the creation of social facts but often tries to inflate just how it comes about. To agree with Shipman: "inquiry is rarely inductive, but always influenced by the preconceptions of the researcher" (Shipman, 1981, p 13).

One realises that fieldwork in FE organisations is permeated with the conflict between what is 'theoretically desirable' on the one hand and what is practically possible on the other (Buchanan et al, 1988, p 53). The nature of research as a dynamic process is uncertain no matter what methodological approach is employed. Given the chaotic environment of contemporary FE (still coming to terms with its status following incorporation) it is equally likely that research designs need to accommodate change and divert from original intentions with the prospect of research becoming very untidy. In this case the justification of methodology becomes an advantage to the framework of the study as the various qualitative devices being employed are more flexible and in keeping with a critical realist philosophy, which compliments quantitative counterparts, i.e. documentary sources.

4.4.2 **Consolidating access: 'In the field'**

The fieldwork concentrates on three case studies in colleges from across the Scottish Further Education sector. Interviewing began in June 2003 (being completed in June, 2004, with some further post-interview follow up with respondents during 2005) after initially spending from February 2003 discussing levels of access. Interviews commenced in College A from June 2003, which coincided with negotiations over access in two other FE institutions.

Despite, initial access and being assigned a 'mentor' in College A, it was still necessary to present research proposals to a Learning and Management Teaching Group, in the hope that some of the Faculty managers would become involved. Having the opportunity to present proposals to managers (at the time Heads of

School, subsequently re-titled Head of Faculty following restructuring) allowed for the research goals and objectives to be clarified during discussion.

Following the advice of Buchanan et al (1988) semantics were important in both the initial contact and presentations, but also at the interview stage, with care about entry and exit influencing interview success. Also, stressing that a copy of the thesis would be made available assisted in trying to give something in return (Maxwell, 2005). Managers were re-assured that any information would not be attributed to them, which was re-emphasised later at the interview stage. From the initial presentation, the mentor forwarded details of all present at the meeting and a list of those who would be interested in taking part in the research. Following preliminary meetings in June 2003 interviews were set up.

Access was made easier in both College B (interviews commenced in December, 2003) and College C (Interviews commenced in August, 2003) in terms of geographical location and membership of the respective organisations. In the case of College B, sending a letter of intention preceded a meeting with the Chief Executive/Principal to discuss research proposals (June-July 2003). Proposals were to a Senior Management Team (Learning and Review Meeting: late August, 2003) who also commented on a proposed letter to academic staff, informing them of the research and its voluntary nature. This was followed by an Academic Board meeting (mid September, 2003) where union representatives were present and questions were taken as to the nature of the research and the type of benefits this could bring to the organisation. Likewise, a presentation to a Leadership Review Team (early October) allowed actors to ask questions. From this point, approaches were made to Senior and Middle managers.

For College C, following a letter of intention, a meeting was arranged with the Principal/Chief Executive (June, 2003) followed by meetings with the Associate Principal for Human Resources and Quality Manager (July 2003). After gaining support (on the grounds that the research would be conducted at times which would not impinge on staff preparing for an impending HMIe visit later in 2003/04) consent

was given to conduct the research. A general letter was sent out to staff and a short extract was put in the *Weekly Staff Bulletin* later in the year (early October, 2003) informing staff of the research. Approaches were then made to other managers (Assistant/Depute Principals and Divisional Leaders) although having the support of the college and the publicity of the research was a major advantage, when engaged in discussions about interviews.

Analysis in the three colleges centred on the quality function. Given that the main approach in data collection was the semi-structured interview it was impractical to conduct interviews with every employee in each institution. The focus of the case study required interviews with a selection of academic staff from across the organizations under study, which was separated into two distinct phases by virtue of the type of interviews and questions being asked of respondents. To be more precise individual interviews were held with key post holders associated with the quality function. To begin, this incorporated (corporate agents as structural modellers) Senior Managers, particularly those with a quality remit, together with staff responsible for quality i.e. Head of Quality and Planning, plus those in the Quality units and those with Faculty or Department responsibility from across the colleges. Having identified managers, it was possible to set up preliminary meetings, to discuss their role in the quality function. Initial access in College A meant that this institution would provide the basis for selection and comparison, i.e. across department areas and status of staff in the two other participating institutions. Individual interviews with corporate modellers assisted in shaping Phase Two of the fieldwork, as three Faculties, departments or divisions were chosen across the respective institutions involving curriculum leaders, senior lecturers and lecturers. Pairs and group interviews were then conducted across representative groupings.

4.4.3 **Profile of participating Further Education institutions**

Given the nature of access, it is possible to suggest that the desirable and possible are contingencies which have to be weighed up in any selection of case study organizations (Buchanan et al, 1988). The rationale eventually centred on the ability to gain access to organizations. Among other factors were that all the colleges in the

research can be loosely termed as ‘community colleges’ in urban areas. The colleges have a strong commitment to access and outreach programmes for students. The geographic spread incorporates the Central belt of Scotland. College A is in the Edinburgh & Lothian region, while Colleges B and C are in the West region. The colleges reflect a broad range of income base, with all the participating institutions receiving the majority of their funding through the Scottish Funding Council (SFEFC at the time of commencing fieldwork) which is summarised in: ‘Performance indicators for further education colleges 2003-04’, (*Circular letter FE/22/05*). All the participating institutions had variable percentage performance indicators (PI’s) in relation to sector benchmarks for staff student ratio and academic outcomes. Each college demonstrated above and below sector averages in areas of performance measurement.

College A

This institution is in the Funding Council Edinburgh & Lothian region, being one of the largest colleges in Scotland and the largest organization involved in the study. In 2003/04 the college had an income of between £15-20m. Over 90 per cent of income sources stem from Funding Council grants and Tuition fees and education contracts, with other income making up the rest (there is small amount of endowment and investment income). The college enrolled approximately 15,000 students equating to between 90,000+ WSUMS (Weighted student unit of measurement) in 2003/04 (Circular letter FE/22/05). In 2002/03 the college employed 251 teaching staff - 179 full time equivalents (FTE’s). Of the 229 full-time teaching staff, 97 per cent had a teaching qualification, which was 11 per cent above the sector average.

College B

This institution is in the Funding Council Glasgow region and is the smallest college in the research. In 2003-04, the college had an income of between £10-15m. Sources of income for the college are over 80 per cent in Funding Council grants and Tuition fees and education contracts, with other income making up the rest. The college had activity levels with the value of approximately 55,000 WSUMS in 2003/04 (Circular letter FE/22/05). The college employed approximately 192 teaching staff in 2002/03,

with 128 FTE's. From the 138 permanent FTE's, there were 88 per cent with teaching qualifications, which was 2 per cent above the sector average.

College C

This is a middle ranking college in the Funding Council Glasgow region. In 2003/04 the college had an income of between £15-20m. Sources of income for the college are over 80 per cent in Funding Council grants and Tuition fees and education contracts, with other income making up the rest. There was a small percentage endowment and investment income. The college attracted 73,000 WSUMS in 2003/04 (Circular letter FE/22/05). In 2002/03 the college employed 252 FTE staff with 142 being permanent. Also, there was 141 staff with a teaching qualification, which was equivalent to 96 percent of teaching staff, 13 per cent up on the sector average.

4.4.4 **Selecting interview respondents**

Interviewing everyone across the institutions was impractical, although the selection of respondents depended on whether Senior Managers opted to become involved in the research. In College A, the level of detachment was greater than in the other two organizations. Contact with managers was initially made through the Learning and Management Teaching Group, while levels of interest were communicated via the college mentor. Preliminary meetings with managers assisted in creating the tempo for the research as it was possible to stress that the research was about learning from the experiences of participants rather than concentrating on the measurement of quality i.e. good or less good. Earlier in the research, an opportunity to attend (as a non-participant observer) an End of Course Review meeting at College A illustrated many of the quality issues pertinent to the research and proved very useful. Extensive notes were taken and following reflection on various issues, were incorporated into the development of questions at a later date. Enough interest across a selection of curriculum areas was generated, and matched in the other two colleges to facilitate effective comparison.

In College B, being on the Board of Management had implications for the perceptions of staff about the purposes of research and the danger of a feeling that the research was management orientated. However, in keeping with the type of advice Buchanan et al (1988) advocate, the benefit of presentations to the Academic Board (union representatives being present) assisted in answering questions about the nature and purpose of research that it was an academic exercise, participation was voluntary and results would be confidential according to respondent's wishes.

Such purpose and direction was made clear across all the colleges and assisted in building up levels of trust, so the research was seen as non –threatening. Once a degree of rapport was built up across the research sites, with a familiarity of presence further access proved easier to attain. Managers were involved to a greater or lesser degree in establishing access to other academic staff. Identical processes were carried out in College C, where support from senior management was given the added boost of providing rooms and facilitating catering arrangements, which made attracting respondents to meetings a little easier.

The criteria for selection of interview respondents, was largely on the basis of those with direct involvement, supporting or delivering the quality functions. It was also necessary to make provision for sampling people but also, "settings events and processes" (Maxwell, p 2005, p 87). Initial interviews were conducted with the Principal/Chief Executives and key quality post holders i.e. Senior Managers with a quality remit. Gaining an insight into the perceptions such managers had of an organization and quality in the wider context was valuable but also aided access to others under their line management control.

The profile of respondents is provided in Appendix 1 and includes the proportion of male /female respondents with those identified and chosen as part of the rationale for conducting the fieldwork. It was necessary to consider the typicality of settings, but also the heterogeneous, rather than just the typical. Comparisons across sites afforded the advantage of being able to illustrate differences, which is common in multi-site case studies.

The selection of respondents for interview also required matching up similar disciplines across institutions i.e. respondents called by different titles, but with similar job remits. Initially, this meant having discussions with the mentor in College A, about the different job roles in the institution. Providing a rationale for selection of respondents in College A was replicated across sites.

Fieldwork began with managers (Phase One) those whose activities are geared towards organisational goal setting and have the capacity to model structures as corporate agents. Later interviews incorporated middle managers and lecturers (Phase Two) who spend much of their time in the classroom but who are governed less by managerial objectives and adhere to certain extra organisational normative codes, traditionally associated with professionalism. Differentiation across both phases of the research was necessary to ensure comparability across sites. Also, distinguishing those senior managers, with more strategic responsibility and other managers, who responsible for operational functions. As with Loots and Ross (2004) senior managers are ostensibly referred to as depute principals, assistant principals or in charge of functional areas.

Also, acknowledging curriculum leaders and senior lecturers have some management and administrative duties i.e. writing Self-Evaluation Reports, while a lecturer tends not to have such responsibility. In short questions focused on the features and operations of a quality regime, in an attempt to establish dominant agencies. Looking at power and interests establishes what a regime looks like, as an analytical construct, being a set of practices around the evaluation and control of knowledge and performance. Examining different actors in the regime provides various accounts demonstrating that decision -making powers do exist with varying impacts and levels of acceptance.

4.4.5 **Research questions Phase One: Senior managers (corporate agents)**

Senior and Faculty/Department/Divisional Managers (Strategic and Operational)

In keeping with the critical realist philosophy, whereby accounts of mechanisms are limited (as with quality regimes in FE) the construction of a model is a legitimate

stage in the research. Despite a model not being a remedy it provides a focus. In the absence of a quality model in the literature it became necessary to ask respondents questions that helped to determine the powers of the emergent audit mechanisms.

By interviewing the potential 'movers and shakers', actors demonstrate strategic, operational and relational influence over quality matters. It was important to ask questions about the perceptions, influence or various associations managers had of external factors, both in terms of the number and relative saliency of influences. Manifestations at college level become linked to forms of relational power (multiple or dispersed forms of power). Allowing for interplay between structures and action fitted well with the critical realist approach, because causes can emerge as both internal and external factors (Sayer, 2004, p 17).

Broad questions allowed respondents to assert their voices, informing particular experiences on the specific ways they dealt with quality. General questions focused on the broad themes of the research: the main characteristics of quality; perceptions and interpretation of influences on quality; a shared meaning, understanding and language of quality. Also, questions on the impact of quality audits on practice, professional identity and work intensification. The quality process and quality framework i.e. Self-evaluation was developed, as was improved standards; acceptance of audit culture relating to issues of control, compliance, resistance and recalcitrance (see Appendices for a full copy of typical interview questions). Emphasis with questions varied across the two phases of the interview process, being dependent on the participants.

In order to explore issues about change, other questions sought to concentrate on particular significant events, to understand how managers could use their locus of influence to shape decision making in the institution. Concentrating on the experiences of managers resulted in events coming to light, which further aided the shaping of other interviews. An exposure of the interplay between actors and structures, and notions of internal and external contingencies emerged due to being more flexible with questions to respondents.

4.4.6 **Research questions Phase Two: Middle managers and lecturers (primary agents)**

Curriculum Leaders/Senior lecturers, lecturers

Having finished interviews with managers, it was necessary to target specific faculty/divisional areas, across a selection of disciplines and then match them across institutions as far as possible. Gaining an exact 'fit' was difficult due to specific organizational configurations nonetheless the match achieved made it possible to target similar disciplines. Interviews with trade union and Board of Management representatives illustrated whether 'quality' was generating specific work practice issues, in the context of meetings, or being raised more formally through the EIS union. From such events it was possible reflect on interviews with managers about why certain factors were considered important. The issue of 'peer observation' was exposed as creating various tensions across the three establishments.

Contextualising pairs or group interviews in Phase Two also meant different types of questions, (given the experiences) of each group geared towards identifying practices rather than attitudes. Typical phraseology is assumed as follows: *'Can you give me an example of where an audit requirement led to a refusal to implement'?* The focus is on experiences and building a profile of what is happening on the ground, leading to consideration about attitudes, with causation coming through the description of practice. The sessions were split between curriculum leaders/senior lecturers and lecturers from the specific areas that had been identified (see Appendix 3 for interview schedules).

The interviews for both groups commenced with respondents being given a sheet asking them to spend five minutes to reflect and briefly state their experience and time at the college followed by two questions: '*What do you understand by the term' quality'? 'What do you think management is looking for from… in relation to quality'?* The main interview started once respondents had made comments from the questions The advantage of using these sheets was it allowed comparison on ideas about what 'quality' meant between groups and across both phases of the research. Having completed the sheets, respondents were given an introduction to the next part

of the interview process, which focused on the experiences of respondents and asked them to describe their experiences using examples. This in some ways overcame notions of attitudinal bias, whereby respondents tends to associate good outcomes (to self) and poor outcomes (to others) as part of an attitudinal response.

The themes from literature were again a focus, albeit there was less emphasis on external factors (particularly with lecturers) given limited involvement in external activity and relational influence across institutions. Other questions concentrated on targets, ownership, impacts, standards, compliance processes, professional identity, workload and intensification, new skills, tensions in the system. An example compounding the strength of the critical realist approach here is that even where issues referred to compliance, there was a presupposition of resistance (Sayer, 2004, p 18).

While the interview schedule provided a focus there was also room in each interview to explore 'significant incidents'. An example surfaced time and again; 'peer observation', which was mentioned by management respondents in Phase One but became a prominent tension in Phase Two.

4.4.7 **Analysis of data**

Interview data was collected (from College A, College B and College C) over a staggered period, from June 2003 with some post interview meetings with respondents (during 2005) to clarify events and provide transcripts of interviews. An advantage to this process meant that data could be reflected on as it was produced and it was easier (having commenced fieldwork in College A) to identify further respondents in the other two participating organizations.

In total, sixty-six semi-structured interviews (total 119 staff – 67 female/52male respondents) incorporating individual and group based sessions – three distinct groupings with different levels of responsibility/duties associated with quality (Senior Managers, Middle managers – Lecturers). Interviews were tape-recorded (lasting between at least 30 minutes and up to one hour) with a number of

preliminary meetings. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with this approach having several advantages. Respondents were assured that if they were disclosing sensitive information they would have the opportunity to edit or clarify responses when transcriptions were handed back to them. Also, any alterations could perhaps tell the researcher something in itself (Easterby-Smith, 2002).

While interviews were the main source of data, notes were used collected from meetings which assisted the formation of questions. Events suggest a predominantly intensive form of research although this must be weighed up alongside the use of documentary sources. In keeping with the critical realist tradition of being non-partisan to the tools of research, documentary sources were of significant value, for example, in being able to examine quality performance criteria across and within institutions. Such sources were subjected to a framework of reliability, validity, credibility and representativeness, in an effort to establish meaning and evaluate the usefulness of data.

Across, all three participating institutions, there were several requests to amend scripts although this generally surfaced as issues in the transcription, to make the discourse make sense. There was only one refusal for interview, which prevented a meeting happening in Phase Two of the research, although the researcher was advised to approach staff individually by their manager because one member of the team had objected to the researcher taking up time on their meetings agenda. Instead of the larger group, meetings were arranged in pairs. There were instances of interviews being postponed and re-arranged, but this is only to be expected in research of this dimension.

The interviews had been designed to gain an insight into, and map out, the consistency of a quality regime and whether enough credible evidence exists to establish the notion of quality regimes being in existence. The perceptions and experiences of influences on quality issues are important in mapping out how regimes work, the demands made and, how this impacts on working practice and

professional autonomy. Hence, do actors see demands as excessive and does resistance manifest itself?

Data analysis required patience and organisation with much intensive listening to taped recording of interviews during and following transcription; reading and re-reading of the transcripts. Establishing an examination of actors and their reasoning, together with the rules particular to audits and institutions facilitated location in the wider economic system in later analysis. For the purposes of clarity, data collected was initially placed into several 'loose order' or 'organizational' categories (Maxwell, 2005) being broad areas that are easily anticipated linked to the research questions. This categorisation process enabled cross-fertilisation between the particular cases, which developed into general trends for the research.

The analysis of each set of data from Phase One and Phase Two of the research was influenced and subjected to several elements of examination, from familiarizing to establishing weight of meaning and focusing on themes (Alexiadou, 2001). This was combined with the analytical procedure favoured by Miles and Huberman (1994) with the use of memos to stimulate insights and Summary Sheets establishing key categories for analysis. A driving force providing direction was the literature review and themes that had emanated from the application of a conceptual framework for understanding quality regimes. Various codes and labels were assigned to particular categories to inform the data collected in Phase One and Phase Two of the research. This process was enhanced by the use of marginal remarks for (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p 67) for cross-referencing events, or indicating a key event.

Approaches to data analysis were aided by re-visiting sites, plus having discussions both formal and informal about progress. For example, discussions with the mentor in College A, along with more informal 'small talk' in college tea rooms, with staff who enquired about how the research was progressing or at meetings with staff who were interested in the project. All mechanisms assisted in developing a picture of quality regimes. Some staff also made approaches with more information about their input as time went on. Such reflection proved extremely useful in College A, where

ongoing support helped to make what was initially an unfamiliar environment into a more familiar one.

4.4.8 **Limitations of research methods**

There are some evident limitations to the research, perhaps none more so than the researcher being a FE practitioner and bringing to the research site particular value biases. Some critics may suggest that differential access to information in two cases may have swayed an understanding of the process in the organization, where there was least attachment (College A). Given that College A provided the focus for selecting respondents in the other colleges, perhaps to some extent dispels this criticism. Familiarity was gained in other ways through mentor support, attending meetings as a non-participant, with a particularly intensive period of research activity in both phases, meaning researcher visibility around the college on a regular basis. Attachments to College's B and C corresponded with trying to gain access in these institutions, whereby levels of involvement in day to day college life was on the periphery, although it became a pragmatic contingency and a valuable opportunity. The advantages of being an insider (when possible) has been documented earlier on the grounds of geographical location, and accessing respondents more easily. Eliminating the influence of the observer is impossible, although it is not the fact of eliminating but understanding these influences and to use them productively (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Methods used in the research suggest that there will be certain limitations in the forthcoming analysis of the case studies. Accordingly, there will be doubts as to whether the findings will be applicable to Scotland or the UK FE sector. Albeit, there is a gauge from previous research (as noted in Chapter Two) to suggest some outcomes appear to be similar, although with some variation. While replication is not possible, it was never the intention of the research to entertain notions of similarity, but using a critical realist persona suggests complexity in emerging contingency. The Scottish dimension demonstrates what is happening in both an under researched area (quality) in what can often appear as an invisible sector (Scottish FE). Comparative research between countries was prevented on the grounds of time and resources.

However, it is the characteristic in realist analysis to connect the particular with the general (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000) suggesting despite the particular nature of the Scottish system or the cases examined in the study, the research exhibits properties that are exemplars to be compared to the general case.

Any claims to typicality are subject to the drawbacks of case study research, namely that of representativeness and reliability of the data produced. Despite this, the strengths of observational fieldwork in colleges and a comprehensive series of interviews with key informants allows for detail engendering complexity as a justification for methodological choice rather than broad coverage of the issues. Also, the use of 'quasi-statistics' (Maxwell, 2005, p 113) enabled simple numerical results readily derived, to be able to assess certain types of evidence in the research project. This is in line with previous FE research (Gleeson and Shain, 1999) and embedding authenticity through complexity.

While an intensive design using interviews was seen as more appropriate giving a greater insight into what is happening this is does not discount the use of survey tools (Yin, 1994). This survey approach has been used in previous FE research (Randle and Brady, 1997; Mather and Seifert, 2003) to assess the attitude of FE practitioners to work intensification. Despite the potential for a survey application, there was time and resources which precluded effective implementation. Plus, the research agenda intended to embed complexity, by understanding how and why quality regimes manifested a presence in FE. The next part of the thesis provides a comprehensive exploration of the research findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: FEATURES AND OPERATIONS OF THE QUALITY REGIME

5.1 Introduction: rationale for organising the findings

This introduction will set the scene and establish a rationale for organising the research data. The findings unfold in this chapter and in Chapter Six and they examine how quality has manifested itself as a mechanism of change in the Scottish Further Education sector. It is necessary for the purposes of disseminating findings to establish a framework within which material can be explained.

Adaptation of derived categories and constructing a 'regime matrix'

The contribution of Clark and Newman (1997) (as explained in Chapter Three) consolidates our understanding of the shift from bureau- professional to managerial organisational regimes. In using the term, 'regime', we add weight to an appreciation of the nature of organizational regimes, providing a fix to attach this research data. The managerial milieu allows the researcher using critical realist philosophy to demonstrate an appreciation of nuances in social life. In order to overcome critiques about empirical credence the derived categories of Clark and Newman (1997) are adapted and applied into the field of FE. Moving beyond abstract impression, allows for the addition of further ingredients to the recipe for understanding regimes in FE. This notion of evolution is perhaps not lost on Clarke and Newman (1997), who advocate that specific policy domains and organisational settings will have varying implications for how events are enacted in practice.

The construction and use of a 'regime matrix' (see Table Two) assists in making sense of the findings by illustrating the interplay of important structures and agents in the regime. Enabling *sources of regime articulation* allows for particular features, characteristics, demands and operations to be explored. To begin, Chapter Five is organised to illustrate forms of regime articulation through *legitimacy* (how power and authority are manifested), *affiliation* (how agents and structures are attached) and *transmission* (agenda setting and decision making) with the quality regime. These categories act as a useful catalyst to establish the broad brushstrokes in explaining

contemporary FE regimes. One important point to make at this juncture is that the adaptation of categories does not mean that they assume exclusivity. Ideas do intersect each other, allowing for varied, but not definitive translation.

To explain the *sources of legitimacy* imply certain forms of authority e.g. legislative and policy edicts and processes. Such factors tend to be manifest in the meta and macro levels of the regime and reinforce the validity of regime features and operations. While the 'modes of attachment' (Clarke and Newman, 1997) can encompass various forms, this research has adapted the more fluid notion of *sources of affiliation*. This variation assists understanding the scope agents have due to wider group or relational affiliation within a specific organization and across the FE sector. Actor affiliation takes on a more dynamic and changing form as a consequence of sector and institutional restructuring and policy initiatives (e.g. Self-evaluation). Structural determinants influence several forms of affiliation and attachment at any one time across institutional and sector levels. For some actors, accepting certain forms of affiliation and attachment act as an enabler and can represent a first or second order form of control. Much depends on being a facilitator of authority within the context of power relations in the quality regime.

Finally the *sources of transmission* incorporates some categories from Clarke and Newman (1997) ('decision-making', 'agenda setting' 'normative power') in an effort to concentrate on, how and within what type of frameworks regime operations take place. Clear in the operational demands and mechanisms of control are the voices of agents (corporate and primary) and their perceptions of the regime.

The findings are also organised around various levels of analysis in the regime matrix integrated across both chapters. The meta and macro levels of analysis assist in establishing some of the externalities influencing the regime. The meso and micro levels of analysis enable explanation of internal operations of the regime. Taken together the findings illustrate the interplay between structures and agents in depicting the features, operations, impacts and acceptance of the regime.

Forms of control (see Smyth et al, 2000, in Chapter Three) are also significant as mechanisms in the regime matrix. They assist in enhancing our understanding of how regimes function and evolve. The various forms of control (bureaucratic, corporate, market, regulatory and technical) establish the conditions and protocols, which support an interpretation of events in 'control regimes' (see Table Two).

With the development of Chapter Five (from sources of transmission) the findings are presented according to three distinguishable organisational groupings (each with different levels of responsibility/duty). References are made to 'actors', 'agents' and in acknowledging critical realist applications individuals are ascribed the status of 'agential projects', all of which are interchangeable. As explained previously in the Introduction to this thesis agential projects relate to how particular actors portray and embark on certain strategies, intentions, writing, talk and actions in the regime. Agents are categorised according to the extent to which they have more or less capacity to influence terms of interaction and produce change.

Managers in more senior roles are ascribed corporate agent status due to a capacity to induce change at institutional and sector level. It becomes clear that the voices of managers are more evident when examining aspects on a meta and macro level due to their positioning in the regime. At a meso level managers are the structural 'model makers' (initiators of structures). The synthesis for this group is by virtue of having strategic input, with a few cases (amongst operational managers) involved in very limited teaching contact time. It is also possible to reflect on the wider FE sector forms of affiliation and authority that managers can utilize in their job remits. The Chief Executive function has been grouped with senior managers (as 'leader affiliates') to retain some form of anonymity given the size of the Scottish sector and location of the studies. The majority of managers have progressed through the ranks of FE or worked in associated industries in the public sector. The average service profile of managers is twenty years plus, which given the time spent in FE suggests some classroom experience.

Primary agents (as middle managers and lecturers) are considered to have less capacity to induce change, due to a lack in structural and cultural modelling capabilities (Archer, 1995). Middle managers, with curriculum specific duties are distinguished across colleges by status labels but have similar job remits (Section leaders, Curriculum leaders and Senior lecturers) being deemed to be of primary agent status. Establishing a precise remit for this group is more difficult, given local variation in the size of the college and job titles. Restructuring (the case with Curriculum leaders in College A) since incorporation is a particular contributory factor in the re-shaping of posts. The remit of this group is a post-incorporation phenomenon, embedding more operational quality functions and related administration, but with a significant weight of teaching. The teaching contact in the classroom tends to be over 10 hours and up to 18 hours, for curriculum leaders (College A), senior lecturers (College B) and heads of section (College C). Various committee and line management affiliation confer certain opportunities to provoke some change as a consequence of cross college functions e.g. 'College Guidance Coordinator' or 'Quality Manager' (in College B).

Lecturers form the third grouping with a definitive primary agent status, spending the majority of their working week involved in delivery to students. Contextualized by a business process model, most lecturers spend between 8-12 sessions in two –three hour slots in the classroom (normally between 21-24 plus hours). Some respondents are given remission (across colleges) for course team or moderation duties (administrative) with titles of Programme Leader (PL's), Programme Co-ordinator (PC's) as a consequence of restructuring programmes.

Table Two: Configuring a Quality Regime Matrix

Sources of Regime Articulation	Levels of analysis
Sources of legitimacy (e.g. Ministerial Priorities and legislative structures)	**Externalities** **Meta** (Neo-liberal philosophy/Government legislative policy) **Macro** (Scottish Funding Council / HMIE)
Sources of Affiliation (ways agents are attached including relational affiliation across agencies in the FE sector)	**Internal operations** **Meso** (Institutional corporate college structures and processes including role of trade unions) **Micro** (Internal levels e.g. point of delivery and operations of quality e.g. Self-evaluation)
Sources of Transmission (e.g. decision making, agenda setting, normative codes)	
Agential Projects (Initiate, establish, diffuse, reproduce, resist the regime) **Corporate Agents** –structural modellers with ability to institute corporate structures (Senior managers) **Primary Agents** (responsible for operationalising/implementing quality processes (Middle managers/lecturers)	**Indicative rationale for forms of control** - **Market** (competition/market/consumer demands, evaluation of outputs v costs) - **Corporate** (Managerial /economic rather than social objectives to running colleges - **Ideological** (focused on common sense understanding of quality and associated processes) - **Bureaucratic** (mechanism for career linked obligations) - **Technical** (design of quality processes and curriculum linked to transmission) - **Disciplinary** (forms of sanction linked to certain behaviour /normative codes of practice).

Having established the rationale for the regime matrix in Table Two (above) it is evident that events are contingent with a cross cutting nature within and across segments (as indicated by the arrows). For example forms of control intersect to reveal processes of intensification as structures and agents (across levels) interact. Such fluidity implies a particular strength of organizing material in this manner. The fieldwork attempts to gain insights into, and maps out a quality regime and the space people occupy within. In keeping with such analysis sources, levels, mechanisms and agents are considered in a synonymous way to make sense of the regime.

During Chapter Five the features and characteristics of quality become established, which demonstrates the nature and the existence of quality regimes. The meta and macro pressures, with the influence of the state and its agencies to control colleges, demonstrate how certain demands are made as a consequence of the economized meaning of quality. The regulatory nature of the regime to order working practice is propelled by a series of demands, to establish routines (whether as quality assurance or quality improvement) which assists maintaining and enhancing quality standards. The perceptions and influences on quality issues are important in demonstrating how regimes work and the control demands that are made on agential projects. The rise in internal control policies reveals a certain operational logic of the quality regime, whereby certain impacts are differentiated by group membership and sector affiliation. Making all agents auditable has become valid and legitimated through a public audit regime.

5.2 Sources of legitimacy

5.2.1 *Framing meta political control: new forms of legitimacy*

The meta and macro environmental influences driving the way quality is being measured, conceptualized and devolved in organisations has led to the evolution of features and demands placed on institutions and agents. The legitimate deployment of authority and power reinforces the regime as structures or actions. At a meta level, in Scotland, the New Public Management agenda is set firmly in the context of neo-liberal philosophy, which is being factored by a set of continuities through the New Labour modernization programme. The Lifelong Learning agenda is intended to

generate enhanced student opportunities associated with a quality provision in FE. Marrying the market with social justice in FE is perceived to be realised through sound management as a solution.

Legitimacy in the public audit regime is achieved, and dependent on using public resources prudently in line with Ministerial Priorities. Visible upward accountability is a feature of the FE system and provides a certain degree of comfort to the providers of funds and evaluators of performance. The post 1998 shift in structural control in Scotland meant that the legitimacy characteristic of an earlier period (formerly being a Scottish Office responsibility) constituted by hierarchy and direct accountability upward to politicians was compromised by management through quango. Devolved authority for funding colleges, governance, frameworks and targets is given to the Scottish Funding Council to support Ministerial priorities with colleges being accountable to the funding agency. The Funding Council ultimately controls and devises central indicators (on behalf of the Scottish Government) for colleges, as part of a national policy framework. At the time of writing, the Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (SEETLLD) monitor the performance of the Funding Council in supporting Scottish Ministers policy commitments (all being accountable to the Scottish Parliament). Intentions to improve the quality of provision of FE have generated policy advice from the Scottish Government, which is reflected in strategic aims of the Funding Council. There is a movement of funds downward and (in theory) a subsequent flow of accountability upward in the system. The level of monitoring through Auditor General's Reports provides a distinct level of scrutiny in the public audit regime, which is filtered through to college institutions.

5.2.2 *Framing macro-economic control: Scottish Funding Council*

The Funding Council is perceived as the most significant external corporate control factor (with the HMIE the quality functionary) in the FE system. The Chief Executive of the Funding Council is accountable to the Scottish Parliament (through the Audit Committee) for prudent use of funds, being obliged to meet specific Ministerial priorities, for example, 'quality improvement and modernisation'

(Auditor General 2004). The adoption of a corporate managerialist quality agenda by institutions is a crucial element in regime affiliation as it goes some way to fulfilment or achieving regime legitimacy in the eyes of the funding body. It is evident that features and operations are interpreted through forms of market and corporate control. A common response during interviews with managers is the perceived economic pressures placed on them due to the influence and demands of the Funding Council.

Recognition existed amongst managers that the Funding Council is answerable to the Scottish Government, but, in the words of one manager from College A, "being divorced from reality", on an operational level. Some respondents espouse that particular agendas are 'foisted on' institutions. The authority and legitimacy of the Funding Council (as a non-departmental body) to influence colleges, is evident as a cross -college manager (College C) comments:

> When they [Funding Council] have a particular agenda to move then they can move that very effectively because he who calls the piper… He who pays the piper calls the tune. They've got their money and if they want to find extra… then they can affect the direction in which the college goes**.**

The dominance of the Funding Council to shape the outcomes of quality is therefore seen as quite demanding and burdensome, particularly for smaller colleges. The perception of many managers is that colleges are juxtaposed in a child /parent relationship with the funding body. Respondents stated that the terms of affiliation for colleges in the sector are conditional, being based on adherence to financial memoranda from the Funding Council. Various managers make remarks about the type of information requests made on colleges by the Funding Council. One Manager (College C) states that the relationship with the Funding Council is characterised by operations based on "tedious and irritating information requests", while another (College A) adds "feedback isn't helpful" and "you are only told when they are not happy with you". Wider management groups question the legitimacy of the parent body (Funding Council) whereby accountability is considered as being one-way,

which contorts notions of an inclusive quality community in the FE sector. In effect, managers are articulating what they consider to be definitions of appropriateness and a legitimacy deficit.

5.2.3 *Framing operational legitimacy: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)*

The quality function is upheld by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) on behalf of the Funding Council and is constituted in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the two parties. Co-operation and partnership are necessary to secure and promote the SLA in Scottish FE. The promotion and augmentation of continuous quality improvement is factored into the principles of the SLA. The findings reveal that regime association between state agencies is perhaps more complex, but nonetheless, imbued with political drivers to satisfy the Scottish Government. The demands of the HMIE coincide with state pressures placed on institutions to conform and move towards best practice models while the findings illustrate forms of bureaucratic regulation in the way colleges report quality information.

The findings reveal that there is a dichotomy between managers in the confidence they have in the HMIE, along with the organisation of FE quality arrangements. Some respondents consider the role of the HMIE to be of some importance in maintaining a high national standard. One leader affiliate, from College B comments:

> [Hardly] anybody has no faith, or little faith, or doesn't have a lot faith in the independence, objectivity, and value of the Inspectorate and it's truly, I think a pat on the back for Scottish Education that professionals do have that level of, perhaps not confidence, that's maybe too strong a word, but agreement that the independence and 'value added' is there.

Managers generally support the current protocols between colleges and the HMIE, for example, colleges being notified well in advance of HMIE visits. The inspection /review arrangement means a certain amount of warning and preparedness is possible leading up to events. For one manager (College B) this means, "colleges get their act

together as far in advance as they can". The various associated demands of preparation for HMIE visits are considered to have positive effects on improvement in the institutions. One senior manager likens the HMIE going into colleges to the "Queen's visit", whereby improvements made in preparation are perhaps sustained afterwards.

Some managers note tangible benefits being gained from the HMIE presence in colleges i.e. a good report or perceived success could be used in the media or as a morale boosting exercise. One senior manager, in College B comments:

> You definitely feel better if you get big ticks and you just hope that you are doing your job anyway, but their actual value… are we jumping through hoops to meet their ticky boxes? I think they are of value, but I mean… obviously there has to be some kind of inspection process and I think from our point of view, it did a lot for the morale of staff, yes it did…Good returns. I don't know how that would have been the other way but I think it was of value and there has to be some kind of audit.

Despite the 'feel good' factors of successful visits, this is overshadowed (in the view of many managers) because of the associated demands placed on institutions by the HMIE. Numerous examples emerge in the fieldwork of disruption and inconvenience to the general running of the colleges, Various demands on general running costs, the student experience and diminishing levels of take up of staff development in the run up to a visit are evident in manager's accounts. Meeting the demands of the HMIE involves the commitment of various resources, with managers sometimes cast in the role of a reluctant 'persuader', tasked to convince other staff of the legitimate benefits of external policy initiatives through internal translation.

During the fieldwork the official rhetoric of the HMIE shifted from 'inspection' towards a 'review' or 'proportionate review model'; differentiated by various levels of confidence that the HMIE has in an institution. Despite the rhetoric of transformation, evidence from the study suggests that both colleges and the HMIE

are experiencing difficulty moving away from the language and mind set of audit and inspection. When the fieldwork commenced, College (C) was due for a HMIE visit, although the vast majority of managers report that informal briefings by HMIE officers (prior to the visit) outlining the different elements of the visit, suggests a series of audit and inspection demands rather than a review model.

Further evidence from managers notes that HMIE demands are framed by performance assumptions, with visits often about checklists, which tends to, "kill a lot of the spark" [innovation] as one manager (College C) put it. There is a significant amount of opinion from managers that the HMIE lack levels of creativity and innovation as an institution. Some managers report that the HMIE are more concerned with an audit function, much of this being put down to the influence of the Funding Council and the wider public audit regime emphasis on making institutions accountable and auditable bodies with a focus on prudence through scrutiny. A significant characteristic is the external operational pressure from the HMIE whereby one senior manager reports: "They set the official parameters within which we work". So, the legitimate framework of quality is through adherence to a business process model that stresses institutions should conform to a standard of governance.

Recent moves towards forms of quality self-certification do perhaps illustrate that institutions have been influenced and undergone a process of on-going education by the HMIE since incorporation to produce quality in an official form. Hence, delegated or devolved authority of colleges to self-regulate is subject to colleges receiving complimentary reports for producing certain externally determined standards. For colleges failing to perform and conform to prescription, a more rigorous inspection/review process will be constituted by the HMIE. In effect, the impression is one whereby the state agency is still setting the agenda, but by concentrating on 'a lighter touch'. Where there is doubt over the quality of an institution the state agency employs a 'heavier hand', with more resources targeted bringing into line, those more recalcitrant colleges.

5.2.4 *Embedding intra-organisational relational legitimacy*

Some managers consider the pre-incorporation configuration of the HMIE, (under local authority control) as a time when HMI inspections were useful to colleges in bringing about change in the sector. Opinion exists amongst managers that the HMIE (since the evolution of SLA's in the post Funding Council era) now has a diminished academic role in that it cannot influence quality issues that have financial implications for the Funding Council. A senior manager (College A), reports:

> They [HMIE] have absolutely no influence on the funding council in terms of additional resources to help you to do better. The funding methodology doesn't allow it.

Another manager (College C) states that,

> The HMI were previously not quite God, [but now], they are under orders from the Funding Council …they [Funding Council] call the shots.

Colleges are subjected to a very clear external state agenda for greater public scrutiny as a consequence of HMIE visits to colleges. A manager in College A recounts a discussion they had with an Inspector (HMI)

> The HMI reporting officer for the follow-up [visit to evaluate recommendations from the initial college inspection] told …in advance that they'd been told by the Funding Council to be more stringent, more thorough in the follow up.

Many of the managers interviewed speak of real tensions, with more critical espousals referring to a perceived political agenda that the HMIE adheres to as a consequence of their service level contract with the Funding Council:

> I think they are Government agents basically I don't believe that they are independent. I certainly don't believe that they are educationally driven. I think they are politically driven. (Cross-college manager College B)

A perception of political interference is borne out by some managers, through accounts of meetings where individual HMI's had been candid about their role and the types of constraints 'they', as HMI's faced. Such experiences of managers, only serves to heighten views, that the system is created to serve the demands of political masters, but lacks meaningful accountability. A cross-college manager (College B), comments:

> It's more a question of this is the system and that's what you do and there is no discussion as to whether there is quality… I mean within the quality framework we ask for customer feedback but the HMIE never ask for customer feedback other than from Colleges as a centre not from departments, not from the people who are actually teaching, who have got to implement the system and I think that's hypocrisy.

Despite assertions that the SFC/HMIE relationship is a 'political marriage', at least one senior manager espouses the view, that despite the principles of the SLA, the working relationship between the Funding Council and HMIE is more estranged. The reason for this viewpoint is substantiated, whereby the HMIE considers itself to have legitimate expert status and works on behalf of the Government (as an independent agency) rather than being subordinated by the SLA. A senior manager (College A) reports that despite any affiliation there appears to be a "lack of joined –up thinking" between Funding Council directives and HMIE implementation.

> I don't think the Funding Council and the HMIE actually work together. The HMIE see themselves, as beyond and above the Funding Council. This is purely my perception, they see themselves as the academic guardians of quality and professionalism etc and the Funding Council has a service level agreement with them, they go out and do that to get the money. However, it

> appears as if there is no articulation between them in terms of 'that's what the funding council wants in terms of performance indicators or specific targets and it's the HMI going out to do that'. They don't, because that little stock of phrases and paragraphs, [used by HMI's in college inspection reports] doesn't bear any resemblance to anything you'll hear from the Funding Council.

Evidence from other managers, does suggest more specific types of control built into the SLA and the inspection agenda, depending on the externally defined level of importance of issues. Such constraints cast the HMIE to be a, "puppet of the Funding Council", as one manager (College B) put it, being less than objective. Due to this type of state relationship the HMIE is perceived to have developed a more audit focused role rather than developmental role, due to satisfying the demands of the SLA. The HMIE is vetting organisations on behalf of the Funding Council, with quality checks of institutions being formulated in line with an economic rationalist agenda. Where the HMIE are not confident in an institution's performance there is a requirement to submit an action plan to the Funding Council, with a follow up (by the HMIE) in consultation with the errant institution.

5.2.5 *Legitimising multiple quality agencies*

While the Funding Council (as the majority funding source) is the most significant external factor for colleges in conforming to quality functions, accounts from managers illustrate further pressure to comply with other awarding bodies. Various managers report that a feature of quality is multiple contacts with quality awarding agencies, which amounts to double figures in some cases. An obligation to conform to various awarding bodies inter alia, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scottish Quality Management Standards (SQMS) and Investors in People (IiP) necessitates standards maintenance. In line with policy initiatives, other agencies, i.e. Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) have had an increasing influence on the development of the curriculum and subsequently quality processes to maintain and enhance delivery

Managers' perception of external influences since incorporation is a plethora of quality awards, with each quality body operating different monitoring models. Managers perceive various quality inputs and outcomes as integral to resource allocation at a local level. Different types of operational demands are placed on institutions according to the purpose of quality and the nature of accreditation and credentials. The influences on quality emerge according to whether audits attract finance or are, being used for image and marketing purposes or are constituted as academic.

> The findings reveal that various external institutions (e.g. SQMS) require certain legitimate standards to be in place to ensure funding with colleges having to meet an increasing burden of different external audits. A general consensus exists that the various requirements of Local Enterprise Companies (LEC's) for the Scottish Government, for SQA and for the Funding Council create certain difficulties and lack of cohesion. To quote a Senior Strategic Manager, College B: "There is such a multiplicity of monitoring bodies with varying degrees of statutory authority that it is still a bit of a quagmire".

Managers report that a failure to accommodate external demands would result in sanctions, for example losing SQMS certification. In practice, this ensures a particular approach to quality is necessary whereby the foundations of an assurance, compliance based system are present. One senior manager in College C comments:

> I don't think they [i.e. SQA, SQMS] particularly drive us towards quality improvement or a quality culture, but they make sure that the foundations are there by checking our systems [and] making sure that they are quite rigorously implemented.

The suggestion is that an understanding of quality can be separated along conformance, other systemic demands and improvement. Contrasting with conformance factors associated with financial reward, are other quality awards that are more clearly associated with image or marketing factors, an example being the

IiP award. Managers, who support IiP, refer to the award as conferring a certain amount of institutional prestige because of a focus on employee development. Managers suggest mixed responses about the efficacy of IiP as a 'quality badge'.

At the time of the fieldwork, College A are ceasing to adopt the IiP, because of a perception amongst management that the processes do not provide a sufficiently credible developmental approach. Likewise in College C, some senior managers view the Investors in People (IiP) process as not being challenging enough for improvement to flourish. In contrast College B regards itself as, "the first college to commit to IiP in 1992" (senior manager, College B). Some senior managers in College B feel a more qualitative input to quality processes have certain legitimate benefits that contrasts with the harder quantitative affiliations (numbers and targets) more in keeping with funded activity. This in turn suggests that variation and complexity are emergent depending on a number of local management contingencies with senior managers as significant corporate agents in the adoption and sponsorship of quality.

A senior manager (College C) comments that the Scottish FE sector approach to quality is not co-ordinated, which creates continual institutional demands in terms of accreditation and heavy maintenance.

> It's it a bit Hydra-like really, you get one bit of it sorted out and then you know another audit process comes in through the back door, they do keep popping up in relation to new initiatives and different bodies get created which then want to audit.

Choices about the adoption of quality on a meso (institutional) level are founded on the predominant macro influences of state policymaking and who provides immediate financial support for learning and teaching, which colleges rely on for the majority of their funding. Most activity is quality assessed and enhanced through the HMIE on behalf of the Funding Council, propelling distinct characteristics of scrutiny.

A multiplicity of audit bodies, by definition, means meeting targets in post incorporation FE, both in a formal and informal sense, placing certain demands on institutions. A fear amongst some managers is that crude funding measures tied to performance will lead to Principals doing the 'safe thing' (in economic terms) with a curriculum offer, which would be contrary to the institutions mission of accessibility and community provision.

5.2.6 *Establishing institutional legitimacy*

External pressures are features in the quality regime of FE, synthesized on a meso (institutional) level, by increasing levers of control. Symptomatic of the manufacturing of legitimate authority (at the time of incorporation) for colleges in the study, was a period of transformation, whereby FE colleges adjusted as quasi-business institutions. Decision-making in the managerial regime is framed by cost curbs, efficiency and partnered by quality targets devised centrally by state agents. Specific targets are devolved within incorporated institutions, by local corporate agents, supported by internal control functions e.g. quality units, whereby an internalizing of governance takes place, which compounds regulation and control.

With the break from local authority control, senior managers (corporate agents) became integral to effective regime evolution, being reconciled at organisational level by responses to first order market and corporate control policy drivers stressing enhanced accountability. The interplay between the macro state influences and internal configuration of colleges is acknowledged by managers. One senior strategy manager (College B) reports external measures and influences are, "probably quite sensible… it's what you would design for yourself anyway". Less direct control appears to have created more anxiety, which results in the rise of internal control mechanisms through the vehicle of accountability.

The findings reveal the almost 'Greenfield status' of colleges from 1993, meant a lot of work having to be done in establishing legitimate affiliations and attachments. This corresponds with Laird, (2002) about little advice on quality at the time of

incorporation. An example of where this process begins and the consequential requirements of incorporation are explained by a senior manager (College B):

> The time of incorporation was quite exciting and there was a lot of work to be done in the college…When we came here there were no systems at all. There were no finance systems, no personnel systems, no nothing, so we basically had to start from scratch and provided all the services in college that used to be provided for us by Strathclyde Regional Council.

Legitimate ownership and affiliation provided an impetus for establishing, 'categories of conduct and rules and procedures' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) in the internal reconfiguration of colleges as institutions of accountability (from passive to active quality). First order control mechanisms (e.g. Funding Council) have required the three institutions to engender similar shapes and processes in line with a corporate managerial regime, which suggests pseudo-ownership. A senior manager (College B) describes events in the following terms:

> [From] incorporation then you had this feeling of being on your own as an individual. You were disenfranchised from the national service in a sense. Now, what that meant was that you became much more aware of your funding, of student numbers, of the performance indicators, that were produced every year. And, therefore you took on the responsibility at college level for quality and you realised that, if you were going to survive, and you were going to be adjudged (sic) by many external agencies

Senior managers' (across the three institutions) perceptions of devolved autonomy is of colleges having more of a driving control over their quality improvement strategies and performance, tempered by external state control mechanisms, to create auditable performance. Incorporation brought with it certain practical with rhetorical freedoms to develop and control quality, although the reality from the findings has been one of the institutions being, "hamstrung by external agendas", or that the sector was, "no longer a Cinderella service, but hampered by external factors", as a

senior manager (College A) reports. A leader affiliate from College A, acknowledges perceived benefits, but at the same time is critical of certain outcomes:

> In post incorporation colleges there are just so many issues that you have to consider about the students' experience, the students' finance, the students' guidance which are all in good things but just because you have to tick the boxes doesn't mean that the actual experience for the student gets better. Sometimes we end up using these sources to allow us to demonstrate to those externally that we've done what we ought to be doing, you actually lose focus on the students themselves and that is a complete travesty, and there are issues there.

The senior manager suggests that the control demands of quality audits are stretching across all areas of college life. The forms and processes at meso level are being transformed with agenda setting inculcated with a 'quality feel' to accommodate state agencies requirements to meet with and address Ministerial Priorities for the FE sector. To cope with the exigencies associated with the external pressures, internal structures have appeared to evolve with internal actors becoming reference points in the dissemination of quality matters. The pre 1993 (bureau-professional) structures of quality were dominated by more of an informal culture although such forms of regulation now appear as anachronisms in FE, with out of date value systems and an illegitimate discourse status.

5.2.7 *Legitimation of data production*

Various senior managers in the research report that the level of importance for data exists on two levels. First, the financial data that is submitted to the Funding Council can attract severe penalties if a college is more than two percent below its targets, whereby there is a claw back by the Council. A senior manager (College B) makes the comment:

> For the data that is submitted, which relates to funding, there are severe penalties. If, for example, well let's say you're more than two per cent below

> your target, you have to pay the money back, and most colleges are in quite critical financial circumstances. That could well be a major and serious matter in terms of college's ability to continue trading as it currently is

Respondents question the validity of some performance indicators (Pi's) particularly those relating to academic delivery and student performance. Externally inspired measures do not reflect other important aspects of the student experience; distance travelled, value added or soft skills (particularly important measures for each of the colleges in the study due to the levels of deprivation in the areas they serve). The use value of performance indicators (as a comparison) with other colleges is criticised as limited. A senior manager (College A) describes the current performance measures as: "One indicator and they are, not the sole indicator". Another senior manager (College C) adds that performance indicators are contested because they are: "Very very crude and often misused", or for being "too hard" and focus on definitive outcomes rather than processes.

A general assumption among managers is that the Funding Council has not yet made a serious attempt to incorporate softer measures into a performance equation due to difficulties with setting criteria for certain measures (distance travelled by students or added value). Given this scenario, a general viewpoint is that the performance indicators in use are a driver and measure, although too much emphasis cannot be placed on them, because they do not adequately reflect the experience of many of the students at colleges. The point of potential conflict between the institution on one level and the funding body (with its arm of inspection HMIE) is framed by the legitimacy of targets. A senior manager (College B), reports:

> But to the people that really matter, the folk that pay us [Funding Council], over seventy per cent of our income obviously Pi's [performance indicators] are important. They are a yardstick by which they measure whether they are getting value for money. That will be communicated and back communicated from the Inspectorate to the Funding Council and from the Inspectorate to the college and from the Inspectorate to the public if the situation is less than

> satisfactory. Or, if the situation is satisfactory of course it will also report that as well. So yes, I think external pressure is real, some of it is imagined, but it's mainly real.

A perception exists that the demands of the evidence driven environment, is becoming tighter, with work being proof driven and subsumed in paperwork. A manager, from College A reports: "You prove everything with formal measurement and an evidence base".

The accounts of managers, suggest that legitimised quasi-scientific approaches are constituted by formality. A senior manager from College B exemplifies the demands of formal quality and an evidenced based system.

> You have to have an evidence base for assertions you make. One or two of the documents, list [College B] as being in the Premier League of tertiary education in [FE]. Well, somebody is going to challenge that statement and say well ok if you are supposed to be operating in the premier league, you are obviously top notch; can you prove it? And that's what happens in all these quality audits whether it's an HMI inspection an audit general office issue or SQA, whatever the audit is or various systems, all the time you are asked to prove it. So I think that's affected the protocols and the processes in the ways of working that I have that every single time I'm conscious they are not just doing something but why am I doing it and once I do it have I got the evidence, can I marshal that and keep that together because it is going to be asked for at some particular point? So it's about saying why you are producing that level of quality and then be able to prove that that is the appropriate level of quality.

From August 2003, Funding Council performance indicators for colleges have been published for the first time in an effort to achieve some form of common standards or benchmarking in FE. While some managers agree with benchmarking, there is a general concern (across groups) about the legitimate basis of external targets, which

fails to appreciate local nuances. In all three colleges, managers mention that without a consideration of the local circumstances it is impossible to adequately assess an institutions' performance. Part of the equation is the use of softer targets (for quality measures) which more intelligently acknowledges quality improvement. During the fieldwork there were conciliatory moves by the Funding Council in partnership with the HMIE to introduce some aspects that incorporated softer targets, although this did not diminish management scepticism

5.2.8 *Legitimation through consent (Self-evaluation)*

Later quality developments (post-1997) have focused on cultural change, with the ways of talking about quality having undergone an evolution in the period since incorporation. Quality assurance systems built on regulatory factors now coincide with ideas of reflection and evaluation in a hybrid form, which can be configured as forms of ideological control. The 'good' professional actor is considered according to whether they embody certain characteristics, which are familiarized through the discourse of quality. The concept of Self-evaluation (see Chapter Two) has been a factor in the development of quality in Scottish FE. Further, models of classroom observation (inspired by the HMIE using their sector authority) are intended to employ more devolved monitoring on a more regular level to delivery. At the heart of this quality development, is a movement from assurance based models to those founded on improvement, the fulcrum of which, is criteria and indicators developed by the HMIE. It is anticipated that for a regime to establish legitimacy, it will need to go beyond (just) compliance measures associated with assurance models and progress towards consent and improvement models. The embodiment of change is that practitioners become more evaluative about learning and teaching.

The findings demonstrate that while industrial quality assurance models (with their systems to check and command compliance) are embedded in FE, forms of quality improvement are also integral to the quality processes of colleges. The introduction of Self-evaluation and the continuous improvement (consent building models) is symptomatic of a move towards the establishment of a more mature quality regime. The findings reveal procedures and levels of administration symptomatic of a

regime, with course teams affiliating from delivery to planning aspects of the education process. Evaluation of performance takes place in various ways (i.e. by the team, by the institution and by wider sector bodies e.g. the HMIE).

The rhetoric of Self-evaluation encourages colleges to become self-regulating institutions and to move away from quality systems solely hinging on procedures and policies. The perception of Self-evaluation amongst managers is one of increased involvement by all actors. The comments of a manager (College C), sums up a general consensus across the study: "With self-evaluation there is quite a lot of engagement, it's more like an active process than trying to thrash out yet another procedure".

The research illustrates that quality assurance systems, tend to coexist with the later continuous improvement models. Underpinning quality development is the normative glue of audit or making quality more auditable through performance. Continuous improvement models tend to gloss over the issues of control inherent in systems of quality. A common critique voiced by some respondents (mainly lecturers) is that irrespective of process, quality in colleges is paper intensive and audit driven. The findings reveal that the winning of consent is becoming central to legitimising the quality regime with agents in institutions being encouraged to be more responsible for improvement and enhancement. Corporate agents consider Self-evaluation as the way forward to achieve a quality consensus in FE with classroom practitioners being educated to participate in becoming accountable and auditable.

The fieldwork findings also demonstrate that that opting out of quality defined within the terms of managerialism is made (and has been made); increasingly difficult, as the requirements of external and internal quality mechanisms have impacted on agents across all levels, not just in a ritualistic sense. Self-evaluation has become embedded in the three institutions as a mechanism to deliver quality, not just to satisfy external bodies, but going some way to establishing a level of consent within the institutional regime.

Emerging from the fieldwork there is evidence of a mounting pressure in institutions to introduce more classroom observation to evaluate the impact of teaching strategies on learning. The responses of colleges are subject to certain disputes over the legitimacy and validity of the processes of observation being proposed. The main opponents of classroom observation are lecturers, on the grounds of a flawed management rationale underpinning the initiative, a lack of commitment to resources, with the processes of observation (as additions to those for teacher training) being in contravention of EIS trade union policy.

The findings suggest that commitment to the rules and rituals of quality have tended to become more important than the actual service delivery. There is a rhetoric associated with quality improvement, externally influenced by funding providers, and internally translated by college management. Continuous quality improvement is both protracted and necessitates many staff having to be trained to think and work differently (using a forced language) or to utilize information more effectively, resulting in various work effort violations.

5.3 Sources of affiliation

5.3.1 *Structures, posts and functions*

Featuring prominently in the post-incorporation shift of status for colleges was the preparation of ground for, in-house quality audit systems and reconfigured hierarchy, establishing the norms, routines and functions (with its specific artifacts) to include enhanced levels of administration. The dominance of corporate managerial 'affiliations and attachments' (as opposed to the collegial) in the three colleges are illustrated through the growth of quality structures and processes (posts, responsibilities and corporate practices). This research illustrates that in line with the managerial modes of domination has come a system of command and support structures that is sympathetic to a business process model. Such mechanisms also promote forms of bureaucratic control with quality as a distinct mechanism of career enhancement.

The colleges in the research now have an internal sub-organisation layered around structures and forms of administration. Quality units do similar things, albeit differentiated in terms of the size, budget and institutional profile of a college (previously, Chapter Four, gave an indication of the size and budget of the colleges). The development of quality, at institutional level, whether as structures or in practices have steadily grown (from incorporation) to resemble a comprehensive strategy, incorporated within the modes of the strategic and operational plans.

What the findings portray is that quality is more embedded in the college calendar and has moved beyond 'doing it as well as possible' and then forgetting about it. This means quality can no longer be achieved and left but continues to be embedded, diffused and reproduced. There is an implanted level of permanence, frequency and fixture in the institutions whereby the audit always 'lurks'. New institutional roles, job titles and agential functions within the structures across colleges range from Quality Managers, Quality Advisers and Quality Officers, reporting to a line manager or Head of Quality, with a link to the main senior strategic managers, being Vice Principal and Principal (Chief Accounting Officer). Agents have a specific aim to define, manage and monitor quality. There are direct links between the quality management function and the Senior Management Group, across all three colleges. This internal regulation is particularly evident in College C, where the quality function has engendered an active policing role. This perceived remit is described by respondents responsible for the quality function as "the College Police", tasked to seek out non-conformance and nullify it. The emphasis on procedural conformance, in a more explicit regulatory function, establishes attachments with more punitive, regulatory outcomes. Effectiveness and performance are measured as a factor of governance, whereby institutional reassurance becomes a feature in the processes of quality.

The proliferation of quality posts has meant the visible creation and emergence of physical structures and routine events. To illustrate, quality units, now occupy distinctive, permanent, space in the organisations, with a staff structure tasked to develop an internal control system of policies and procedures. In two of the colleges

(A, C) with more clearly developed hierarchies and quality functions, space goes with the distinctive quality function. The Quality units and functionaries are housed within a specific space and environment, while in the smaller college (B) the lead role of Quality Officer is given space with a title on the office door, but the quality function is more diverse, symptomatic of budget constraints. The lead officer role in College B is also subsumed within a substantial additional teaching remit. Across all three colleges quality events have become part of the college calendar i.e. 'Quality Weeks', where practitioners are coached or educated in being corporate quality conscious.

Quality committees and short life working groups on quality, incorporating the wider staff groups are prominent features in colleges. While Quality units in each institution, have some accent on differences, their role is wide ranging, embracing more and more of college activity incorporating; audits, customer feedback, internal customer satisfaction, surveys, annual course review, internal moderation, planning, reviewing and contributions to the strategic planning process. The levels of administration needed to support quality in the colleges assist in establishing the notion of a corporate quality regime, propelled by the meta neo liberal priorities through the operational logic of managerialism. Various agential projects have a vested interest in establishing, diffusing and reproducing the quality regime.

Key post holders in the three organizations all have a distinctive quality remit with a hierarchy assisting in the embeddedness of quality as a regulatory function. It is evident that careers can now be built on participation in quality both within institutions and across the sector as the occupational status of accountants and auditors is enhanced. The quality functionary in varying respects has acquired quasi expert authority because quality itself has become the protégé of managerialism.

During the fieldwork it emerged that there is a concerted effort by Quality units across colleges in actively seeking to shape and to 'win the hearts and minds' of staff. The notion of gaining wider consent and obviating some of the recalcitrance is constituted as a specific demand on corporate agents in the quality regime. The

development role of college quality units assists in raising awareness and selling the message of quality. This enhancement function creates a series of demands around "getting people on board", and developing "a shared vision" as depicted by the quality manager (College C). Part of the message for the Quality Unit in College C is to disseminate quality through 'Roadshows', where a clear message is "We don't manage the quality, you manage the quality" as a quality manager put it. Perceived failure in this case is put down to the maturity level of the system, which could be obviated through demands for more active engagement and adherence (by non-conformists) to the practices and values of the system.

5.3.2 *Relational affiliation*

The internal manifestation of quality is also consolidated by wider sector affiliation of agents. The findings infer much of what Halliday (1994) determines about perceptions of quality being dependent on where actors are in the hierarchy (previously discussed in Chapter Two). It also suggests that influence on policymaking within organizations and in the wider sphere of the FE sector is dominated by factors such as agency membership, to include relational power i.e. wider involvement and ability to influence sector decision making processes.

The relational affiliation of structures and actors is dependent on positioning within and beyond an institution, which can influence how functionaries perceive the quality regime. Wider sector involvement in the quality regime also signifies certain levels of relational control and consent (particularly amongst managers).

While the three institutions have been subjected to the rigours of external measurement, there is a process whereby several inter-organizational structures enable cooperation in constructing responses to the Funding Council and HMIE on policy. This acts as a network of influence in the system, necessary for continued support at local institutional level. One such example is the Central Scotland Quality Improvement Forum, where agents representing colleges (managers) are able to network. A respondent (College C) comments on the usefulness of the committee for managers because they can: "Compare notes on quality with other colleges

examining policies and procedures and facilitating joint responses" [to the Funding Council or HMIE].

Furthermore, the role of Associate Assessors (AA's) college managers (seconded as generic functionaries) to assist the HMIE in college inspections, further confirms the constellation of interests and relational allegiances which support the legitimacy of the quality regime. The framework of quality has created a rationale for AA's to attach an increasingly strong set of professional ties to a surrogate state employer, which dilutes systemic criticism. Such regime affiliation of AA's is utilised by colleges to gather market intelligence or by individuals for career enhancement. Making a transition from being Associate Assessors seconded to the HMIE to a full-time career position within the Inspectorate is an example of how careers can be built. The current quality agenda supports such career strategy formation, both in terms of quality functionaries within an institution, but also the wider sector opportunities. In this regard quality can and is being hijacked for institutional and individual purposes.

Consultation between the Funding Council and colleges on such matters as performance indicators has led to this interplay between colleges and the Council on several levels. Various intermediary bodies, in the FE sector can orchestrate lobby mechanisms illustrated by the relational influence and role of both Principals and Chair's of Boards of Management (sometimes other senior managers) can have through the sectors representative body the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC). The Quality Management Development Group also exemplifies Funding Council initiatives to oversee the development of quality, which includes senior managers from colleges. Formal consultations on quality by the Funding Council (at least one a year in practice) are considered as necessary by some managers. In seeking to gain levels of consent amongst managers, certain views are sought by the Council, albeit in an effort to generate an understanding of why state agency demands are made. One leader affiliate's (College C) perception is that principals are now better organised to lobby state agents due to sector structures, i.e. the Principals' Forum,

where the potential existed for college leaders to speak with, “one voice” on important issues.

Another senior manager (College B) considers the involvement of college finance managers to be of particular significance, due to status recognition that the group is: “Quite a high level prestigious group, with quite a lot of influence”.

The same manager further reports that relational influence is as a consequence of:

> Very good networking amongst each other, it forms the basis of strength, so that we can support each other, we help each other and if we have a problem then we also have very good links with the Association of Scottish Colleges.

Respondents reveal that being affiliated to certain working groups or committees, means that some quality matters can be addressed. Having representatives (Principals or senior managers involved as Funding Council members) is viewed positively by those managers involved in such activity. Wider sector involvement allows leader affiliates to state the case for individual colleges and confers certain institutional advantages. A leader affiliate (College C) comments:

> I get a feel for what’s behind some of the decisions and circulars that come out - in this colleges interest - because when we’re debating things [back in college] I can sometimes say ‘well I don’t think that what’s behind it [i.e. Funding Council policy] we don’t have to worry about that’.

Other managers have reservations about the efficacy and substance of such relationships. Concerns exist about the real level of debate, influence and change that can be achieved, in shaping the direction of Council policy suggesting a certain level of tokenism. One senior manager (College C) says:

> A minor problem is that they [Principals/senior managers] are not necessarily representative or don't necessarily have a specialism in quality or whatever we need to focus them on.

Significant amounts of opinion express concern that sector affiliation by senior members of staff could merely serve to insulate individual career or institutional aspirations, rather than sector improvement. The danger for some respondents is that affiliates become, "messengers of the Council", as one senior manager in College C remarks. The findings reveal that senior managers in FE are potentially complicit in modelling the organizational field to assume isomorphic tendencies in line with a marketised agenda.

Despite perceptions of corporate agents making some impact, a majority of respondents including a senior manager (College C) convey a reality that institutions can make very little impression on the important Funding Council decisions.

> [W]e can make dents on what goes into the quality indicator; we can't significantly change the Funding Council or the Scottish Executive's [Government] idea of us being publicly accountable for funding. There are indicators that we can't influence. We can't persuade them that we can do, for example, a better job for less people and that would be more valuable to the community than ever expanding numbers.

5.3.3 *Collective affiliation: Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)*

While the EIS represents the vast majority of lecturers in Scotland and is able to promote interests with the Scottish Government and SFC the demise of national bargaining has created certain difficulties at college level. Since incorporation, disparity has evolved between colleges because while the EIS can outline bargaining frameworks and national percentage increases in pay deals to local EIS branches these are subject to local negotiation and are invariably ignored by management at meso level. Changes to terms and conditions and a pay gap, continue to develop between lecturers and management within and between colleges. The notion of

'resource rich' and 'resource poor' colleges is affecting pay differentials across colleges. Management is also free to recognise other employee bodies and incorporate them into bargaining arrangements with the potential to create conflict between employees. However, a complexity exists whereby many managers are EIS members which some view as positive (in relation to partnership models) while other majority groups (lecturers) tend to consider such arrangements as undermining their position. Local EIS officers are generally lecturers. The threat of de-recognition of local EIS branches is also a possibility if bargaining arrangements break down.

On a national level the EIS body can lobby the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council and HMIE on various matters including changes to curriculum e.g. Higher Still arrangements and quality matters. However, the vulnerability of lecturers is often determined by the strength of affiliation the local EIS branch has to the institution and wider FE regime (i.e. key representatives or activists at a national level). What emerges in the study is that local union affiliation and intervention in the quality regime is as a consequence of certain changes to conditions of work resulting from increased administration linked to quality matters. Much depends on how quality itself is defined. A union representative (College A), comments:

> At the end of the day, the lecturers see quality in one way and management may see it in other ways. They [management] may bring in other criteria like economics, efficiency and all the rest of it whereas we are maybe looking at the quality of the content of the course. So we are looking at it slightly differently.

Moreover union officers are generally aware of some of the underpinning motives of the quality agenda. A union representative in College A likens the quality agenda to: "A Trojan horse… quality maybe claimed that this will help us but in fact it may be turned around and used in another way to get greater efficiencies". During the study evidence emerges of local union officers being more affiliated to quality matters as a consequence of concerns being brought to them by union members.

5.4 Sources of transmission

The notion of *transmission* is not considered as a top-down process, although due to the domination by some structures and groups of the quality agenda leads to suggestions that in managerial regimes, the embodiment of management as the solution is evident, through the ideological definitions of quality and operational processes with the right to manage remaining sacrosanct. Evident in the findings is a series of control mechanisms at the heart of the features and operations of the regime.

5.4.1 Corporate agents (senior managers)

5.4.1.1 *Framing ideological control: the discourse of quality*

Examining the way managers interpret and perceive the meanings and language of quality assists in establishing an underpinning rationale and logic to understand the transmission of the regime. Quality is circumscribed with a political logic, which coincides with an economic rationalist approach. A driver for initiating and establishing an economized framework for quality is incorporation and the adoption of a business process model. A radical shift in institutional and sector methods for defining quality, was precipitated by the pressures of corporate status, manifested in prescription and tighter management controls. Marketisation has fostered changed conceptions of quality facilitating certain forms of transmission.

The managers in the study define what quality means to them, alongside how a changed quality language has continued to evolve in the post incorporation era. It is evident that meanings of quality are multi-dimensional. Quality can be understood on several levels, which can coincide with practice or be merely part of management rhetoric. Evidence suggests that there is an impasse between the quality rhetoric and its implementation in practice. An understanding of quality ranges from being purely one-dimensional and quasi-market in orientation, to more complex applications, whereby practice suggests forms of autonomy, improvement and empowerment. The conception of quality amongst managers corresponds with Halliday's (1994) interpretation (see Chapter Two) whereby definitions coincide with affiliation to certain groups and an ability to influence discourse in the FE sector. Managers tend

to embrace the post-incorporation quality regime and yet at the same time some hold onto conceptions of the type of professional autonomy, characterised by a pre-incorporation era and bureau-professional regimes. A relevant factor to explain such outcomes is the long periods the majority of managers have spent in FE, where previous classroom experience is not uncommon amongst the groups across all of the institutions. While the initiation, establishment, diffusion and reproduction of a quality regime, has broadened the nature of managerial control, this is still contingent on a retained professional judgement, albeit it is under considerable strain.
Some managers related quality to the achievement of progress defined by a quasi-market framework, against a process of learning with identifiable steps or, "formal proof of progress" as one manager (College C) put it. A distinct feature of the purely economic rationalist fitness for purpose interpretation is assurance-based quality, with systems in place to detect non-conformance.

The post-incorporation emphasis on the market is also illustrated as quality is associated with marketing knowledge and image. Another manager (College B) explained that quality is:

> A badge which professional educators wear, either in terms of student achievement or attracting student numbers or enjoyable learning, it can take various forms, but there is certainly 'an image thing' about quality.

The same manager explains that quality is also generally regarded as a "reinforcement of professional standards", which could result in a dispute about who defines and owns quality. Perceptions about quality include 'enrichment', although recognition is apparent that contested meanings could lead to certain disputes about ownership and professionalism. A senior manager (College B) comments that for quality to exist there needs to be:

> A professional feeling as though they [lecturers] are making a difference in terms of the contribution to teaching and to do with the student experience being valuable.

Despite management rhetoric about the value of quality, the findings illustrates a more common pragmatic quasi-market understanding of quality which is likely to influence most practice outcomes. Various managers determine that a more realistic picture of quality is translated through the medium of; efficiency, results, policies and procedures (i.e. requirements of state agencies).

Overall, managers do acknowledge that quality has continued to change and evolve from the period of incorporation. While a corporate managerialist quality is a reality, later initiatives i.e. Self-evaluation, has left some managers feeling that more positive meanings could be attached at institutional level. There is a perception that a quality agenda founded on continuous improvement, enhancement and reflection, could be easier to 'sell' to classroom practitioners at college level. More progressive approaches, away from assurance control to consent models are part of managers understanding of quality. A leader affiliate in College C explains:

> I think the general perception in colleges was that it was seen as all about sort of systems to control you… now it's not that at all. It's a motivating force. It's about what drives you to keep on wanting to innovate, and do things better and differently.

Further acknowledgement is forthcoming of a more holistic approach to quality. A senior strategic manager from College C provides a comprehensive picture, which suggests that quality is more complex, fluid and pervasive than a 'fitness for purpose' understanding of the phenomena:

> The definition of quality I suppose defines your whole approach to it and I'm going with half a dozen plus definitions. It's not the simplistic 'fitness for purpose' that's part of the story. The substantial definition about quality to me … is about ensuring that performance consistently improves. I'm saying benchmarking in its lucid sense, I don't simply mean performance indicators, but benchmarking includes a sign of quality which might be staff absence because it's related to staff morale. A sign of quality might be stakeholder

> feedback. It might be about a number of complaints. It might be a whole collection of indicators that characterise for you what your successful business or process ought to be doing and it's not as simplistic as fitness for purpose. So rather than say I have a definition of quality I work to, I have a definition of quality improvement I work to, because there is the whole concept of customers or stakeholders as clients and the basic concept of quality and quality improvement is the people can identify who those customers, stakeholders, students or whatever are, that they have identified their needs and are increasingly getting better at meeting those needs, which is almost a marketing definition of quality.

The manager accepts improvement as a driver for marketing purposes, where rules and forms of strategy need to be present. A more sweeping, all embracing understanding indicates that the rhetoric of quality is being transformed, although the evidence is clear that a hybrid approach is present in colleges. Assurance co-exists alongside ideas of improvement and empowerment although this is mediated by the sinews of effectiveness, efficiency and performance measures.

Some corporate agents are keen to advocate positive changes and outcomes in post incorporation FE, reasoning that the development of quality has reached a stage, whereby there is a common understanding in institutions. Other managers are clearly critical of the quality agenda because of the demands placed on colleges. The majority of respondents (occupying a middle ground position) are committed to a shift from quality just being about systems and procedures. One manager comments that things have changed away from: "somebody telling you what you may or may not do, plus the boxes you must tick". Managers who are advocates of continuous quality improvement tend to suggest that a shift in conceptualization and practice is occurring. Such managers, contextualise quality as being about inclusiveness, to encompass students and clients, their experiences and subsequent efforts to improve user experience. A senior manager (College C) reports on how a changed understanding of quality has influenced practice:

> ...People have actually started to understand that the performance indicators and all those really dry things that they have been filling in boxes about for years, actually means something in terms of the experience of the learner and that they can actually influence them. So I wouldn't say that there is a common understanding, but I would say that taking it broadly there is a gradual shift in perception of what it's all about.

There is a perception (amongst some managers) which reveals a strong connection between language and practice. Terms used to capture performance i.e. league tables, are seen as having politically threatening connotations. Instead, some managers believe the use of benchmarking and comparative performance is instigated by the Funding Council to engender consent. Quality becomes more acceptable and progressive (something to aim for). Since incorporation the language of quality has evolved so that performance and standards measurement co-exist with a less confrontational notion of Self-evaluation. The more optimistic managers envisage a gradual shift with less crude audits and more development monitoring in colleges. The development of management roles since incorporation means more expansive affiliations and career investment in the sector. Managers are now considered as the institutional 'movers and shakers' and have formed an increasingly distinctive set of professional ties across the FE sector.

Distinctive techniques are employed to "take the sharp edges off quality" as one manager (College A) put it. Some managers envisage the institutional legitimation of quality contributing to the dilution of institutional recalcitrance. The quality rhetoric provides the ideological space for general change mechanisms to be introduced e.g. increased administration, although such approaches are not always met with positive responses or result in positive outcomes. Not all managers are wholeheartedly committed to the economized quality rhetoric or notions of continuous improvement. In contrast to the advocates of the system other managers consider the demands of corporate quality to be a potential hindrance to their own job functions and the wider student experience.

5.4.1.2 *Agenda setting: market control and audit scrutiny*

Managers comment about the type of reports and level of reporting, which are now more complex, depending on the levels of finance attached. The main performance indicator (pi) and the source of most tension and pressure for college managers is the weighted sum (student unit of measurement) target awarded to colleges based on contracted activity with the Funding Council. As a consequence of students having monetary value, the impression given by managers is that quality has become economized, and so attracts more operational scrutiny.

Due to the convergent nature of audit, to cover more areas of college life this is influencing the operations of colleges. One manager (College C) comments: "There are more reports and more details within the reports". Another manager (College C) adds "We don't have a choice". Imposition is evident in the comments of a manager (College C) who refers to certain report requests.

> So there is a lot of work in these [reports], how you fill in the boxes, it's just thrust upon you [by the Funding Council] …let's just thrust this upon them at a very busy time of year, that kind of thing.

Many senior managers comment on the excessive operational demands of the audit regime, with a common understanding that quality audits (in their various forms) are unlikely to diminish due to the public audit regime. One senior manager (College A), suggests colleges are subjected to "the 365 day audit", due to the intensity, frequency, duplication and administrative burden of the quality function. The manager also comments:

> [It's] gas masks for gas leaks, [the proliferation of audits] issues have come up, so somebody has added that to theirs and it's because they all come with funding and it tends to be funding comes from different areas.

The research findings suggest an agenda and motivational force for the increase in activity is the audit friendly conditions, which are creating a naturalized environment

for the tentacles of audit to spread. A highly regulated sector means more institutional accountability.

The pre-incorporation world of the traditional settlement, which concentrated on the delivery of curriculum, (geared around assisting teachers to do just that) has been transformed into a service that purports to place the consumer as the centre of attention. Managerialism places more emphasis on information monitoring but this often constrains actors, through bureaucratic and audit rigour with a perception that this is at the cost to the frontline service to students. Regime accountability is marked by intensity breadth and volume, which is summed up by a senior manager (College B):

> At the time of incorporation there were no audits at all. Now we all feel we are audited to death and the teaching staff will tell you that *they* face all sorts of quality audits from the curriculum point of view, and they do.

Enforced institutional regulation (through audits) has produced unintended effects, i.e. unsustainable cost burdens, resulting in calls for simplicity from managers in the regime. A senior manager in College C illustrates disempowerment over decision making processes:

> You can talk to them [The Funding Council] but it's like talking to that wall there. They don't change tack very quickly and if they do it's only marginally for, you are stuck with it, it's just one of the prices you have to pay, and get on with it… I don't think it will go down [the level of audit], they do ask for more and more reports, it's difficult to see what benefit they get from the report.

The relationship between the colleges and the Funding Council is considered quite pragmatic, being based on conformance and compliance.

> They [Funding Council] have indicators they want you to report on and you have to use their templates their definitions, their models, when you report. (Senior Manager, College C)

The uncertainty and diversity of demands being placed on organisations mean that respondents do not know what to expect next, which impacts on an ability to plan. Managers report that a move to one audit body would make more financial sense and save duplication within colleges. A senior strategic manager (College A) confirms the need for audit simplification. ”I don’t see why we can’t just have one audit body that comes in; we know the standards and targets that are set for us”.

Managers report that the Funding Council wouldn’t have any concerns about colleges adding value to quality processes. The problem for colleges is that an already full quality agenda is unlikely to develop alternative structures. Perceived inertia and a lack of innovation are due to the pressures exerted by state agencies to meet and conform to the existing arrangements. One manager in College A reports: “There is no interest in us doing additional stuff, as long as we report our pi’s to them [Funding Council] in the way they ask”.

Viewpoints indicate a narrow spectrum of compliance, with very limited room for creativity and innovative ideas, leading another manager (College A) to convey a general opinion that, “If it’s not required by the Funding Council it won’t get done”. Some managers, hope that the demands of audit will not increase given a perception that any ‘slack’ in the system has already been used up. A divisional manager (College C), reports:

> I would like to think it wouldn’t get any worse. I mean obviously at the college, we get the demands from the Funding Council and my perception is that we seem to have to be more attentive to the Funding Council over recent years than we were previously…We are very accountable to various outside bodies and I feel that that obviously has ‘upped’ the anti’ for me but I can’t see how much more accountable we could possibly be to be honest with you,

> and therefore I think probably we are now at a level where it should level out, hopefully.

The findings do illustrate that the perpetuation of quality type structures evolving to meet external requirements tends to act as a self-fulfilling prophecy with implications on an operational level. A senior manager in College A comments:

> You can actually end up with three different versions of tick boxes just to say yes, we are doing that right, and while somebody is doing that there is a student banging a desk, waiting for someone to pay them some attention. So there are issues about how we use our resources.

The question posed by some managers focuses on creating a quality framework with a 'common currency' to satisfy multiple agencies. One senior strategic manager in College A considers it as, "the big challenge for the funding council and the HMI and Scottish Enterprise". There is a consensus amongst respondents that the demands of the quality audit regime are not cost effective and require a comprehensive overhaul towards simplification of policies, structures and processes. However, it cannot be said that state pressures are mono-causal factors and solely responsible for institutional quality approaches.

5.4.1.3 *Image production: promotional value through corporate control*

Numerous affiliations and attachments to external quality audit bodies constitute an "explosion", for one Senior Manager (College B). Aligned to this explosion of quality, is the investment of time by institutions gaining recognition from external organizations on quality issues. A senior manager (College B) sums up:

> It's now seen as being almost imperative that an organisation has some national quality award or affiliation and so all these things together have concentrated the mind wonderfully on quality.

"Quality increased dramatically" as senior manager (College C) comments as a tool for public celebration. The quality process has become part of the college's appreciation of the whole student experience. The status of the student, becoming a 'customer', 'client' and 'stakeholder' influenced a movement from passive to active interventionist quality, in an effort by institutions to 'show off' their quality prowess. The fieldwork evidence illustrates that the marketing of quality occurred across all functions, from the classroom to student facilities and estates management.

While the quality element for funding in the system is considered to be, 'minor' by leader affiliates (College A and C) there are several factors which impinge on the quality image of a college. Within the corporate managerialist modes of operation, the role of the customer or student is integral to funding and forms of measurement. A senior manager (College A) comments that a college feels a need to, "pay particular attention to their [students/customers] needs"

The findings illustrate how externally instituted quality processes such as HMIE reports (as part of the inspection/review process) provide valuable scope for marketing. While various respondents comment that HMIE documents did not constitute a wide readership, they provided the basis for reviewing the colleges – on the back of performance indicators. Positive HMIE reports can attract a certain amount of media coverage. One such example emerged during the fieldwork in College B, with a local newspaper report entitled: *'Simply the Best'*, following a successful report. Various senior managers', perceive the impact a poor HMIE review can have adverse consequences on an institution, because the process goes to the heart of the business of colleges. A senior manager (College B), reports: "HMIE visits are prepared for really quite assiduously". Marketing image and knowledge of the external environment have become quality factors in their own right, being part of standards maintenance. Yet at the same time, corporate image also serves to regulate the behaviour of agents to meet certain institutional expectations.

5.4.1.4 *Agenda setting and decision –making: embedding quasi-technical control*

The post 1993 transformation in FE has resulted in more stringent and transparent rational planning and evaluation processes being evident at college level. Across the three case studies, forms of quasi technical control mechanisms embody the setting of targets to align with externally imposed performance criteria. Institutional targets forms part of the strategic planning process as part of a rolling programme of performance assessment. Planning meetings are an integral and increasing function within college life to ascertain success in meeting performance indicators. Identifying any anomalies and re-setting targets, as necessary, becomes a focus for activity with the quality element as a central component of the business process model. There is a retrospective (rather than real time) nature to this planning and evaluation process, with repetition as a consistent thread. The aforementioned is time intensive, with adherence to frameworks, which are created on a national level through the Funding Council and HMIE (compounded at inspection level). A senior manager (College A) reports on target setting as part of a planning cycle:

> We've actually got the performance indicators up to 2005/6 in the strategic plan but they are always crystal ball gazing, you are not too sure exactly what is going to happen. So we kind of refine these targets year on year, on a rolling programme and then the strategic plan comes out. Once we know what the finances are in April, the operational plan appears and there are more detailed performance indicators there. So there are the performance indicators that we need to provide funding council, there are our own performance indicators, which can be things like 'What are the minimum standards of accommodation that we expect people to teach in, and also how we set retention recruitment targets.

This process of planning is protracted with an increasing involvement of staff on all levels in planning reviewing and evaluation. At its most basic, course teams generate the writing of course reports, which tie into a self-evaluation process across all factors in service delivery. Moreover, there is an emphasis on actors complying with quality processes. The findings reveal a level of dissatisfaction amongst more senior

managers that some lecturers are not being proactive in using quality intelligence more effectively. A senior manager in College A confirms this frustration.

> What we are trying to do is concentrate staff in quality units on the areas that they need to be better at actually using that information….We ask them to collect it [information] but then it just sits there, they don't do anything with it thereafter.

The suggestion is that more coaching of staff is necessary to produce a more refined evaluative performance ('make it more auditable'). While quality affiliation centres on compliance driven models, around the rules and rituals of planning and evaluation, the findings unveil ambiguities over whether this leads to a more consent and commitment driven quality practices. The agenda and decision –making is characterised on one level by rational objectivity, which enables a process to be established that is auditable. In short, the affiliations and attachments of agential projects in the regime have become more than just ceremonial, but are played out in a number of normative day to day operational practices.

5.4.2 Primary agents (middle managers)

5.4.2.1 *Framing ideological control: the discourse of quality*

The findings illustrate that while senior managers are arbiters, in the quality agenda as legitimated by institutional regimes, middle managers are operational functionaries. Middle managers are tasked to form teams, manage and evaluate the process of quality. Corporate agent status confers legitimate authority (as structural modelers) to initiate and establish the discourse of quality while the primary agential capacity of middle managers is an inhibitor due to a perceived lack of structural and cultural modeling faculty.

The understanding of quality as a 'common sense phenomenon' is contested by respondents. Of significant influence is middle manager input into the reproduction of quality and the maintenance of performance indicators. The conception of 'worth'

or ‘value’ attached to quality rests on whether contributions are antithetical to the general contribution of a business process model and the advancement of corporate quality. Some middle managers feel they are running a small business, with economy and competitiveness as common sense outcomes. However, a lack of corporate status combines with a shortage of committed support from senior managers towards middle managers, which influences levels of authority and autonomy.

Respondents comment that the change of discourse being used to support the structures of quality has gained a momentum in post incorporation colleges. More recalcitrant views about the excessive operational demands of quality demonstrate that the rhetoric espoused by external state agents is often subverted locally in translation and diffusion to suit meso level corporate agendas. Some middle managers supports economized agendas, and are keen (where opportunities arise) to be involved in the initiation and establishment of quality initiatives, despite increased demands. Subscription to the quality regime by some is rationalised as ‘showing willingness’ and being ‘seen to be positive’ about a corporate quality discourse. Such speculative commitment is because career progression often depends on adhering to particular discourse, quality knowledge or giving vocal support for the regime. In sharp contrast, there is a significant level of cynicism amongst other respondents who perceive quality as an attempt to colonise professional agendas, and as being an infringement on ownership and self-control.

Despite allegiances for or against, the majority of middle managers believe that a ‘new’ post 1993 language has evolved to support the quality function e.g. consumer demands, customer needs, client, self-evaluation etc. This forced language has been used to focus the minds of practitioners when writing quasi-technical reports and administering the system. A middle manager (College A) reports that a prescriptive and regulatory quality is necessary to clarify the requirements of the regime.

> They [senior managers/awarding bodies] weren’t very specific on how they expected you to comply with these broader definitions of quality and I think they’ve become a bit more specific as we said it makes the task of keeping up

> with what they want just that wee bit easier. Before you were always trying to guess what they meant by certain statements.

One view of quality, expressed by middle managers, is of an enhanced standard of learning as a consequence of a more interrogative quality regime. Albeit the findings reveal contested ideas about what constitutes improved quality experiences for students. Some middle managers advocate quality as defined by the whole student experience, whereas others focused on the classroom experience as being more relevant. Despite differences of opinion, common terminology i.e. 'measurable' and 'standards' as descriptors of quality are common in the vocabulary of middle managers across institutions. Evidence exists, which suggests that the operational demands of the quality system subvert what some middle managers believe to be 'real' quality, delivered to students through a valuable classroom experience. Middle managers are trying to cope with various demands (quality as a significant element) while avoiding too much displacement. The systems, ticking boxes and an extreme paper burden (compounded in the post 1999 Funding Council era) are viewed by many middle managers as reality of public service, although very cumbersome. A middle manager in College B espouses a critical, yet consistent viewpoint:

> I just feel that education has been in a serious decline over the last decade and that's not just my feeling that's a general one. What are management looking for here? Best values, best practice, an elimination of waste and things like that? It's a trade off of cost cutting against getting the numbers through and so on, and maybe this is just the way things are for the public service, and all public services are overloaded and creaking, they've all got performance indicators and so on.

Some middle managers consider the introduction of institutional Self-evaluation (from 1997) as using a more inclusive quality language. Support for institutional improvement suggests pragmatic adaptation for some middle managers. Nonetheless, a dichotomy exists, with agents supporting quality being tied to corporate market

logic, (a fact of life in public service). Other middle managers perceive the focus on the consumer as a device, which further encroaches on the bureau- professional.

5.4.2.2 *'Servants of the regime': corporate control*

Fieldwork evidence from middle managers stresses a more concentrated application of the quality agenda since the inception of the Funding Council. A middle manager (College A) reports on the visibility, structured nature and rules in the institutional regime.

> People talked about quality [pre-1999] but they didn't really I think provide you with enough background, enough real information about what they meant by quality at times, but I think that's changed in the last couple of years…It is quite formal and structured the way it's operating now…Now they will tell you. The public folder system on our e-mails systems [has] got all the policies for quality there, so help can be had first of all by looking at the different policies and then referring back to any member of the quality team.

Middle managers have a direct operational responsibility to ensure the implementation of quality policy, being responsible for audit tasks, yet they are also subject as the auditee to other systemic quality influences. There is an expectation amongst corporate agents, that middle managers will be enthusiastic agents of transformation.

Primary agents are expected to subscribe to quality committees, quality advisory groups or short-life working groups (evident in Colleges A and C). The development of institutional (meso level) quality committee structures are manifestations of external demands to assist and ensure a process of assurance, improvement and enhancement across the colleges. The quality committee in College A tends to cover everything (to do with quality) from; approval of new courses, performance indicators, the monitoring of student evaluations, plus recommendations to senior management. The role of participants in committee work is to disseminate information back to respective departments or curriculum areas. Encouraging middle

managers input to committee work is seen as an attempt to embed and consolidate a quality approach in colleges. Not all respondents view internal committees as necessarily positive, with a number of middle managers feeling constrained and disillusioned by institutional agendas. A middle manager from College C explains how a managerial approach to agenda setting goes to the heart of committee decision-making.

> My overwhelming impression (like virtually every other kind of meeting or short life working group or whatever it is I'm involved in here) is that pretty much a decision has been made and you are kind of being consulted, but being consulted I think, by and large, on some predetermined, I'm not saying this is always the case, but by and large I get the impression that we are being consulted on a predetermined decision anyway. So it gives a sense of greater democracy whereas in reality it doesn't really exist.

Moreover, a middle manager (College C) reports that involvement in the quality agenda is inevitable in post-incorporation institutions.

> It appears to me that in a lot of ways you cannot avoid getting involved [in quality matters] and I realize that. But there is just no end to it [quality] quite honestly.

The aforementioned factors influence the manufacturing of primary agents (through bureaucratic and corporate forms of control) as auditable agents. The position of middle managers in the institutional quality regime means they are propelled to 'broker deals' and assume a 'double identity' in order to cope with their institutional remit.

Middle managers consider 'role ambiguity' places them in an invidious position which leads to 'ever evolving' administrative and audit burdens, A middle manager (College C) stresses some of the operational complexities of the quality agenda:

> There is an increased accountability in a sense that you are ultimately accountable for everything it would seem. Your courses, the lecturers delivering them, the retention, the recruitment, the information, the pre-selection the advertisement, the marketing and all the other elements now, contracting of them it's now massive and we are ill informed and ill advised on many of these things and there aren't parallel systems running that allow you to check… they [senior management] are over reliant on the paperwork then they [senior management] are certainly not going to have the truth and the people [middle managers] who are most trying to make it work are probably the people who are directly becoming the most incompetent because there isn't sufficient time to appropriately do everything.

5.4.2.3 *'Being constructed as auditable': quasi-technical and bureaucratic control*

System displacement for middle managers is factored as a consequence of being removed from regular contact with external state agents. Because middle managers are 'drivers of curriculum development' they are more likely to be involved with the technical and bureaucratic sources of control through SQA or SFEU structures. Both organisations are considered as routes for career advancement by some middle managers.

Operational remits do fit alongside career aspirations for some middle managers, i.e. to become seconded as an Associate Assessor (through the HMIE) to enhance a career profile. External prompts from HMIE are important in shaping the direction of quality at college level, which predominantly focuses on systems audit and influences middle manager working practices. A middle manager (College A) reports: "They [HMIE] are very focused on systems aren't they?" While, another middle manager adds: "I think if your system and paperwork are up to scratch, they are very happy with that".

For middle managers, the HMIE inspection visits largely focus on getting paperwork "up to scratch" and conforming to externally imposed systems and procedures ('being constructed as auditable'). The demands for accountancy style practices by

HMI's require middle managers to become effective audit systems administrators. Nonetheless the majority of middle managers convey a 'feel good factor' from HMIE visits if things go well, which in a sense serves to facilitate conformance. Having said this, many middle managers articulate the view that the whole inspection and review scenario is fraught with unnecessary corporate and quasi technical operational demands. The HMIE process is perceived to be more about the preparation for an inspection, ensuring the procedures and processes associated with the actual event are in place in order that there is a conformance to audit standards. The audit process is considered to be at the detriment of looking at good teaching and learning in progress. Any improvements suggested by the HMI's, tend to focus on tighter or different forms of evaluation using a restrictive report writing practice. Documents are created to meet with and address an auditing style built on conclusive evidence. The study substantiates suggestions that the HMI approach is focused on control undermines professional autonomy and is contested.

5.4.2.4 *Ownership and autonomy or regulatory control*

The particular operational demands of the regime at institutional level infer that autonomy and ownership are under threat, resigning respondents to the status of mere functionaries. Middle managers consider ownership to develop the curriculum as an important measure of autonomy. Likewise, a sense of ownership of policies and systems confers professional investment. Yet internal quality configurations are generally imposed through institutional Quality unit functions within colleges. While middle managers acknowledge quality unit functions do have some positive aspects, being, "sources of advice [procedural]" (middle manager, College C) and, "providing assistance with practical problems" as another manager, (College C) remarks, the structures and processes are subject to consistent dispute across the colleges.

Some evidence exists of quality team involvement being encouraged by middle managers in their broker or mediator role to encourage integration of a quality ethos in their own teams. In such cases, there is a perception of the quality team acting as 'trouble-shooters', finding solutions to problems associated with external agencies or internal procedures. A middle manager (College A) reports: **"**You feel that they

[quality team] want to get involved with things rather than just bits of paper and ticking the boxes. It feels more meaningful than that".

There is a lack of consensus over the effectiveness of quality teams, as a majority of middle managers perceive quality teams to be functionaries of corporate management control, which clash with their own particular understanding of self-regulation. There is a common trend across all three colleges of quality (initiated elsewhere) being imposed, often from external sources, with middle managers having less influence on structure modeling, more likely to be cast as compliers (in diffusion and reproduction). A middle manager in College B identifies a lack of ownership and self-control:

> The fundamental structures [of quality] are there and they won't even have been discussed, they are pushed into college from outside and all ours [structures of quality] are then derived from senior management, the fundamental structures are there and you can't negotiate them.

Even so, middle managers are keen to stress that quality is something which is self imposed, aspires to particular professional standards, which are separate from the demands of 'systems imposition', initiated by corporate agents. The setting and ownership of professional standards is summed up by a respondent in College A: "We set our own quality…I don't think that's got anything to do with the quality things that come down from quality control" [quality team/unit].

Meeting paperwork requirements or ensuring performance indicators for the presentation of statistics indicates that the quality team supports academic professionals, but also attempts to establish ideological forms of control through education (staff development and other support measures) to ensure policy conformance. Hence the delivery of programmes, which requires professional judgment, can often collide with the quasi technical compliance requirements of the quality system.

While a number of managers acknowledge that the overall packaging of quality is better in the post Funding Council era, with some evidence of better documentation, and clearer feedback there is a general assumption that this has not fundamentally changed the demands of quality. Some middle managers comment that regime demands can be circumnavigated where innovation is local and pragmatic i.e. devising local processes and documentation for quality. A middle manger (College A) explains: **"**I think if we didn't have a quality department bringing all these things down, I don't think it would make one bit of difference to the quality". Another middle manager (College A) remarks, "we've tended to where we see a quality issue, we've invented something to counter it" also, "I really don't think the quality department have helped me". Middle managers are keen to retain operational control, although this is often subject to challenge by other agents.

5.4.2.5 *Targets, evidence and operational ambiguity: market, quasi-technical and corporate control*

Middle managers perceive that corporate targets/performance indicators are important when assessing successful outcomes (pass rates) although these are often non-negotiable and unrealistic. Moreover, middle managers are encouraged by corporate agents to pressurise lecturers into quality activities, both to maintain and consistently improve student performance outcomes. Middle managers always have to be vigilant and keep one eye on the audit. A middle manager (College B) reports how targets and formal proof collection are characteristics for evaluating all kinds of provision from teaching content to space utilization.

> I think we are all target driven in some form, either by target numbers in the class or for example my [rooms] I like to see them full from morning till night, if they are not then we are losing money, that kind of idea. I think you've got to look at it that way.

Another colleague adds:

> In my role of target setting, certainly I set my target of doubling provision up over the last two years which we were achieving and we are setting targets to be doubled again over the next three years. I shall set this [targets] so it's very much about being target driven.

Other middle managers express a growing frustration over being displaced by quality issues, which depart from the classroom teaching and the curriculum. "Well, I sometimes think that we get so tied up with the audit that we forget; you know it would be a good idea to teach them something" (Middle manager, College B)
Some respondents feel that attending formal meetings is growing exponentially due to the onerous nature of internal verification systems (i.e. checking the quality standards of students work). Also, the workload from various meetings (e.g. typing minutes and dealing with action points) is focused on producing evidence.
Hence, an example in College A is of a middle manager encouraging more informal meetings (to circumnavigate an intense meetings agenda) which is translated into documentation as proof of evidence for the various internal and external agencies.

> I encourage people to have informal meetings and I certainly see a lot of documentation from staff who have said that they've talked to other staff about this matter or that matter so we suggest that certainly with regards to the work there is a lot more communication than there was before.

Evidence conveys that the formal has undermined the informal; written evidence is central to establishing meaning, more obviously so since the establishment of the Funding Council (post 1999). Rigour has an economic external basis, but in the case of some middle managers undermines or fractures trust relations. The focus of external agencies on producing evidence and rule based information requests is perpetuating bureaucratic regulatory structures. Compliance demands are a focus for middle managers in College B: "We are getting asked for the same things over and over again, just in a slightly different format. That is extremely frustrating". The quality regime has evolved to a level of maturity, whereby reproduction occurs

through various maintenance activities, which are generally performed by middle managers.

The processes of formalization are similar across all three colleges, tending to supersede, yet also discount, previous conceptions of quality or ways of doing things. The outcome is to make quality systems highly visible. One middle manager (College A) states:

> I think the big push has been to systematically record quality whereas sometimes the quality was there but it wasn't written down with a specific heading and easy to access.

The collation of statistical information is perhaps most profoundly apparent for middle managers in course report writing (used in the Self-evaluation process). Senior managers assess the content of course reports with evidence suggesting a reinforcement of regulatory powers (used to quantify compliance in conjunction with performance management). The demands associated with reports are arduous with the style of reporting being subject to reinvention several times during the post-1999 period. Reporting processes carry a history of bureaucratic demands with various levels of contention between respective levels of authority in the colleges. Middle managers comment that there has been a period when such reports have been submitted to line managers but laid dormant. In some instances, middle managers report that course reports are now being read by senior management and again, in some cases, acted upon. One respondent in College A comments:

> You feel that the reports are read now and they respond to them individually actually, and they comment on the content, and how it's been written and everything related to it.

This viewpoint is not universal across all colleges. In College B, there are various critiques that while rhetoric suggests otherwise, course reports are not taken seriously by senior managers. Some middle managers perceptions are that they are merely

"going through the motions" to satisfy an audit. Evidence exists of middle managers trying to institute changes in the mechanisms of provision and delivery through the reports, but being consistently unsuccessful in their requests on behalf of course teams (particularly where there are resource implications) Perceptions of course reporting (for many) are of the process being no more than an audit trail to suit external HMIE requirements. The type of feedback from corporate agents is a source of some dissatisfaction as a middle manager (College B) explains:

> The feedback isn't about how we've done, the feedback is suggestions on how to write something differently, and the feedback should be well let's do XY and Z but that isn't what happens.

Some middle managers (across all institutions) perceive that senior management are "the villains, obstructing the peace", as one middle manager in College C put it. Middle manager's irritation focuses on senior managers restricting a meaningful flow of information, and being out of touch with specific operational demands. A union representative (College A), explains that middle managers have been placed in an unenviable position as a consequence corporate restructuring.

> There has been a discussion since restructuring about the roles of curriculum leaders because it was never really clarified, what their remits are, although the restructuring took place almost two and a bit years ago, the knock on effect is still there. I think like an awful lot of re-organisation, because changes are initiated at the top level, I think they tend to focus on their roles and are not really aware of the consequences of change for the best.

Such transformation results in middle managers seeking to try and diffuse responsibilities to other members of staff, normally lecturers. This also incorporates additional duties, because the arrangements for internal moderators (part of the verification process for students work) are somewhat vague in all institutions. As one middle manager remarks, "the time for negotiations has passed", suggesting tensions exists over the distribution of quality type tasks in the operations of the regime. The

wider collective dimension (union involvement) illustrates that middle managers face a dilemma many being union members in allocating some tasks to lecturers because in doing so they contravene union instructions. A middle manager comments

> The unions have said that unpromoted staff should not be doing these things [writing course reports or various other administrative duties], so the result is that we end up doing them and that's because there is a lack of a proper cross college policy.

Softer approaches are in evidence with internal affiliation i.e. to quality committees or working groups and using, "an official sounding line" as one middle manager put it, is a device used to spread the quality agenda to others (i.e. lecturers). A middle manager (College A) explains:

> In my view the changes in moderation structure that I have to make because of the college's change in management structures is to my mind beneficial because it has more formally involved more of the staff in their procedures than was the case before. That has been the most positive effect from my point of view, in terms of bringing more of the staff in on the actual process. The negative effects I suppose, we all perceive them to be the increased amount of paperwork that we have to do. The record keeping that is required for audit purposes and so forth. We have the sense sometimes that there is a lot of apparently useless box ticking and so on, but the quality unit in the college has been working quite hard over the last two or three years to try to refine procedures to make it a little less onerous.

The middle manager recognises that the quality system needs to be inclusive to encourage a wider college involvement. A common recognition exists, as with the senior managers (earlier in the chapter) that simplifying procedures and routines is necessary if the management of the quality process is to be effective. Despite pressures there is a definite resolve amongst middle managers that they have no other choice but to diffuse aspects of quality through task allocation i.e. moderation, to

effectively meet operational demands. Exporting tasks elsewhere merely serves to dilute or filter the increasing additional demands of the quality regime onto lecturers. A common theme emerges that middle managers normally 'end up' doing things themselves to ensure tasks are completed. Such perceived failures in convincing other primary agents are generally considered to be due to a lack of support, direction and leadership, which has "not come from the top", as one middle manager (College A) reports.

5.4.3 Primary agents (lecturers)

5.4.3.1 *Framing ideological control: the discourse of quality*

Lecturers are realistic about the purpose and need for quality mechanisms, but at the same time express frustration with the contradictions in the operational demands. While senior managers give wider definitions of quality to include professional judgment and improvement, lecturers paint a much starker view of quality. There are some similarities (in the way lecturers define quality) with middle managers interpretations primarily due to the closer classroom experience of each group. As with middle managers, lecturers are subjected to internal programmatic translation of quality. The clearest examples of divergence in understanding quality is that lecturers tend to divorce personal professional definitions based on sound professional knowledge from the systemic institutional definitions of quality.

The findings reveal a general consensus amongst lecturers (over quality issues) with a focus on providing an interesting, stimulating and good service, in keeping with high professional standards. Despite acknowledging a need for accountability, the lecturers' conceptions of professional quality often conflict with the regulatory assurance systems and performance measurement. The majority of lecturers have a perception that 'fitness for purpose' quality, is about meeting externally imposed targets, audits and performance indicators

Various explanations on quality, put forward by lecturers, indicates the existence of an active and evolving quality regime. However the operations of quality lead to some ambiguity over what constitutes normative conceptions of the phenomenon.

> We [lecturers] are being driven by audit and at the end of it; who actually just checks the quality, evaluates quality, what is my role, what is my responsibility! I think there are so many grey areas because quality is a big issue, but I think they [management] are really interested in how we actually evaluate quality.

There is a perception amongst a majority of lecturers that management on a local level orchestrates the quality agenda. Lecturers comment on institutional quality being about "adherence to systems", as one put it. Another lecturer remarks that, "evidence and proof drive demands", tends to dominate the quality agenda. Such scenarios have a profound effect on how lecturers identify with corporate style quality systems. A lecturer in College A disputes the purpose of the regime, which focuses on efficient systems of regulation:

> It's [the quality agenda] not really impacting on the main problems which are resource and finance problems. You can have a wonderful quality system but if you haven't got enough staff or you can't recruit them or haven't got good facilities then you can have all the quality management systems but it doesn't solve the problems. Management likes to believe everything can be solved by a new system.

Systems of calculability and predictability tend to conflict with the reality of life for lecturers. Moreover, lecturers refer to the structures that appear to evolve with rules and procedures, creating an understanding on one level, but also manufacturing certain constraints in an organisation. A lecturer (College A), exemplifies how structural factors have come to dominate institutional discourse: "We hear the word "quality" and what we think of is the Quality Unit; they require us to put in statistics at the end of the year, which don't mean much".

The findings also demonstrate that the main focus for lecturers is to provide quality in delivery to students, with uniformity and conformity to systems being one aspect of the spectrum, but low in priority. Despite this 'student centred' approach to

quality, there is an acknowledgement by lecturers that the quality agenda in the post incorporation era is imbued with certain managerial demands. One lecturer (College B), states "quality is anything management wanted to put forward" suggesting that official institutional definitions of quality are being utilised in an expedient manner to drive through corporate managerial agendas. Lecturers identify that their working practices are couched in a series of economic and audit demands that influence the displacement of course development time, cut teaching time, while increasing administration, through internal moderation and course reporting. A lecturer (College A) sums up the dichotomy between official institutional meanings of quality and those many lecturers are keen to stress and nurture:

> I think you think of quality in terms of something that has some worth or value… If you think in terms of education, you would want your students to have a quality experience but against that we have a Quality Department, which is supposedly geared to improving the quality of the experience but that's a perception… It depends on how they [Quality team] perceive it. That would be based on paper reports, rather than how we or how students, perceive it in the classroom setting.

The perception that the official college quality systems, are in some way external to, and so divorced from the lecturer's day to day teaching practices, is reinforced by a respondent in College B:

> I mean none of it is actually in any way relevant to anything that I understand as quality… Consequently there is a complete miss-match, an utter and complete irrelevance to everything we do in terms of recording, which is always about producing evidence, implementing quality procedures, everything is utterly and completely irrelevant…none of them [quality procedures] make any sense at all.

The general viewpoint from the findings is that lecturers are becoming enmeshed by the operational demands of the system. The official language of quality, and its legitimate basis, also means it is difficult to critique. A lecturer in College C

comments: “You can’t really argue against increased quality”, which suggests that the official discourse of quality is difficult to challenge.

5.4.3.2 *Limited operational autonomy: market and corporate control*

Lecturers comment that their post-incorporation remits are essentially about ‘cutting corners’ to create efficiencies. Quality is perceived to be adversely affecting the type of product that is being delivered to the students. The fundamental experience of many lecturers is of market and corporate control measures, with more quality being equated to better outcome economies, through cuts in teaching contact time, followed by greater scrutiny from outside bodies.

Two very clear types of discourse are evident in the study, with senior managers and lecturing staff having different operational priorities and understandings of quality. This dichotomy is explained in the words of one lecturer in College A

> Quality is higher on the agenda than the student experience because quality is about money… if you can afford to give good quality you do, but quality is also about efficiency and if you have efficiency it’s going to be linked to quality… and your standards are going to go down… Managers often don’t associate quality with efficiency, which is what frustrates lecturers because the two are intimately linked…it’s a trade off… you can have a happy medium but the fact is they’re linked.

The findings suggest that lecturers are not involved in the initiation and establishment but, vital to the reproduction of the regime. The demonstration of the characteristic artefacts (part and parcel of the quality systems in the colleges), are external to the lecturer’s reality. The influence on regime structures exemplifies the primary agent status of lecturers, in comparison to the corporate status of more senior managers. It is also apparent from the feedback of some respondents that management in the respective colleges are making efforts to be more inclusive. Certain forms of administration (e.g. reports and processes) are being translated by

regime confederates (e.g. Quality teams) in ways that are more acceptable to some lecturers. A lecturer (College A) explains the acceptable face of quality procedures:

> We weren't really part of any negotiations to construct quality systems… The only thing I would say our quality person [names] has redesigned the course reports to make it much teaching and learning based rather than just talk about performance indicators and that is good because I would want this in a course report. I don't really want to talk about equipment, materials and rooming because these are college wide issues and you can summarise them quickly… but she's changed the course report to be much more about teaching and learning and that's good because you feel you have helped shape the report.

The impression of ownership, through opportunities to influence change, is important to some lecturers because it allows (albeit fragile) notions of empowerment to surface. Wider explanations of the particular difficulties that lecturers face in managing the quality of provision tend to focus on staffing and resources levels, which are outside their remit of control.

Despite some scope to influence operational matters, it is evident that temporary or part-time lecturers operate in a vacuum, with little or no sense of ownership of quality. The operational position of part-timers is characterised by one respondent from College B

> I really don't know what college wide policies there are… and what goes on and what is expected in the department… I'm a part timer so I don't really feel that I'm involved… I feel I need to know what the college policies for one thing is like… within our department it tends to be very much… not things that compromise the college but we tend to structure our own things with the meetings that we have… I would think I'm really the worst person in the world to ask about college policies on quality are.

Temporary or part-time lecturers comment that their contact with the quality agenda is superficial and tends to concentrate on paper-based materials placed in, or collected from pigeonholes. Across the three institutions, there exists a gap in communication between part-timers and various layers of management, with senior management, being considered somewhat invisible. The perception of part-time lecturers is that quality system compliance is something that is learnt from other colleagues, not quality units or senior management.

Despite being part of a peripheral workforce part-time lecturers are becoming more affiliated to forms and processes of the quality regime. Assessing part-time agential status illustrates how the diffusion of the quality regime covers more areas of college life. The regime affiliates actors in ways that previously they would not have been and often results in significant changes to the work effort bargain.

5.4.3.3 *'Creating an auditable performance': corporate control*

While there is an acknowledgement by lecturers of the influence and impact of funding on delivery outcomes, the presence of the Funding Council does not feature as strongly in responses due to regime affiliation. However, many lecturers are under no illusion about the emphasis on an economized agenda for quality. The nature of external contact for lecturers is more likely to be through subject developmental events to promote curriculum change through the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) or Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU).

Lecturer perceptions of the HMIE are often as a consequence of having been involved as part of college inspections/reviews, either in preparation or through observations in the classroom. It is evident that the demands of the HMIE have a significant operational influence on aspects of the lecturers' work. The demands on lecturers are more acute when colleges are preparing for visits and range from aesthetic improvements to the college environment, to more detailed paperwork preparation. A lecturer (College B) reports: "There was the HMI… we had to put posters up in preparation… And make the place look 'pretty'".

Moreover, preparation for HMIE visits is dictated by senior management's requirements of lecturers. A lecturer College C states:

> Of course one of the things that we did have to do, (which I felt kind of time consuming) was there is the preparation for it, you know we did have these meetings and briefings about it, which really just kind of made me think it might be far better if the HMI just walked in and saw what we did because we did spend a bit of time having to attend briefings to be briefed on what, well- not what to say… I felt I could have used the time more effectively to prepare quality lessons or something, so I certainly felt they should just walk in that would be better.

For other lecturers, the HMIE visit is a displacement event with countless hours spent creating an auditable performance, by getting the paperwork right to be able to stand up to scrutiny at any time.

> I had to do quite a lot of preparation, basically doing what you're doing anyway, and you try to tidy up your files and I must admit I typed up some notes… You know that every single lesson that week [the time the HMIE are in college] you're vulnerable at any point in the day and anyone who's been teaching knows it can't be at that level all the way through… its stressful… the moral is be prepared for them walking in.

Some lecturers are positive about the HMIE, as a feel good factor for successful colleges, although no consensus exists on the value of visits or the expert status of HMI's. A lecturer in College B comments, "Experts really come in buzz words and they call them trends and fashions". Other conceptions of the HMIE are more critical about the process of being appointed, questioning the background and credentials of the personnel as having a vested interest in making a system work to support career ambitions.

Other lecturers who have experience of HMIE visits feel the demands of such occasions are like an investigation, being of the opinion that the HMIE focus on changing teaching practice in the classroom to suit political agendas. Such demands result in levels of cynicism about observation and grading of classroom activity. Also, students are forced to complete numerous quality questionnaires (often without consultation or against their wishes) which take up increasing amounts of teaching time.

5.4.3.4 *Framing tighter 'auditable' curricular models: quasi-technical control*

The post 1993 experience has seen the challenge of new public management lead to an erosion of professional discretion on the nature of the pedagogic system and control over the curriculum. The move from external to internal examination processes in Scotland are seen by some respondents in the study as coinciding with the evolution of a modular curricula system. The reconfiguration of pedagogic system, (teaching to assessment**)** is further compounded with the developments of Higher Still, in Scotland, after 1997 (Canning, 2003). Curriculum control is asserted through forms of assessment and a network of internal moderation and audit procedures, which are externally influenced through the SQA, HMIE inspection/reviews and other quality bodies.

In an effort to mitigate the turmoil created by a series of national policy developments standard curriculum materials are being produced by the SFEU and SQA (external agencies). Such organisations also function to institute forms of bureaucratic control as power is invested through hierarchy in the FE sector. At the same time actors are sustained through opportunities for career advancement although the use of external consultants tends to curb such routes. For many lecturers the quality agenda has been reconstructed to mean and support something else, "a Taylorised system", as one lecturer (College B) put it. The wider curriculum framework (initiated by the SQA) is characterised by tighter curricular models using statement of standards, learning outcomes and performance criteria.

The influx of quality issues has also influenced and in many ways galvanized other demands, which is characterised by paper driven activities. Systemic approaches to

quality matters are hinged by administrative duties, which incorporate the convergence of the financial and academic. Many lecturers perceive the vagaries of unintelligent management information systems result in a duplication of effort. A lecturer (College A) sums up the frustrations of many other respondents:

> Why are they asking me, I'm the class teacher? I've nothing to do with that [paper chases] its' repetitive and a duplication of effort… It's a total waste of time; it's in the system, if the system is not good enough, well tough!

Some of the more experienced lecturers in the study feel the mainly passive management structures and processes of quality characteristic of the pre and mid 1980's, were dependent on the professionalism of the deliverer of the curriculum and supporting staff. The focus was on the professional manner and self-control of the lecturer, qualified in a formal sense through expertise and work experience resulting in innate forms of quality. Management involvement in this settlement tended to be concerned with the minutia of timetabling and attendance, although such arrangements are superseded by the aforementioned developments.

5.4.3.5 *Audit, targets and formal systems: market control*

The perception amongst the majority of lecturers (as with middle managers) is of college institutions being characterised by compliance led targets/performance indicators. Such measurements are devolved down to lecturers, in the form of pass rates – often non-negotiable- with a concomitant pressure on lecturers to pass students, who often don't meet certain criteria. There is a perception amongst lecturers that pressures on management from external sources i.e. Funding Council and the HMIE led to tasks being devolved within institutions through a process of corporate control. Given the current experiences of the lecturers in the study, evidence indicates that the demands of quality are likely to increase rather than diminish. There is a perception that quality levers are being used as an attempt to gain more external influence in the classroom. A union representative in College C comments on the systems in use:

> There might be quality systems to say, we are going through all these stages but it doesn't tell you how to rectify the problem so therefore to me that's not a quality system. You can have all the quality systems you want to do with your paperwork, which is possibly a good thing and that's good if you need to keep records. The way funding is you do need to keep records, so if you've got to keep your records then the paper work and that is important. But, with regards to teaching, I don't think the quality systems help the teaching, which is, in my opinion, what we are primarily here for.

Several interviewees express views that the wider climate against which FE is operating forces an agenda whereby lecturers are under pressure to meet certain targets, beginning (but not ending) with student intake. The economized market version of quality is considered as paying lip service to classroom quality by a significant number of lecturers. The types of demands placed on lecturers, which violate notions of real quality in favour of satisfying economic factors is explained by a lecturer (College B):

> I can remember in the past working in a college were we would have 600 applications and we would take 120, now we will get about 120 applications and take in about 110, you know. That's a major change in terms of the interviewing. The interviewing is now almost rubberstamping so that we can guarantee to the college that there will be "a bum on that seat".

Feelings of pressure are manifest through delivery demands, with lecturers' perceptions being of a diminution of quality. Having to teach to student assessments to meet targets and get students through courses effectively within strict timelines leaves little room for added value. Such demands leads to, "teaching them [students] the answers", as one lecturer in College B put it, to ensure student success remained high, as part of continuous improvement. Likewise, a union representative in College B comments:

> If lecturers are honest, and they are very often in their discussions with me, many of them feel as though that the pressures of passing students is simply phenomenal in the sense that if the students are not successful in the units that we have delivered to them, they will be asked questions by course co-ordinators and people further down the line about their teaching performance, rather than students' performance. It's openly acknowledged in a sense by Senior Lecturers [line managers]… if a lecturer stands firm it will be passed onto an Assistant Principal who deals with quality matters and repeated experience is that they will suggest to the Senior Lecturer course co-ordinator or basic grade lecturer involved, that more reassessment opportunities be granted [i.e. to improve pass rates].

The discussion illustrates that primary agents are subject to forms of affiliation in the quality regime that obviates their decision making powers and forms of professional authority. Historically such authority had been granted under the bureau professional regimes (pre –incorporation). The outcomes centred discourse is supported by a more established corporate managerial agenda, which makes assumptions about the validity of an economized approach to quality.

5.4.3.6 *Assurance to evaluation: ideological control*

Many lecturers consider that managements across all colleges are trying to make attempts to 'win over' staff to the idea of cultural change. Involvement also has forms of condition attached, which are compliance orientated. The attempts at inclusiveness are characterised by 'Quality Weeks' or 'Quality Days' to bring on-board staff to the quality agenda, and dissipate forms of recalcitrance. A lecturer in College A explained:

> The idea here is not aggressive it's about conquering your heart and mind these days, that you constantly have these 'happy family' e-mails from the Principal. Or that the idea that organizations are not in conflict and we're all working together towards a common goal and so you have this sickly sweet marketing agenda slipping into everything we do as if we have no problem with running around on Saturdays posting leaflets through peoples doors. It's

> a kind of organizational harmony tat, which is just really sickening to most people. These are people getting double our pay and much better conditions and they keep trying to convince us our lot in life is wonderful and aren't we all a team?… In fact, you just think you don't know my reality, you don't work in my reality, so I'm not going to play happy families and it's that … It's not the aggressive management, style it's the 'softly softly were all a team' approach that causes most resentment.

Yet lecturers are aware that the demands of the quality agenda add value to the labour process, in the name of quality. The antagonism focuses on 'false' notions of teamwork, cooperation and inclusiveness. Evidence points towards lecturers being genuinely concerned about quality in the classroom, although hybrid notions of improvement has tended to stress further demands and violate an already tenuous work –effort bargain. The traditional, normative aspects of professional practitioner authority, has been subordinated to corporate managerialism, whereby rules supersede judgment. The experience between the delivery of the curriculum and the consumers has been altered to encompass the whole student experience as part of a business process, consumer-orientated model. Behaviour modification is a feature in the transmission of the quality regime through the subordination of primary agents to corporate objective measurement rather than professional authority, albeit this process does not go uncontested.

5.5 Conclusion

The utilization of a regime matrix enables discussion and analysis about what the distinguishing features of the regime mean, relating back to nodal points of legitimacy, affiliation and transmission. The factors of fluidity, dynamism and relativity are in line with critical realist philosophy. Structures of quality can act as definitive mechanisms that constrain, although conversely actors can transform the structures.

In post-incorporation colleges more emphasis has been put on effective quality operations and the chapter illustrates some of the forms and mechanisms of control characterised by the embedding of structures, posts, procedures and routines in the

college year. Also an evolution of a more consent based model of quality attempts to combine the tenets of bureau professional practice, which appears to converge with those of corporate managerialism rather than being in opposition.

In the sources of transmission, various corporate and primary agents reflect on a quality regime, where resource and policy decisions are made elsewhere, encapsulated by forms of market and corporate control. Sector affiliation appears to serve macro demands, but also individual career investment, which on one level illustrates bureaucratic control by diluting an effective dialogue and constructive critique of the system.

Due to the demands of the quality regime there is a certain amount of operational fatigue. The story is not as straightforward as would first appear on the surface because the regulatory nature of the regime also implies tensions which will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPACTS AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE QUALITY REGIME ON WORKING PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue to explore the theme that regimes are substantive by considering that the quality regime has been a contributory factor in work intensification. There is a further examination of professional autonomy in the context of control mechanisms. A focus on consent based continuous improvement models provides evidence of impacts on practice. The impacts on skills and discretion of professional practitioners, serve to indicate how regulatory bureaucratic control operates, but also how the current quality paradigm in FE is a contested or false remedy. The chapter acknowledges that an emphasis on agents illustrates disproportionate impacts according to particular affiliation. The findings will demonstrate varying levels of acceptance of quality audit cultures amongst agents, revealing the nature of control, consent and resistance.

6.2 Corporate agents (senior managers)

The impact and acceptance of a quality regime for managers is constituted in several ways, with the interplay of external and internal factors being evident, although clearly obligations associated with state agencies (e.g. Funding Council) propel certain responses. Corporate agents are cast as 'translators', 'persuaders', 'regulators' and 'challengers' due to their affiliation to the regime. Managers translate macro policy initiatives, while attempting to generate meso level institutional support for official versions of quality. This does not mean that investment in the quality regime is through passive acceptance. Managers do challenge, or to be clearer, question rather than resist official versions of quality i.e. Funding Council or HMIE processes. The emphasis for any kind of challenge by senior managers is usually in the context of protecting their own colleges from perceived unnecessary scrutiny or detrimental policy decisions. Also, managers do utilise quality at college level as a mechanism of regulation or to generate forms of consent in attempting to establish a corporate identity.

6.2.1 *Agents of obligation: market, corporate and regulatory impacts*

A common understanding about quality for managers is generally factored through corporate and market governance paradigms. There is broad acceptance across a spectrum that accountability associated with being in public service means that the public purse should be protected. One manager (College A) explains:

> I understand where the Funding Council [as the main provider of funds to colleges] is coming from. We do have to have measures of quality otherwise they're wasting my taxpayer's money.

Acceptance of the quality agenda can be explained not as a choice, but as an obligation associated with regime affiliation. Senior managers across the study are obliged to accept the thrust of quality as part of operational and strategic remits in line with their particular terms of reference. Leader affiliates are entrusted to manage staff budgets, plan college strategy, but also to engage with the wider sector, through committee affiliation. Functions are played out against an evolving national policy agenda. Certain obligations appear as externalities, which are also contingent on an institutional role, which fosters aspects of instrumentalism to ensure the health of the local college.

Since incorporation, college managers have become more accountable in matters of quality to: the state, funding bodies and students as customers. On a college level, senior managers are tasked with making policy meaningful, which equates to initiating and establishing centralised institutional audit models to assuage sector requirements. Given the characteristic low trust relations of the wider quality audit regime, there has been an adoption of corporate structures that also challenge the already fragile trust and collegiality in the institutional setting.

Evidence conveys that leader affiliates accept processes of reporting because they are a fact of life i.e. the way the Funding Council decrees compliance to maintain resources. There is agreement amongst managers, that economic control is part of college life, in a relationship with the Funding Council. Despite a public audit regime

framework and market model, some managers believe the current regime does not equate to cultural or ideological control. Overwhelming evidence illustrates that while the impacts of neo liberal philosophy, through the mantle of NPM has meant forms of devolved authority, managers of colleges are still very much dependent on external political authority via the conduit of the Funding Council (post 1998).

While the level of external sanction determines impacts and manager compliance, there is still some room for manoeuvre on a college level. The construction of post-incorporation relationships in the FE sector entrusted forms of autonomy to the Board of Management of colleges at a local level. While local Boards are accountable (as with college Chief Executives) to the Scottish Parliament, this also means the Funding Council cannot easily intervene in the running of colleges. Some managers (depending on level of seniority and job function) perceive that autonomy does exist at a meso level to develop a distinctive 'quality ethos'.

Managers are also pragmatic about how they translate time requirements associated with the demands and impacts of quality. A leader affiliate (College A) is clear that the scope for local variation is subject to the domination of a wider reform agenda. The macro framework of quality does impede colleges doing anything other than what is necessary, being limited by existing obligations tied to time, resources and perceived benefits.

> My job's the college. My perception of the external audit things, are hoops that the college have to jump through to continue to get the funding to let me do the bits that are my real job.

Control and performance assumptions are prominent in the translation of quality models that are adopted and shaped by the institutions. Acceptance of regulatory mechanisms is considered to be necessary to continue getting funding, with performance indicators, targets, proof and statistics being accepted methods of operation. The findings reveal that corporate agents have some (although limited) discretion in the interpretation and production of information, suggesting negotiated

outcomes with the Funding Council and HMIE. Multiple ways of producing proof and interpreting information help managers to cope and sustain the accountability discourse, while attempting to manufacture consent within institutions.

Some managers comment on improvements in quality, but are also of the view that colleges are becoming better at subsuming external impacts and presenting data to accommodate macro agendas. The quality regime is an example of how information is appealed to and also ignored. Managers consider the manipulation of data to be commonplace in order that the correct impression of an institution can be maintained with external agencies. A manager in College B reports:

> [T]he data should speak for itself. It should be unimpeachable, the data should be clean and consistent, but of course we live in a world of 'spin', there is vested interest and there is a great deal at stake, so naturally people are going to not necessarily falsify the figures but certainly manipulate in such a way that what they present to the public or to anyone else presents them in the best possible light. I mean everybody does that and it would be foolish to imagine that Further Education would be any different from the rest of the public sector or anybody for that matter. I think in some cases it's what they don't say rather than what they do. It's the data that you don't give [to external agencies] rather than the data that you do, which could carry a broader more in depth view. But to be fair, the Funding Council itself is taking our data and it is manipulating that data and presenting it…

The passage illustrates that senior managers feel under a certain amount of pressure to massage or present data that avoids further scrutiny, due to the high stakes with funding. Quality has a media currency, and so data is also subject to manipulation in various ways, whether as a form of presentation or through more blatant intervention. On one level, the rationale for many senior managers appears to be that the forms of calculation for quality measures do not take into consideration local circumstances and tend to be 'too hard'. A justification for being economical with information to external agencies is a common sense approach, to insulate colleges from perceived

interference. It is clear from interviews with senior managers that external public policy and specific expenditure decisions by state agencies are placing a considerable strain on the resources of colleges and individuals, to meet the quality agenda (success through outputs). This is most clearly illustrated by a senior strategic manager from College B (the institution with smallest resource base in the study) who estimates that the demands of ritualistic, conformance quality "looks cheap, but it's not. It's 25 percent of the cost of your organisation at least".

There is evidence of impacts across the hierarchy, whether in terms of being more aware about quality or more intense involvement aligned to job functions. A senior manager in College A comments:

> I think that would be absolutely true for everybody who is involved in FE colleges [i.e. more involvement in quality] and I mean everybody from the receptionist at the front desk, throughout the organisation, and that can be simply attendance at quality awareness sessions, 'go and be aware of quality'… So yes, whether it's just the use of time or whether it's actually jobs, which people now have to do in order to meet quality requirements yes, I think it's a substantial part.

The constant tension, evident in the relationship of colleges with the Funding Council, fosters frustration amongst many managers because of a lack of trust in professional decision-making at a local level. A leader affiliate (College A) reports on the wider external assumptions on the performance of colleges:

> There is an assumption that colleges are not doing the best they can with what they've got at the time, and I would question that. I think the vast majority of colleges are doing the best they can with what they've got at the time.

The acceptance of the quality agenda by managers is also related to notions of progress and improvement being achieved by the wider sector. Advocates are more

willing to ‘buy into’ the ethos of the HMIE quality framework although this perhaps underestimates factors of obligation. A leader affiliate (College B) reports:

> The HMI reviews are improving, there have been more good and very good lessons and assuming that they are applying the same standards, or I would say they are probably applying higher standards as they go along, then that’s very good news and generally the grades are getting better as time goes on because people are building those standards into their day to day work.

The progress and improvement discourse tends to obscure that the driving force for a majority of managers complies with HMIE dictates out of necessity (so are accepted) to ensure good grades from an inspection/review visit and avoid further, more rigorous intense scrutiny

The type of influence the quality agenda has on managers is to some degree dependent on the nature of the specific responsibilities managers have in colleges. Managers are to a greater or lesser extent subjected to forms of accountability, control, assessment or measurement to meet and ensure certain external requirements are initiated and established at institutional level. Senior managers, tend to acknowledge that their own workloads have not been increased or intensified, although do accept the impact of the financial regime on their working practices. In terms of pure financial audit activity, managers are clear that this activity has evolved to become burdensome, so they concentrate on only what is necessary to maintain systems. Conversely, a leader affiliate in College A, acknowledges how other members of the institution are more inclined to bear the brunt of quality audits.

> I suppose it really depends on which bits you consider quality, if you are talking just about audits, and assuming that you don’t mean things like required internal and external audits for financial purposes, it’s probably fairly minimal because it’s the poor souls who are in other places in the organisation who have to do that. My job is management; co-ordination;

> making sure that things are going to happen; that people know where they are going, all that kind of stuff.

Other managers acknowledge feelings of busier times, but are unsure whether this is as a consequence of increased auditing. Despite a degree of uncertainty, it is apparent that certain periods (inspection times) are associated with more quality type activity. Members of Senior Management Group's (SMG) with a quality remit tend to have expanded roles to accommodate the requirements of quality. The task (for some managers) of co-ordinating quality functions means the quality element of the job role evolving, with more associated quality type activities and less time to do them in, due to the perceived burden of over auditing. A leader affiliate from College A explains that colleges are subject to a constant cycle of quality audits.

> Well I think all colleges will argue that we are over audited. We went through SQMS [Scottish Quality Management Systems] full audit last September and October, we went through a kind of heavy HMIE review, and a follow up review that again the Funding Council changed the rules on what they wanted to be more in-depth. It was a four day follow up review, really that was just completed a matter of a couple of weeks or so ago and the next day we got a letter from the SQA [Scottish Qualifications Authority] saying they were coming to do a full audit in October of this year. So, you think 'God'! We have just finished one audit and you are getting another one coming up, now I cannot believe that that is necessary and that is the structure we've got because an awful lot of time is going into now, gathering in a slightly different format, or maybe a significantly different format the information that these different organisations want. But basically they are looking at the same thing surely?

While obligations are evident some managers experience more tasks or paperwork, while others are able to avoid both increased intensity levels and an associated workload increase, due to their affiliation to the regime. A senior manager (College C) reports on factors affecting autonomy:

> I'm lucky, the way the college is managed a lot of my job is kind of active participation with staff and students …if I let it the whole job could be e-mails and paperwork, but I don't. Maybe I should?

While this respondent consciously decides to avoid the paperwork there is no doubt (across managers) that the culture is paper based and proof driven, with notions of accountability. Also, there is an inference from the college manager about where decision-making powers reside. In this case, authority enables structural modelling to avoid the overload of paperwork. Such actions create space for other, or what is considered more worthwhile activity in the regime whereby some managers are able to retain professional autonomy over their own work agenda.

For others, operational managers (i.e. Heads of Department) an increase in work has been incurred through the reading and analysis of documents created by the process of evaluation. A Divisional manager (College C), reports:

> It's good [the self-evaluation process]. If you'd asked me that question two years ago, I would have had to say 'Well, we go through the paperwork and we don't actually do anything with the paperwork', but again it's a learning thing. You suddenly realise the paperwork is relevant and [names senior manager] attempt to bring it into real time has made a dramatic improvement. Instead of just having a little bundle, I've now got an enormous bundle, but it's a working bundle, which sits in a drawer and I check it and look at it and use it and that's the whole point of quality paperwork.

Managers with financial remits are experiencing impacts on workload, which are intensified with more tasks and less time to complete them. Perceptions of the corporate micromanagement of the Funding Council impacting on professional working practice are characterised by low levels of trust. A senior manager (College A) explains:

> I find that I'm doing a lot more reporting on the actual detail of every decision that has been made, why it's made and the papers that prove why it was a good decision to make… If you trust the management within the colleges, if you trust that the colleges are managed properly anyway, then you wouldn't need that level of detail. Sometimes, you are spending so much time reporting that you think I could be doing my job rather than reporting on the fact that I am doing my job.

Impacts are constituted in more intense, time-consuming, audit and evaluation. The type of information required by the Funding Council is essentially designed to develop levels of confidence and trust in the colleges to conform to what are ostensibly formalised rules of engagement. The demands of the Funding Council (translated from Ministerial Priorities) appear as irresistible impacts, due to the institutional regime affiliation of colleges.

Moreover, the impacts of external scrutiny and the requirement for institutional adherence means quality functionaries (at meso level) are obligated to perform a more formal security role (through initiation, establishment, diffusion and reproduction of quality). Being ever watchful is explained by a quality manager in College A:

> A lot of it, as I see it, is almost protecting the College against being caught up by something externally, you know not being aware of something. It's not that I think quality provision is the problem it's because there are so many external requirements you have to meet; someone has to keep an eye on all of that. And, it is as I've said before it doesn't necessarily add to the quality of what we do and in some cases the teaching staff achieve quality despite the quality framework because they're spending so much time filling in reports… But there is no doubt that it [the quality function] takes up an enormous amount of time and resources meeting all these external requirements and to produce the evidence crucially because you can be doing things but you can't prove it and it's hard to produce the evidence, that's a problem really.

A number of issues are raised by the quality manager, particularly in the context of the impacts and intensification of quality, alongside evidence and proof production. While there is sympathy with the perceived plight of lecturers this is reconciled by maintaining the college systems against falling foul of external agents or institutional methods for dealing with dissenters. The quality manager (College A), also comments that while intensification is evident, this has not resulted in an overall personal increased workload.

> No [not an increased workload], although I'd always thought, and I still believe this, to an extent that if you can do everything properly and get to the point we [i.e. college] should be at I should be able to talk myself out of a job. This is because if you think the whole point of running Self-evaluation and things is that you'll get the systems set up and running and it will all tick along and there will be checks and balances and measures you know and there shouldn't be a need for me. But it doesn't really work that way…Partly because quality can cover absolutely anything so I tended to get involved in all sorts of things… You develop procedures and things through auditing, it never goes away.

There is a suggestion in the account of the quality manager that members of the institution will eventually learn (or be indoctrinated) to affiliate to quality processes and be educated in the correct manner to digest the college and wider quality agenda. What is also evident is the incremental nature of the quality agenda, which is encompassing more and different college activity levels. The presence of quality has a significant impact on those that internalize and disseminate quality messages, ensuring internal regulatory systems are established, but more latterly the promotion of forms of self-inspection are considered as part of 'winning hearts and minds'. The HMIE are trying to establish more responsible institutions, whereby financial and non financial concepts of performance sit happily together. Different translation is necessary as the audit implies convergence being two fold, in relation to the effects on the practitioner professional and the types of audit activity that is being developed by the servants of the formal quality structures.

6.2.2 *Agents of translation*

Many managers in the study (including leader affiliates) are of the opinion that being a corporate public sector manager includes translating messages (through forms of diffusion) developed in the macro and meta domains. Evidence illustrates that for college managers to be effective translators of sector policy relational affiliation is necessary, as is an underlying acceptance of mechanisms to articulate and engage with change. Despite involvement and investment in the sector there is a general dissatisfaction amongst managers about how relationships with the Funding Council and HMIE are constituted by a lack of trust. The tension or conflict over quality becomes clearer the more distinctively college functions are tied to performativity. In short, managers may lack some choice because they are the conduits and translators of externally induced policy.

The requirements of other external quality agents e.g. Scottish Quality Management Systems (SQMS) necessitates translation at meso level resulting in assurance systems being initiated and established to meet and comply with certain quality standards. Diffusion of assurance mechanisms is seen as necessary although there is a general dissatisfaction with the complexity of processes for reporting information to external agencies.

In contrast to systems of quality, credentialism and accreditation through quality 'badges' (e.g. IiP) require diffusion in a different sense with a particular ethos and approach being adopted by an institution. No clear consensus exists across or within institutions about the value of certain quality approaches. Adoption of quality awards is dependent on leader affiliate authority, subscription and translation according to perceptions of added value, against the time and effort to achieve such status. In College B subscription to the IiP award is encouraged and activated at corporate agent level, although there is evidence to suggest primary agents dispute the purpose and value of the award.

While impacts are evident on both meso and micro level there is an acceptance amongst leader affiliates that a movement from assurance systems to evaluative

reflective continuous improvement is worthy of translation. Less certainty exists about whether a common understanding over the meaning of quality has spread in colleges. A senior manager (College C) explains:

> I wouldn't go that far no, [i.e. that there is a common understanding] but I think, there has been a shift from it just being about systems and procedures and somebody telling you what you may not do and which boxes you must tick. A shift from that [systemic approach] to a bit more of an understanding that it's actually about students and clients and their experience and what we can be doing to improve their experience. …People have actually started to understand that the performance indicators and all those really dry things that they have been filling in boxes about for years, actually means something in terms of the experience of the learner and that they can actually influence them. So I wouldn't say that there is a common understanding, but I would say that taking it broadly there is a gradual shift in perception of what it's all about.

The acceptance of continuous improvement models (i.e. Self-evaluation) is more to do with whether senior managers can translate and sell the benefits of a quality message to other groups (in particular middle managers) who can be persuaded to conform. Several examples from the study illustrate that senior management commitment to quality is necessary in establishing and diffusing the regime along with the subsequent enforcement.

The findings portray that a longer period of 'bedding in' is necessary despite an acceptance of improvement models. Reproduction of the regime is made more difficult and is contingent on primary agent subscription. A manager in College A reports that despite some policy drift with Self-evaluation it is nevertheless accepted.

> Self-evaluation is something that we did do and then it drifted quite considerably in most areas in the college. There was a fear in the minds of many of the staff in the college that self -evaluation was a management

> idea… there was a fear that management would look at any reports that came in and would critically judge people. There are some areas in the college, where they do it [evaluation] as a matter of course, in some parts of their courses or in some of their courses they do it in a very informal manner. So, it goes on and has always been going in some areas. In other areas you could say they avoid it like the plague unless they have to do it. We are now reintroducing pure observation throughout the college, on a more confidential footing. There are still concerns I think in some people's minds, but this is a development opportunity for them.

The consolidation of Self-evaluation is translated through forms of classroom observation (HMIE initiative to embed more self-inspection) which some corporate agents are keen to see implemented. There is a danger in the research of constituting corporate agents as passive acceptors although the reality is that some managers are active confederates of quality. Managers as translators of quality improvement models can also use opportunities to present ideas to dissenters as more palatable fare. More overt measures of regulatory control become obscured as quality initiatives are sold in an evangelical manner in an effort to distance the market from its ideological partner.

The impression of how and why there is an acceptance of quality by managers needs to be considered in two particular ways. First, there is the translation and diffusion of particular quality models, which is encouraged by senior managers due to external requirements on institutions. The involvement of senior college figures in the promotion of quality needs to be contextualised by causal affiliations across the wider sector. Involvement of corporate figures is also composed with forms of personal investment and self-interest in the wider FE sector, which in turn insulates career aspirations. However, in accepting the agenda, managers are vulnerable to forms of bureaucratic control.

6.2.3 *Agents of persuasion: ideological control and consent (impacts of Self-evaluation)*

While college managers have the job of translation, evidence exists to suggest that improvement agendas require different approaches by managers to include forms of persuasion. In an attempt to win the 'hearts and minds' of staff, quality is sold as a development opportunity. There is evidence that corporate agents (senior managers) are keen to translate some of the rhetoric of quality into more acceptable formats. The emphasis on language has appeared to shift from a technical systems approach towards the use of cultural descriptors. Key exponents in the transformation of language are the advocates of quality approaches at macro level (HMIE) translated and diffused through colleges by a number of quality supporters, which can range from managers to quality support functions and lecturers. An acceptance by management of quality models on the basis of professional practice/internalization (rather than conformance to the external agenda) is perceived as a progressive approach. A focus from senior managers is placed on the process of reflection, rather than just meeting external HMIE criteria once every so often. This attempt to internalise a quality ethos is reported on by a leader affiliate in College A:

> The difficulty with the framework [quality framework] is unless it is internalised in a college and actually becomes part of the college's own philosophy, it's simply seen as the way that the HMI rate you when they come in…I understand the external organisations having needs in terms of demonstrating their value for money and productivity and all their performance indicators but there are things that are important to the colleges that we need to make sure are included in whatever it is we have in the future for quality.

The findings suggest that internal translation of the quality regime requires certain persuasion and levels of consent, if managers are to successfully incorporate (in whatever form) external quality agendas at meso level. Engendering institutional levels of support for quality initiatives requires senior managers to effectively accept and drive the quality agenda.

The Self-evaluation process uses performance criteria indicators as a method of assessing whether colleges are performing to a standard interpreted in the final outcome by the HMIE. While being more consent based, Self-evaluation is rigorously systematic requiring better use of data and capturing notions of good practice. The thrust of Self-evaluation has been to steadily impress an ethos of accountability at institutional level. All levels of operation are responsible for evaluating and continuously improving on performance. The perception of some managers is that Self-evaluation can be effectively utilised as a process tool of persuasion to engineer control and consent.

While respondents report favourable views about the efficacy of Self-evaluation this is predominantly dependent on agency status in college hierarchies and perceptions of normative processes. Some senior managers, consider that the impacts of Self-evaluation are positive (away from compliance and assurance based audit) and so more easily embedded. A senior manager (College C) explains the nature of the shift in perception, which suggests Self-evaluation is becoming part of a consolidated regime.

> The big impact of quality audits initially is to standardise approaches and to get people used to the idea of audit. HMIE initially helped refocus on Self-evaluation, but not enough. As time has gone on, I think we [the institution] have got much closer to that, and we've got much more of a reflective profession than we had.

Key 'movers and shakers' at college level advocate their own independent culture, with a reflective practice and ownership driving its own needs and outcomes. The notion of a culture of reflective practitioners implies that the tentacles of Self-evaluation are being naturalised within colleges. However, evidence from across the groups tends to suggest that the impact of Self-evaluation has been heavily influenced by what the HMIE requires of colleges rather than how colleges see their own professional development. In short, reflective practices have been made more

auditable, through internal management systems in support of external requirements. Colleges are 'taught to report' rather than be creative.

The testimony of a manager in College C indicates some of the problems college managers are having convincing wider groups of the value of Self-evaluation. The manager illustrates that an inherent audit paper system's mentality contradicts the ethos of reflection through evaluation:

> I think maybe there has been a bit of a conflict in the past because when we've tried to get into Self evaluation… I mean we've had a couple of false starts with Self-evaluation. I think because we tried to do it in a way, which was based on the old paper based systems it generated more and more and more forms and I think that just gave people the wrong message of what it was about. I think we've, to some extent, got away from that. I still think there are too many forms, but I think there is a greater understanding of the process behind it than there was in the early stages. And, I think there is a clearer attempt to keep the paperwork to a minimum and concentrate on the process and the thinking behind it.

The commentary infers that the correct type of translation and techniques of persuasion, with a greater understanding of what lies behind the process will lead to more success. The idea of participation is clearly evident in the manager's responses, with an implication of more and further staff commitment to the evaluation of performance.

For some managers, the process of Self-evaluation is considered as a straightforward tool of bureaucratic control, using education to elicit certain levels of consent from more junior staff and embed an audit mentality. A manager (College A) reports on the role of management to develop consensual internal structures of audit:

> [As] a management team we've got to be almost educating them into realizing the purpose of all of this. And, it's actually I mean you could say it's

> a staff development issue, the purpose of audits, the range of audits that occur in the college the different natures, the different styles, so that it's seen as a positive thing. I'm not sure that is disseminated down enough and I would include myself in this. Sometimes you get so 'bogged down' in making sure that everything is there that you actually lose sight of the purpose of what audit is about because undoubtedly it is a useful vehicle for us all to be more reflective.

Despite a lack of consensus amongst managers about both the impact of the external agency (HMIE) and the Self-evaluation policy framework for evaluating colleges, there is evidence to suggest the process can be harnessed on a local level to achieve positive effects on staff morale. The workload pressures on other staff are depicted by some managers as something that can be embraced by professionals as they concentrate on the positive aspects of continuous improvement. A manager (College C) explained how the HMIE visit was an opportunity to demonstrate professional pride:

> [One] of the teams who'd got a good number of very goods [from the HMIE grading] went and printed tee-shirts with the ratings on it and paraded around. They wanted badges, they felt very much that it was their achievement…I don't think at any time they would have got a signal from senior management, to say 'we'll be heartbroken if you get two unsatisfactory grades'… They will undoubtedly complain about the additional pressure and workload leading up to that, but in the main it is about professional pride. To be honest I think that's a good thing. I don't think it's a problem.

The systems and internal formation of quality are clearly part of the meso level pressures for the regime to produce reassurance to management because quality has to be made auditable. The meaning of quality is therefore encapsulated by a series of audit routines, which is not too dissimilar to the views of Power, (1997) on the harnessing of regulatory programmes to quality management. Securing consent at institutional level by senior managers (corporate agents) creates some form of

dilemma. Convincing employees of the merits of continuous improvement programmes, despite further increases in workloads is problematic in practice. Senior managers in the study are keen to conscript and persuade other agential projects to assist in regime diffusion and reproduction. Some evidence exists of quality teams being established using hybrid professionals i.e. practitioners to drive and develop techniques of persuasion. Conversely, quality teams appear to send out contradictory messages due to a policing role framed by an economized assurance and conformance that coincides with a softer message of cultural improvement. Despite some success, a general perception of quality teams is as an arm to facilitate corporate managerial control.

Quality team members (across the study) consider that facilitating cultural change requires the quality function to be re-branded to ensure long term success. A quality manager (College A) reports:

> There is a credibility issue for the Quality Team and it's much better to have active practitioners involved. They also have a much more genuine understanding of how things apply. They can advise me and they can also advise lecturing staff. Umm… so I definitely think it helps, I think as a set up, the set up is working well or its starting to work well, people do come to us for advice and they see us in a much more positive light than in the past… It's being used as a resource, which is what we're here for, you know I hate… I don't even like being called Quality Assurance Unit or Quality Control Unit that really bugs me and you know I would go for, I don't even like the term 'quality' to be honest but I would definitely talk about quality improvement or quality support or things like that. I don't like the whole policing assumption.

The main factor inhibiting the persuasion of other groups about the virtues of quality initiatives is an increasing work performance. A manager in College B illustrates how the drain on time can undermine the value of quality.

> The more time they've got filling in a checklist or doing a Self-evaluation for an HMI coming along, the less time they've got to actually engage with students in terms of improving the teaching materials they produce or maybe simply just marking essays. I'm not saying that they shouldn't do it, they have to find ways of monitoring quality, striving to improve quality that doesn't impinge on people's perception about its value…

The comments, from the manager illustrate that despite corporate attempts to transform the image of quality, various costs are incurred. Getting things done as a consequence of external threats and internal policy interpretation can become a false remedy, with unintended effects. Some managers support the Funding Council and HMIE ethos, and are willing to translate a quality agenda through techniques and devices of persuasion. The softer approach co-exists with a more profound regulatory tone.

6.2.4 *Agents of regulation and discipline: articulating control*

Evidence from the findings suggests that managers utilize various mechanisms in accepting, articulating and shaping the regime through internalising governance regulation. Some managers use the threat of external agencies as part of an acceptance strategy. Establishing an ethos that colleges have "got to be ready" as one senior manager (College C) put it, to deal with a perceived external threat is one such mechanism. Internal systems need to be rigorous and contain mechanisms of control to ensure compliance. It is in this context that one manager in College C refers to internal college academic auditors as, "The Gestapo".

Senior managers can use HMIE visits in an opportunistic manner to manipulate the work-effort bargain through motivating and controlling primary agents. So, external quality audits can be used to generate forms of commitment and conformance in satisfying specific corporate demands. A senior manager in College C comments:

> To some extent just having external audits, there is always a scenario to be created where you say to staff we are having an HMI audit in January and tell

> them in December you were only ‘kidding’ because the work would all be done, people re-focusing, rethinking, preparing for an external engagement, so having any external audit has that energizing or whatever you would call it process going on.

The commentary suggests that the threat of audit can be engendered to confer certain advantages for corporate agents. More simply, the corporate managerial affiliated support serves to justify additional workloads, along with an associated intensification for other groups.

Other managers accept the principles of corporate quality, as they afford opportunities for more punitive translation, demonstrated in the use of audits as a potential disciplinary device. Some corporate agents do advocate forms of discipline, with dissenters regarded as being disloyal and fearful of change. Using regulation, measurement and monitoring processes, in the name of a better customer service, evolve as a vehicle of enforcement. For example in College C, the use of non-conformance labels to bring recalcitrant staff into line. The forces of regulation are established by the Quality unit mandate and viewed by managers and others as the ‘College police’ with a direct responsibility to senior management.

Further evidence exists of a senior manager (College A) manipulating Self-evaluation as a tool to define and identify non-performance, in order that disciplinary measures can be instituted (if necessary) in the name of customer service.

> As a manager, I do have as any college would have, members of staff who I’d like to perform better um… and the quality system enables me to generate evidence to either instigate that development or either get them out the door umm… all of that is to the benefit of the students so that we’re not delivering a poor product.

Institutional quality appears to be reconfigured to incorporate cultural aspects of modelling, with the consolidation of Self- evaluation, through classroom observation.

The problem for some managers in their own acceptance of quality is moving from assurance based models that focus on control, ensure compliance and alleviate management anxiety. A view also exists that various checks and balances are sensible and necessary to regulate lecturer autonomy. The rationale for adherence is detailed in the account of one manager from College C.

> Yes, they have to be [controlled] particularly with a curriculum, which on the whole isn't externally assessed and that aspect of the quality system you have to be able to rely on it to pick up if they're not checking what they do and if that doesn't happen then students are really going to be disadvantaged because their qualifications will lose all credibility outside. So there are things, as you know we have an auditor, [from the quality unit] who goes round and makes sure that people are keeping to the procedures and where it's not happening then we do have to take action to sort it out. I think that's only a little bit of the quality system, but it's a crucial bit, as I say it was the foundation of the whole of the rest of it and if people aren't keeping to the procedures then somebody has to come from above and say "do it" because otherwise the whole system loses credibility.

While managers are keen to advocate consent based models, characterized by empowerment, the underpinning foundations of quality systems in FE appear to be a rigorous attention to systems. As mentioned previously, the role of the quality teams and the staff development function in colleges are important mechanisms in diffusing an institutional message, by enlisting the support of primary agents in the regime. A senior manager in College C comments that:

> We used to use words like 'non-conformist' which I hated, now we've started using positive words like 'compliance' you know, so the language changes a lot with quality, but I thought 'non-conformance' was a dreadful word it was like being in the army and you know stuff like that. It didn't suit our culture at all, but 'compliance' I suppose is better than 'non-conformance'.

Despite an impression from some managers in College C that the discourse has assisted in changing views towards quality, it is still evident that other groups view the spectre of non-conformance as a public threat. Certain taken for granted assumptions tend to exist amongst some senior management in College C that a college wide consensus on quality exists, suggesting that any debate has already been exhausted in favour of official versions. To further consolidate institutional adherence, to the quality agenda, some managers advocate a cultural approach, whereby everything is possible when it comes to accepting and meeting regime demands. A manager in College C remarks: "We don't think of things [related to quality] in terms of resistance but constraints on people's time".

The views of managers also indicate the flexible nature of the work effort bargain in post-incorporation FE. Some managers have a perception that a consensus position on quality has been achieved at institutional level because professionals will conform due to self-regulation.

> So, I think you could say they are compliant, yes, generally they are but not just because they are lead like 'lambs to the slaughter' [i.e. middle managers and lecturers] and they just do anything you tell them, absolutely not, they do it because they appreciate a reason for it.

Further examples illustrate that leader affiliates are using more basic methods of regulation across the colleges. Various machinations exist designed to ensure corporate loyalty, an example being the application of status labels to support compliance from other groups. A leader affiliate in College C reports of Divisional Leaders: "I call them senior managers when I want them to do something".
Also threats of embarrassment are evident to ensure conformance and promote self-regulation. A leader affiliate (College B) reports:

> I think it [quality] provides a focus to remind people that you can lose face on the premise that there's an intrinsic professionalism, its embarrassment rather than threat in a control model. You could still have controls in a much

> empowered context, which I think we have at [College B] but I threaten people with the embarrassment of making a fool of themselves, and that's enough. They don't see it as a threat they see it as recognition. …Yes and that's how I secure compliance. I'm unabashed about that.

The findings illustrate that some views, which do not necessarily conform to official story telling are marginalized, being antithetical to the general good of the institution. A leader affiliate (College B) refers to perceived dissenters as, "The Taliban", used as a pejorative to signify resistance by other groups, to post-incorporation discourse and practice. Dissent perceived as politically motivated, coincides with the framing of a discourse that ostracizes some agential projects as sinister or rebellious, while also characterizing as disloyal and treacherous certain responses to the corporate managerialist quality regime.

To say that quality has colonized the activities of managers would be perhaps to overstate impacts on the group, because outcomes are dictated by specific job functions in the hierarchy. The rituals of quality do provide a certain amount of comfort to managers through the establishment and legitimacy of formal quality structures although dispute with external agencies is evident in the findings.

6.2.5 *Agents of dispute: laying down a challenge*

There is little evidence of anything that can meaningfully be called 'resistance' by managers in the study. Instead, managers (particularly those in more senior positions) challenge or dispute matters through a negotiated process. Senior managers tend to object to their perception of unnecessary external interference from other regime agencies or actors. Having said this, the notion that managers passively accept the authority of the Funding Council and HMIE tends to ignore the experience and interpretation of educational reform at meso level. The affiliation of the senior managers within the quality regime in FE enables certain challenges to be made to the legitimate basis of other actors similarly placed in the regime.

Various factors emerge in the fieldwork about the perceived value of the HMIE, with senior managers feeling well placed to challenge and dispute the legitimacy of the Inspectorate. The challenge by managers (to the HMIE) ranges from the process of inspection/review, disputed grading of institutions by the HMI's during inspection/reviews, and in the course of follow-up visits, to outright criticism of the operation and structure of the HMIE as the FE quality function. One leader affiliate in College A comments that HMI grades are subject to negotiation whereby: "If you shout loud enough you can get the grades changed". Contesting the credibility of the HMIE, in defence of organizational independence and professional autonomy illustrates the frontier of control between auditor, the institution and its professionals.

Evidence exists to indicate that challenges by senior managers are filtered through a variety of mechanisms that are in keeping with regime affiliation. The arena to constitute a more general challenge is either through the Principals' Forum, getting the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) to lobby in a political sense or through various forms of external consultation. Alternatively at a local level, direct challenges to HMIE Inspection /Review teams are common practice and manifest in the maintenance of institutional autonomy.

Evidence reveals that the status of the HMIE is questioned and perceptions of a deficit expertise model also have an effect on whether grading given in inspections is accepted without recourse to dispute. Again, the findings illustrate differences of opinion between those that are Associate Assessors and subscribe to the process. Whereas, other critics consider the HMIE model to be flawed with the use of AA's being tantamount to inspection/review "on the cheap".

A willingness of some senior managers to challenge HMI's views, by disputing the process and outcomes of inspection has some success. Disputes with the HMIE tend to focus on the status of proof or requests for assigned grades to be reassessed, which suggests some negotiation. The process of HMIE inspection /review is conceptualised by some manager respondents as a means of control, because often practice is being framed in a certain manner to suit macro policy frameworks. The

intensive experience of actors leading up to and during HMIE inspection is considered to be a displacement of professionals, although necessary to ensure good grades and a sound inspection report. A senior manager (College C), states:

> A means of control [preparation and adherence to HMIE requests] in terms that everybody's got to get everything ready for an audit in a way HMI would want. This was for the last HMI Review, the amount of paper that went through our print unit was just stunning … it's too much of a paper control… Now lots of teachers do their best every day, so why not have an audit or a review when it's not the gala performance style, its part of an on-going life of a college.

The account demonstrates the preparation for HMIE visits is accepted and driven, depending on management perceptions of the external body. Some colleges feel that having Associate Assessors enables an institution to second-guess what may happen at a visit. Such market intelligence is also a form of insurance and comfort, to avoid any embarrassment to the institution through adverse grades. While the minutiae of review and inspection, is fraught with tension, agents are resigned to a sense of inevitability. Some senior managers feel able to exert some influence, although the more economized an issue becomes the likelihood of success is more limited. The displacement impact of HMIE visits, tend to mean that information is contrived to suit the occasion. A manager in College A expresses a sense of annoyance and cynicism with the rules of engagement by stating:

> What I don't like about external audits that look at whole colleges, things like the HMI is that you are required to gather so much information for them, which, 'hand on heart' now, and say is not manufactured just for the occasion, which has been the case occasionally in the past. It now presumably is a reflection of what we do as a matter of course and then they don't read it or they don't contextualise it or they don't do their homework. You know it's a time issue, they probably don't have time to do it but you do then have the

> feeling that they are not listening. They are looking for problems as opposed to identifying the good practice.

Alongside compliance to information requests is a perception by managers that the process of inspection /review poses a threat. Being prepared, 'just in case', is important to insure against further institutional scrutiny, in a climate where the audit always lurks. Managers are critical of the HMIE approach, which effectively focuses on quasi-technical systems to manicure the auditee, rather than the development of creative practice. One senior manager (College C) is clear on the type of impacts the HMIE has on the classroom experience for both practitioners and learners: "The HMI's don't look at teaching and learning positively, which stifles innovation". Little in the way of professional advice, informing a progressive model of education, appears to be forthcoming to institutions from the HMIE.

> I think that most people still think that they are being inspected and I think the HMI still thinks that they are inspecting. I think they are still inspecting and people still see it [HMIE visits] as inspections and the Self-evaluation is there, but it's secondary to what the inspectors think. I don't know what the future of an inspectorate is really, I don't know what the Funding Council is going to say or think.

While Self-evaluation appears to be based on qualitative judgments within institutions, the reality for some manager respondents is somewhat different to official state rhetoric. Some managers consider that during inspections the HMIE inspectors tend to interpret performance indicators in a manner akin to their political masters. More critical managers consider that Associate Assessors are merely messengers, spinning official dictates at the expense of developing a more creative student experience. Such examples provide substance to notions of bureaucratic control, whereby career advancement serves to muzzle professional debate. Career, becomes a form of control in itself factored through the vehicle of quality discourse and promotion prospects.

6.2.6 *In defence of institutional and individual autonomy*

The findings reveal that some managers' challenge to the quality agenda is borne through audit fatigue hampering local autonomy. Evidence suggests that for some managers HMIE visits are a "quality health check" as one respondent put it. Despite reservations, a good HMIE report is accepted by managers, as a form of status in the FE sector.

Some senior managers believe that HMI's are not effectively grasping the meaning of 'real time' evidence i.e. as events happen. Hence, managers comment on the HMIE process being retrospective, with little scope to record actions as they occur, which obscures the content of reports. Senior managers report that a proportion of HMI's visiting colleges are, "not up to it" encapsulated in the remarks of a respondent (College A). This issue of competence can be considered in various ways from: the wider impact HMI's can have on morale at a college, together with the lack of consistency in the performance of HMI's. The account of one leader affiliate (College A) illustrates a certain lack of confidence in the efficacy of inspection/review.

> If I've got a PI [performance indicator] in here I want an expert. I want somebody who is going to add something to my organisation whilst they are here, not just come in and do a comparison. One of the things that really "hacks me off" is HMI reports. Obviously they have these huge databank or phrases and paragraphs and they just lift them out and it's like that magnetic poetry that you do in your report phrases, words you pick out and that's how your report is written. There is nothing personal in terms of a college's character [that] comes through in those reports.

Data findings suggest that the integrity of HMIE reports is questionable, both in terms of the actors involved reporting for the Inspectorate and the documents produced. College managers provide evidence of some negative experiences from HMIE visits, which have tended to create tensions across the institutions. The focus is on particular HMI's challenging notions of professionalism, at a local level. A

manager (College A) reports on the perceived lack of consistency and trust in the inspection/review process:

> The thing is conforming. You can't conform to something you don't know about. It is a lack of acceptance of the professionalism of the staff. I know we are dealing with human beings in a lot of the auditors… Sorry in all auditors, but when they treat one body of academic staff in one way and that same day they treat another, almost like inquisitors, and then they treat another body of academic staff in a completely different way and you think why? Is there a reason for this? And they ask for different things, different evidence to prove that what they are being told is the truth. Where's the professionalism? It's just missing…it makes you resent auditors coming in, again obviously I'm talking very generally, but it does make you resent auditors, it makes you feel that any reports they produce are not based on truth.

Several accounts (from managers) are forthcoming during the fieldwork, whereby disputes with HMI's have flared up over what constitutes evidence. This matter of professional decision-making goes to the heart of professionals defending autonomy. However, notions of legitimacy are comprised through political weighting, which is effectively in the hands of the auditor. Managers details how producing evidence becomes a protracted affair, with a failure by colleges to produce data in certain ways being subject to criticism by visiting HMI's. Audit compliance to set framework rules indicates limited levels of trust in the institutional systems of quality. The frontier of control between auditors, the institution and its professionals is characterised by the account of one manager from College A, where informal evidence is clarified as having little worth to the external auditor.

> There is no professionalism or rather in the eyes of some auditors, they are God and there is no such thing as professionalism amongst the staff. They can go into anything, they can ask anything, that's fine, but to be nasty about it, to be bad mannered about it and to deny to your face that anything has changed or any improvement has been made because you couldn't produce a piece of

> paper that said ‘minutes of a meeting’ where you wouldn’t normally take minutes but because that didn’t exist. It’s almost as if they are trying to say, we are not allowed to have any discussions, and we are not allowed to have an informal meeting in the corridor. Colleges are run on these things. You are not allowed to have a telephone conversation unless it’s documented. The next thing is that one [event or discussion] that’s signed by every party that took part, it’s getting ridiculous.

In the account there is a sense of dissatisfaction underpinned by a perception of a lack of trust, in management and practitioners to run local colleges. The solution in a low trust culture is manifested as technical and bureaucratic control. The manager (College A) also reports on the impact a negative encounter can have on the morale and status of staff.

> Dreadfully [the effect on motivation and status]…this auditor [HMI], was ignoring all the hard work they put in [the group of staff], all the good practice they were now involved in, all the changes, all the movements they were making in the right direction. They were looking at certain spot elements and judging them completely based on these narrow criteria, so they [HMI’s] hadn’t done their homework…

Some respondents reserve their most vehement criticism for the HMIE based on particular perceptions and type of experience actors had of the HMIE. Such disquiet amongst some senior managers questions the role of the HMIE critiquing the reliability, credibility and a diminishing professional reputation of the organisation. Some of the current perceptions of the HMIE are as one manager (College A) reports: “Not the place to go if you want to further your career in FE”. Another (College C) adds, “If you ‘sing the song’ you can become a HMI”. Similarly a manager (College C) comments, “Their [HMIE] move to a review of quality is about ‘dumbing down’ and jazzing up”.

A viewpoint exists amongst managers that colleges are trying to forge their own identities although the HMIE does little to secure post inspection/review improvements. A Leader Affiliate (College A) notes:

> I think colleges are better now on looking at what they do and not being frightened to do that and to try and make improvements. I think it's worse in that we now have multiple audits where ok, some of the information is the same, but in different formats which is a complete "pain in the backside". I think it's worse in that the HMI have lost the credibility that they used to have in actually securing improvements for colleges post-review.

The views of some managers, suggests tensions, which question the legitimate regime status and usefulness of the HMIE in its current form. For some respondents the move towards a review model of quality tends to obscure what is ostensibly a growing audit function of the HMIE as part of the wider sector public audit regime.

6.2.7 *Agents of pragmatism: Associate Assessors*

The level of challenge managers are prepared to engage in with external agencies can also be evaluated against levels of investment and career aspirations. The findings illustrate that corporate agents are also seconded as Associate Assessors (AA's) to the HMIE. Some participants can be involved in college inspections elsewhere, but also bring back examples of best practice to their own colleges. Acceptance by some managers of the AA model is that it mainly provides market intelligence for institutions with agents seconded to the HMIE. Agents become focus points for quality protocols within institutions, whilst involvement also cultivates career insulation. There is some reluctance amongst AA's to challenge external policy emanating from the HMIE and Funding Council. Evidence exists of a dichotomy between managers who conduct AA roles or who are positively predisposed to the AA model and other managers who are more critical of the inspection/review model.

The findings illustrate that some managers feel there is a conflict of interest amongst Associate Assessors. On the one hand, AA's can be a college manager, in one

setting, but an inspector/reviewer in another – possibly at an institution perceived as a competitor college. While it is acknowledged that peer type assessment carries some benefits with the AA model, support for the method is not wholehearted as it tends to temper innovation and so thwart creativity. Sector investment by definition dilutes critical voices. There is also a perception amongst some AA's in the study, that a poorer inspection/review at their own college may reflect on them as not being able to "live up to the grade" as one puts it, in the view of peers or their surrogate employer (the HMIE). Such a scenario contributes in one case (College B) during the fieldwork to a conflict escalating to wider staff groups. The dispute relates to instructions by a manager/AA about the sort of activity that should be taking place in the classroom when the HMIE visits the institution. As a consequence of lecturers not adhering to instructions to change practice during inspection/review there is a threat of disciplinary action. While the issue is eventually resolved, the impact across the institution is captured in the words of one union official (College B): "industrial relations could have been put back five years".

6.2.8 *Agents of standards*

The findings suggest that the overall experience of students may have improved in terms of facilities and process. Given the investment in quality there is not a real perception amongst respondents that quality itself, has improved, although the scenario is complex. Some of the documentary evidence suggests more work is being done: 'Colleges have increased productivity by 25 per cent since 1996' (ASC, 2003) alongside the development and growth of audits. Forms of official state rhetoric needs to be set against local interpretations of quality as explained by one cross-college manager in College C

> I'm honestly not sure whether the time and effort spent to measure quality is at the expense of people having more time to sit and prepare and provide good quality learning. Now if that's the trade off then you would have to say that quality failed, if that is the trade off, if people genuinely believe that their time is now spent measuring and recording to satisfy the external audits and if that's at the expense to sitting planning and preparing and, if you like,

> working out a strategy, then that's a shame, quality has not achieved what it set out to achieve and there is a feeling in many teaching staff that that is the case.

The question of improved standards (for managers) is that any enhancement has only really been at the margins, given the type of expenditure in resources. Audit expansion is perceived as trying to "crack a nut with a hammer", as one senior manager in College A put it.

Various improvements are considered to be a reflection of the type of work done by colleges in both hitting targets (retention of students) and maintaining a social mix, to enhance the social justice agenda. Senior managers tend to comment that colleges are now reaching a wider range of students, as part of the Ministerial commitment to lifelong learning, which is an important indicator of quality. Some managers consider HMIE reviews to be improving, with more good and very good lessons. One senior manager (College C) considers this as progress being, "very good news", with "people are building those standards into their day to day work. However, a senior manager (College C), comments that definitions of improved quality need to be more all embracing, not just reflecting standards.

> I don't… see the investment in quality improvement as just being about standards, I see it as being about confidently moving forward, so it's forward rather than necessarily up all the time, it's about making sure that as you change, you are changing in the right way and thinking about the right things, asking the right questions, listening to the right people, and that's it not just, all of us as individuals doing what we think is right without reflecting on it in a collective way.

Some managers do consider that a nationally recognised quality framework would assist in improving standards. More streamlined ways of collecting evidence invariably means an overhaul of existing arrangements. Such discourse is tentative

and couched in dissatisfaction with external bodies. A senior manager, College C reports:

> It's a good idea to look for 'best practice' and how good colleges do certain things and try and disseminate that through the other colleges. Its not a bad idea, I'm not against benchmarking as such, it's just that the mechanism of achieving it, and the timing of it and the lack of consultation, and I think that's a general complaint about Funding Councils, they tend to be dictatorial.

Other managers think that the sector is not ready for institutional comparisons in a formal sense because this would place negative burdens and greater scrutiny on some colleges. Some corporate agents make comparisons (over standards) with other neighbouring providers, where benefits are conferred (for 'bragging rights'). Some managers strive to take the 'sharp edges' off official dictates and use manufactured statistics to motivate staff to participate in certain ways. Local quality information is presented as part of college public documents (i.e. in strategic plans and operational material).

Other senior managers are more sceptical about the type of improvements emanating from the quality agenda. A senior manager (College A), reports:

> So in terms of making a difference, I think it's [the quality agenda] raised the profile of it. I think that staff that perhaps needed a bit of a push to do the things that the good staff did naturally may have benefited from it. But for some staff that would have willingly done what needed to be done, they just saw it as an imposition and a bloody nuisance because they had to go away and fill in forms and have meetings and goodness knows what else.

Senior managers also identify links between quality and staff development. A certain irony is illustrated because during a prolonged period before, during and after a HMIE visit, the 'take up' in staff development was adversely affected due to

additional work burdens dealing with administration. This connection is encapsulated by a cross college manager in College C.

> Well, we had a good report, the rating was 'very good' we had a very good review and that reflects a lot of hard work by a lot of people. So, from that point of view we could say we provide a quality service. We have to say that the actual statistical returns on staff development over this review period, if we use that as a wee snapshot, is that staff development is down, activity level is down. Now, if it's down because people have been preparing for a review, now there is something wrong with that, there is something fundamentally wrong that the actual staff development inactivity and the participation in staff development is reduced in the very period that we are doing a review because people are preparing for a review that flags something up to the system surely?

The comments of the manager suggests that the investment in and intensification of quality impact in ways that have unintended adverse impacts on actors and institutions. The quality agenda has been cast as a panacea for continuous improvement, although impacts also reveal a false remedy due to the underestimation by official bodies of the types of programmatic and actor investment needed to satisfy regime demands.

While corporate agents may be translators of reform agendas, they also use devices at hand to persuade other groups of the efficacy of quality. Additionally, acceptance of quality cultures represents various negotiated processes of disputes resolution, which dilutes any real serious threat to policy implementation. The consolidation of quality at an institutional level suggests culture change, although obscures modes of regulation. Enough evidence exists to suggest managers are aware that for real progress and improvement to take place the manufacturing of forms of consent needs to coincide with and bolster the type of confidence through assurance models. Managers accept quality because it is part of their sector remit. On the one hand, they have no choice, but subscription also confers certain advantages. Tasked with certain

obligations, managers have to ensure colleges meet external systems requirements, which infers that quality adds surplus value to the end product (students). To some extent, corporate agent obligations to support the quality regime, also assists in the perpetuation of such phenomena.

6.3 Primary agents (middle managers)

6.3.1 *Brokering agents of the regime*

Middle managers (in all colleges) are situated and subjected to the articulation of external demands and the excesses of bureaucracy at a local level, which have a significant impact on the amount of effort necessary to complete tasks. The findings illustrate that bureau-professional conceptions of quality do clash with the corporate managerial manifestations of the regime. Middle managers are tasked with a remit to maintain and promote quality but often as 'brokers' with limited or no authority.

The willingness of middle managers to reproduce or maintain the regime emanates from their job remits, with accompanying obligations. Evidence exemplifies that the quality remits of middle managers have grown since incorporation to a point of being unmanageable. Some middle managers willingly accept quality (as a part of their remit and as a professional standard) but recognise the likelihood of an extensification with intensification of work. Hence, other middle managers are very critical that the quality agenda is being used to squeeze more out of the work-effort bargain.

As primary agents, (but also the fulcrum of quality operations) middle managers are also tasked by senior management with disseminating the cultural message of quality. It is apparent that middle managers make some concerted efforts to persuade other colleagues of the worth of quality being the 'brokers' (often unwilling) on behalf of senior management in seeking to overcome resistance to the quality regime. A middle manager (College A) notes:

> No, I wouldn't say 'refused' [referring to staff refusing to adhere to a quality procedure]. I've gone to great lengths to explain to the guys, what the requirements are and that they need to comply. It is a slow process but I would say we are getting there, it is not finished, it will be ongoing and yes, there is resistance to quality.

The above account details some of the problems associated with selling the quality message to other groups, although it is generally clear that middle managers are accepting their responsibility as operational brokers. Being keen to advocate the benefits of the quality regime, demonstrates that some middle managers, one step removed from the department or divisional mangers, consider quality to have certain career enhancing qualities.

6.3.2 *Corporate and regulatory sources of extensification and intensification*

Not only do middle managers work longer, but their labour is being utilised, with more effort necessary during the time they are at work to keep up with the demands of the job remit. For many middle managers acceptance of quality is often as a consequence of having limited choices, which affects professional autonomy.

The majority of middle managers comment that they feel and experience operational pressures, as a middle manager (College B) reports:

> There certainly has been a big increase since the time I started in the late 80s; no question about that, there has been a big increase in workload definitely. I mean you don't have time any longer. It used to be you had a certain amount of downtime if you like, but that's certainly not the case now. You are rushing all the time. The college management has cut the amount of time that you have for completing units, so therefore you have to get more done in a shorter time and you've got more classes as well, because they've increased the number of class sessions that you do… So clearly yes, there has been a big increase in that, but some of the workload depends on the SQA [Scottish Qualifications Authority] because if they change units then that is a big influence on your workload.

Some senior managers are aware of the impacts the articulation of the quality agenda is having on middle managers. The increased modes of 'proof collection' are seen by some managers as getting in the way of delivery to students with a concomitant affect on the motivation of middle managers. A senior manager (College C) outlines some of the difficulties faced by middle managers:

> The Section Heads… they are probably most stressed from a quality point of view, people like [names], implementing the policy and they are teaching a heavier workload usually than me…so they are the first port of call for the staff, so they've got the staff appearing… if it's a quality issue often staff will go to the Head of Section before they go to me [Divisional Leader], because I'm the final arbiter if you like, so they don't involve me until they have to involve me, but it means that the Senior Lecturers [SL's are Head of Section] get more work. So they are the people that are struggling…

For middle managers, the 'hands on role' of quality diffusion and reproduction also means differentiated impacts that distinguish them from some more senior managers, who are able to step outside the daily activity of the quality agenda because of their mode of affiliation to the regime. Consequently, middle managers are responsible for maintaining and rolling out quality initiatives (e.g. Self-evaluation) to somewhat reluctant staff groups.

6.3.3 *Ideological control: impacts of Self-evaluation*

The impact of the Self-evaluation process is significant in that the framework for evaluation is generated by the HMIE, encouraging greater ownership, maintenance of data processes and other institutional practices. Several respondents attribute a 'feel good factor' to HMIE inspection, particularly if visits are successful and result in good reports. Conversely, a majority of middle managers comment on the intensity and increasing workload associated with HMIE visits, which contribute to spiraling stress levels in colleges. Middle managers express concerns about the impacts and uncertainty of the HMIE visits, which is encompassed by a respondent from College B: "HMI gets you prepared but it's overkill – the uncertainty is not a

positive experience". Another middle manager (College C) reports: "We must have cut a few rainforests down as we sent them [HMIe] reams and reams of information and I don't think they looked at any of it". Likewise a middle manager (College B) adds: "Sometimes you feel as if you are drowning underneath a rainforest if you like, the amount of paperwork that is produced".

Middle managers are considered as drivers of the Self-evaluation implementation process at a micro level. The findings reveal that consent and commitment is apparent amongst some middle managers because they feel that the ethos of being able to evaluate professional practice is useful and progressive. Subscribing to quality is part of a strategy for career enhancement, which also serves to subjugate agential projects to bureaucratic control.

Middle managers are tasked to construct detailed written reports from across a whole range of courses in a process of micromanagement, leading to an enormous amount of additional and repetitive work. Some respondents welcome the benefits of ownership with Self-evaluation, when meaningful debate can take place amongst professionals at course team level. There are also signs that some recognition of the relevance of data is taking place, leading to what one middle manager described as, "a nice exchange of information". Nonetheless, middle managers report that evaluation has always been a feature of provision, but has previously existed (pre-incorporation) in more informal ways.

Despite some respondents being fairly positive about the concept and ethos of Self-evaluation, there is a significant majority of middle managers who consider the impacts to be negative because of intensification in the minutiae of practice. The additional work burdens mean that some middle managers are utilising their free time to complete reporting processes. Other evidence illustrates that Self-evaluation is focused on allaying the anxiety of corporate (external and institutional) agents, with more emphasis on the discourse and practices. The findings convey that evaluative processes are submerged in resource allocation conflicts. Therefore, quality ownership suggests self-regulating agents (autonomous) but in translation

outcomes clearly demonstrate that middle managers face significant levels of extensification and intensification in the work effort bargain. A middle manager (College C) is vitriolic in stating: "[We] naturally regard this stuff in a sense as war".

Other middle managers illustrate that the impact of Self-evaluation means significant levels of evidence production. A middle manager (College C) describes the workload in the following terms.

> Known as the downside of the [names the college] approach to it [quality] is that it's [quality] entirely paper driven, there is a huge amount of paperwork, there are questions and there is this focus all the time on if you want to save something, where's the corroborating evidence? You know, where is the set of statistics that told you that? At the moment the mass of the bulk of the work that we ourselves have to do before Self-evaluation is take all this raw data, PIs [performance indicators] and others and turn them into something meaningful that you can give your section staff before you can begin the discussion. I personally, and most of us here, did not feel that was an appropriate task, and did feel that was a huge burden.

Middle managers in College C are also obligated to spend time preparing portfolio presentations to the Senior Management Group. There are some positive responses on presentations that it gives middle managers a voice to engage with senior management, although others consider the process as 'additional homework' and a 'regulatory exercise'. The reality for middle managers is that there is no "real engagement", as one put it. Long delays giving feedback from presentations, often means events have been superseded by the time matters are addressed. The disjointed processes are perceived by middle managers as impacting on their workloads, in terms of preparation, the presentation and then implementing action points.

6.3.4 *Erosion of professional autonomy (extensification and intensification)*

The outcomes of an expanded role for middle managers are a significant and tangible impact on workloads in terms of having an administrative overload, with email

swamping becoming a source of real concern. Due to systems maintenance, middle managers only concentrate on what is necessary for conformance purposes.

Middle managers accept, but dispute the visible impacts of quality. One outcome (amongst others) is the 'incessant requests' for information, due to the administrative regime requirements. A middle manager (College B) reports being overrun by quality administration.

> It's what other folk have said. It's the thousands of extra requests that are killers. You do your annual course review and do your result sheets and if that was all you had to do and all these other things would come out of those, then that would make it pretty manageable but it's the repeatedly asking for thing, after thing, after thing.

Feelings of isolation and lack of ownership, compound middle managers fairly narrow conception of their role in relation to quality. The fieldwork reveals a sense of professional frustration amongst middle managers, whereby perceived improvements in quality are thwarted because of their particular limited decision making powers and real autonomy. From the findings, it emerges that some middle managers are systems operatives, merely paying lip service to the idea of quality. The impact on the identity of middle managers is that they have been constructed as auditees, performing roles and responsible for tasks that are more rigorously auditable (i.e. reproduced). Professional self-control has been replaced by distrust, whereby a performativity culture is implicated in the irrevocable damage to notions of trust within and between agential projects. Typical of comments are those of a middle manager from College B, who explains the nature of their involvement, the associated outcomes and feelings of disenchantment.

> I think the main product is ticking boxes and that's how it feels to me. I appreciate that there is more to it than that but I'm not included in that or felt to be included in that and therefore most of it I see as just to tick things to keep everyone's 'back covered'. As a by product though, by doing some of

> these things it does raise issues with staff and does raise possibilities of improvement on various levels but it's a by product I would have to say rather than part of the formal process. When we raise these things, nothing ever happens with them, so although it's good for us to do there is nothing coming back from the other side of it [i.e. senior management].

Work intensification for middle managers fundamentally determines how they cope with their time management. Working time is reconstructed to encompass a predominantly 'fire fighting' shop floor role. This notion of a chaotic existence is confirmed by a middle manager in College A:

> My biggest problem is time management and ok we are asked to juggle priorities and tasks but that can be pretty difficult at times, especially with e-mails, telephones, doors, you name it, all going at the same time.

Another manager (College A) faces similar pressures and provides a rationale for intensification.

> I think it is, they are implementing these systems and they are trying to obviously cover what 15 years work in 5 years? And it's now just catching up with the system requirements as they are laying down that work.

Middle managers have a perception of being 'swamped' across all three case studies, with very little opportunity for reflection due to an erosion of downtime. Middle managers consider their significant teaching responsibility, coexisting alongside an all-embracing quality remit also serves to intensify work. A period of wholesale curriculum development also requires more input into planning and preparation in the classroom, along with the monitoring of quality.

Evidence emerges that it is not just in college that middle managers are experiencing pressures, but the boundaries of quality involvement have spread to home life creating the effect of a totalising regime. Middle managers are keen to do a good job

but in order to do so, this means working longer hours. A middle manager (College B) reports on the difficulty of achieving a work-life balance due to increased activity and diverse quality requirements:

> I just think all the time I am doing additional things and working at home and doing hours and hours extra every week to maintain the quality in terms of the colleges quality, but also the quality of the courses that we work on and the quality of the support that I'm trying to give the staff, you know the lecturers that are working within that as well.

The increase in lean levels of staffing, combined with an intensification of work (through pace and volume) alongside performance expectations is evident in the study. Middle managers acknowledge that their experiences are similar in some respects to lecturers due to their classroom experiences, although further evidence exists of certain functions being devolved to lecturers to alleviate the pressure, strain and fatigue of the quality agenda. The notion of, "all being in it together", has resulted in middle managers delegating work to lecturers in an attempt to accommodate increased administration, much of it integral to the maintenance of the quality regime. A middle manager (College B) states:

> One way where it has reduced, I would have to say, is because there has been so much coming on it's prompted my section anyway, to look at delegating stuff down to lecturers, or else I wouldn't cope. So they've [lecturers] had to take some stuff on and hopefully that's been done in a positive way, looking at what would be good for them and the students and giving them the nice things, which leaves me all the 'crap' unfortunately.

From the account it is clear there is some hesitancy in passing tasks and workload down to lecturers. The refusal of some lecturers to take on any additional duties creates nodal tensions between the two groups. Where middle managers are successful in devolving duties it contributes to a blurring of the boundaries of

administration opening up opportunities for further encroachment on the lecturer work effort bargain.

6.3.5 *Reluctant brokers without authority*

The fieldwork also reveals that a factor behind the devolution of duties (by middle managers) is that they are themselves subject to additional requests to participate in working groups or committees. The totalising quality agenda means that senior management in all institutions is effectively trying to enlist the consent of middle managers in more activities, particularly around inspection times. This is explained by a middle manager in College A:

> What you did get was an increased demand on you, so you've got the original statement which was 'this is not a threat, it's going to be no more work' and then e-mail, after email, after email, asking for the same information, 'Come to a briefing- do this', which I refused to do because if you are going to inspect us, you inspect us the way we are and my paperwork is fine because it's part of my job to keep it up, but yes, the demand on us has increased.

High levels of dissatisfaction are evident amongst middle managers as a result of feeling 'duped' by senior management that their involvement in quality initiatives would be positive and not involve substantial additional demands. Middle managers are extremely critical of the HMIE because experience illustrates that college inspection/review visits tends to dramatically increase workloads in all sorts of ways from, excessive information requests, to attendance at additional meetings and the increased production of formal evidence. Middle managers challenge ideas that HMI's are experts (due in part to a generic status) plus a conception that they lack updated knowledge of subject and classroom practice. Such perceptions tend to be concentrated amongst respondents who hold onto bureau-professional conceptions of the practitioner.

The perception of middle managers is that information gathering to suit external bodies is mere duplication. In addition, a critique of the outcomes of HMIE

inspections/reviews focuses on a lack of critical intellectual depth in the feedback. A middle manager in College A reports:

> I think one criticism that I have of our last review is that we got 'very goods', we got 7 'very goods' [grades], which is absolutely phenomenal and yet we still got kind of a lot of action points. I think the HMI are trying to get that right now, but if you get lots and lots of 'very goods', how many action points do you need? And at what point, are they being developmental in carrying this on? … People feel quite distressed by it they find it quite a stressful experience.

The account is symptomatic of other responses, which questions the validity of the inspection/review process and accords with corporate agents as a general critique of the Inspectorate. External constraints explain only part of the story, as middle managers' main connection to the regime is on a day to day operational level. Being advocates of a corporate management quality message creates certain dilemmas for middle managers because they are expected to be committed to a quality agenda that often results in levels of discomfort for them.

The position of middle managers across colleges on classroom observation (a further development of the HMIE inspired Self-evaluation) is that on one level, it is considered positive i.e. a contribution to the debate on the reflexive practitioner. Middle managers are faced with the classroom observation initiative being under-resourced, being in contradiction to the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) trade union position on observation and lacking more senior management support to effectively operationalise and implement policies. While aware of the external influence of the HMIE middle managers are often placed in the position of being local brokers by senior managers. Evidence suggests local causation factors influence the implementation of classroom observation.

In College A, where observation is promoted more enthusiastically by corporate agents there is a feeling amongst middle managers that they can negotiate a position

with lecturers over compliance with observation models. A middle manager (College A) suggests brokering skills are needed to assuage resistance: "Yes, some people feel threatened by the appraisals [classroom observation], it varies… in my area, teachers are very much behind closed doors".

Some middle managers (College A) are of the view that classroom observation on a voluntary basis will not work because they have no legitimate authority to ensure the exercise is carried out. A middle manager (College A) refers directly to the uncertainty that surrounds classroom observation: "It's very confusing actually. They want everybody to do it but they want to keep it as voluntary and it's not going to work".

Further, there is also an acknowledgement by another middle manager (College A) that their own position as a broker lacks authority:

> It's my lot that are resisting, I think it's a political thing, I would say they just don't want to get involved in classroom observation unless they are forced into it and because the college won't make the decision to make it definite they are not volunteering.

Conversely College B is not engaging in any observation, with the local EIS union being insistent on the application of national union policy (observation being part of the teacher training processes and official HMIE inspection /reviews). Whereas, College C appears to be taking a more tranformationalist position, with senior management inferring that classroom observation is part of a future quality agenda. Despite an intention to introduce observation, at some stage across all the colleges, there appears to be some confusion in policy direction and implementation at an institutional level. The account of a middle manager from College C illustrates that perhaps senior management will eventually try to initiate observation:

> I asked the question specifically at the Academic Advisory Board on Friday [about the introduction of classroom observation] and they [senior

> management] were talking about introducing mandatory observation and they said their policy remains and will remain as it is and that is that it's voluntary. So in other words, we can't go in and say to people, 'We are going to observe you quite avidly'.

Middle managers frequently find themselves expected to promote what appears as confused policy. Despite scope for local interpretation, with variable outcomes, accounts reveal mixed conceptions and a certain dubiety, about the purpose of classroom observation. It is evident that rather than a complimentary process to enhance reflective delivery to students some corporate agents envisage opportunities for appraisal of staff members. Other evidence also suggests that in areas where team teaching is common practice middle managers accept the principles of observation and are more able to persuade lecturers of the value of the exercise. Examples do surface in the research where middle managers and lecturers are positively predisposed to the idea of observation but that time constraints and a lack of commitment to resources provide obstacles to implementation. The position of middle managers in the quality regime is exemplified by classroom observation, being brokers without authority, unable to effectively establish regime structures, which hampers the reproduction of the regime. Cast as the lynchpin of quality, connected with line managers and lecturers but compressed as a consequence of their relationships in the regime leads one middle manager (College C) to refer to the job role as comprising: "the thin slice in the thick sandwich". The findings reveal that middle managers are often hamstrung by external and internal structures with limited room for contingency planning.

6.3.6 *Brokers of standards*

The majority of middle managers are doubtful whether any 'real' qualitative enhancement in quality has occurred in the time from incorporation. Respondents tend to view improvements as being characterised in the process of 'doing' the quality (the task) rather than the outcomes i.e. better qualified students. Many managers are resigned to the economised quality system and the cycle of quality that accompanies it, which a middle manager (College A) outlines:

> I think the work that we do on quality has always really had positive outcomes from our point of view, it's just that it's an ongoing thing and it's actually quite onerous on top of everything else we do, and the onerous nature of it [quality] and the need to keep your eye on the ball all the time is one of the rotations of it, but to a large extent necessary.

The development of new skills as a contribution and consequence of being involved with college quality regimes is minimal. Those new skills that are developing tend to imply low-level administrative skills associated with coping mechanisms. Repetitive report writing is a feature of quality work for middle managers who are often being encouraged (and at times coerced) into writing and speaking in a language different from normal usage 'quality-speak'. This change of discourse has been consolidated through the process of course reports and other quality documents.

Some middle managers do feel that Self-evaluation has improved on staff reflection levels. The common response is of increased bureaucratic control meaning more low level administration, as reported by a middle manager from College A: "Well, having worked in offices in the dim and distant past, I feel that my 'admin skills' were relatively ok to begin with, because it's just form filling, box ticking".

6.3.7 *Brokers of 'inaction'*

While middle managers have certain obligations to further the quality culture in colleges, this coincides with increased levels of scrutiny and accountability associated with their own position in the regime. Evidence suggests that middle managers experience the most acute manifestation of the auditor/auditee interplay in the regime, which affects a willingness to accept quality cultures. Further, a middle manager (College C) comments on the process of making a presentation to senior management (constituted as regulatory control) which compounds: "powerlessness, and powerlessness but we feel disempowered even further as a consequence of the presentations and the feedback we get".

Confirmation also emerges that there is a definitive auditor /auditee relationship present with illustrations of internal academic auditors questioning middle manager professional judgment over the appropriateness and the quality of teaching materials. Some middle managers refer to sources of tension between the internal audit function and notions of professional autonomy, due to attempts by the former to make them more auditable. A middle manager in College C reports:

> One of the things we didn't agree with was audits; being told about half a hour before what packs they want to see and well that's really not fair because if you've got a verifier coming in you know well in advance what packs you are going to get. We thought that was a bit unfair, do you know what I mean?

While middle managers do not talk of resistance in overt terms there is evidence across colleges of certain types of recalcitrance as a consequence of systemic demands. Challenges to the rules of the regime do bring forms of success, albeit perhaps as a form of temporary respite. An account from a middle manager (College C) illustrates how tensions are resolved through forms of inaction.

> There are probably not any instances of not participating but there probably are examples of some kind of resistance. One example of that is last year that we got this kind of audit 'thing' imposed on us, this audit schedule and then there was a kind of momentum among SLs [senior lecturers] of kind of resisting it basically and they put it back by a few months. It was one of those things where they'd imposed it on us, like at a week's notice, and it was basically because we were all in the position where we couldn't see any way of completing it, it just couldn't be done. Even if we'd stayed at college till 10 o'clock for two weeks kind of flat out, it couldn't have been done. We basically said, 'There is no way this can happen', and it was only because there was quite a lot of momentum and it occurred at the same time as the SL's had reviews going on that they [senior management] decided they'd

kind of leave it for a period of time and then it got phased in a bit and it was a bit more kind of human if you like.

While the above account does suggest a frontier of control, other evidence points towards ways that middle managers are trying to cope with the demands of the quality regime. Visible acceptance (e.g. forms of 'presenteeism') by middle managers coincides with other explanations on how respondents try to assert some form of autonomy and control in the context of the regime. Such actions, also suggests subverting the rules of the regime.

Visible compliance in the production of formal proof for various internal and external agents coincides with the manipulation of data to produce more favourable outcomes for presentation. Being able to "hold back on data", as a middle manger in College C notes, is considered as a way of meeting systemic demands yet avoiding unnecessary, unwanted scrutiny. Being economical with data is a way of re-asserting some control over quality systems, which on the whole require high levels of conformance. It also signifies little trust or real value in the quantitative data being produced.

6.3.8 *Brokers of pragmatism: resistance to the 'rules'*

Examples of accepting quality on the grounds that it is a game to be played out, is palpable in College C, which also has the highest levels of surveillance and systemic demands. Threads of Gouldner's (1954) *mock bureaucracy* are evident, due to the introduction of bureaucratic rules and regimes that clash with the value systems of employees. Some middle managers are agreeing to the demands of the system but then making a conscious decision not to do particular tasks, which are not pursued by management, despite knowledge of the recalcitrance. A middle manager in College C provides a rationale for conformance, noting that some non-conformance is a part of the system but is disguised as part of a game between more senior management and others.

> You would get some non-conforming…Too many non-conformists is a kind of you know, it's a default kind of thing, but you wouldn't actually have to do one because you would actually be breaking the effective rules. A bit like in a Soviet factory where you pretend to do work and they pretend to give you a wage you know you are hardly going to say, 'Let's come up with another arrangement'. So you are not going to say, 'Oh we are not going to agree with this!' You just potentially agree to everything and there is a substantial degree of non-conformant activity.

The account details that 'opting' out is perhaps not possible, so acceptance is on a surface level to avoid further forms of scrutiny. Resistance develops in the form of inaction, which is more clearly evident in the response of middle managers to some of the onerous systemic demands of paperwork. Therefore, middle managers "reeling out a series of phrases to suit", as one put it, with certain quality requests i.e. course reports, being considered as compliance, but not commitment. There are opportunities to identify mock bureaucracy because some of the rules surrounding the audit are perceived to be of little intrinsic value. There is also a resignation in this activity that a lack of action and support from more senior managers means that reports are dormant processes, which creates friction. Most of the time *representative bureaucracy* is present amongst middle managers because rules (fundamental to the regime) are enforced through compliance with the legitimate affiliation to the regime, bonding on professional values about quality.

The perceived burden of paperwork is accepted by middle managers, but as with other factors in the quality system a pragmatic response is forthcoming. The explanation for this indifferent behaviour is that it serves as a coping mechanism to avoid being swamped. An account from a middle manager in College C, details the manner in which policies are subverted in an effort to manage the contradictions of the quality regime

> You also see although there are all those procedures there, which guide us but there are also procedures, which we are aware of at various times and all too

> regularly we are avoiding and we have to avoid in order to meet other targets. So, I mean retention, is one of these key issues… effectively what you are doing is well burying realistic paperwork in order to meet retention targets and to do your best by students. Well I suppose, in the sense they are not meeting the target, if you were booting them off courses because they are not passing within two goes [i.e. two attempts at passing an assessment]. Some kids need three or more goes, so effectively you are going to end up with a 'skeleton of the students' and that puts all kinds of pressures on courses and staffing**.**

In a similar vein, middle managers (and lecturers) appear to use joking rituals as part of a discourse, which on one hand is directed introspectively, but also towards management figures. References are made to quality procedures as 'real bodice rippers' or individuals contextualised as 'dinosaurs' or 'Neanderthal' in attempts to parody management stereotypes of dissenters. The appropriation of identity is in a similar vein to forms of misbehaviour identified by Ackroyd and Thompson, (1999). Respondents appear to utilise jokes as a way of satirising the regime as a farce, with management figures playing star roles. In using humour respondents are able to create some temporary space and reconcile some of the burden of audit.

Wrestling with the vagaries of the regime amounts to a, "losing battle" as one middle manager (College C) put it. Despite this, corporate agents are reliant on the middle manager group of professionals to sign up to the quality regime, and affiliate themselves in a comprehensive manner, given they are often at the 'hard end' of delivery. The idea that a regime can exist and 'tick over' through compliance at the bottom end (lecturers) appears to need consent in the middle, if it is to be truly embedded and reproduced. Middle managers may subscribe to the regime, although of equal significance is that respondents still hold onto the ideals of the classroom. Some middle managers are willing to subvert regime ideals, if they are not considered to be an important part of a professional debate on quality.

The desire of middle managers to be part of a professional debate is counterbalanced by a growing frustration that their voice is not being heard. The production of 'meaningless' formal evidence is critiqued because it tends to undermine more constructive activity. A middle manager from College B refers to a clash of paradigms, whereby acceptance is borne from a necessity to comply with/to systemic demands rather than through professional choice.

> I think the problem is, I mean you look for a model of teaching and lecturing which is supposedly a profession of self motivating, self regulating practitioners and in particular since incorporation a model has been imported from the business world, quality assurance, total quality assurance, Scottish Quality Management Systems whatever, and it's a model of monitoring and supervising, accounting, targeting etc and that model is completely at odds with a traditional culture and so what we've had is a clash of cultures in the last 10 years or so and that's where a lot of the stress and tension comes form, particularly from older and more experienced people who have been practicing for a long time, or if they've grown up and trained in a culture where you know it used to be self-monitoring self-regulating and that is no longer the case now, I think. A profound cultural clash has caused a lot of tension and recalcitrance and frustration.

The account further illustrates that while resistance from middle managers may not always be in overt terms there is an underlying resistance that clings to the remnants of the bureau-professional regime. This body of evidence suggests that perhaps the model of managerialism, which has sprouted the current quality regime still needs to consolidate support and is far from certain.

6.4 Primary agents (lecturers)

6.4.1 *Market and ideological sources of extensification and intensification*

The impact of the quality regime on lecturers has manifested in several ways. The wider policy modernisation agenda to institute changes in learning and teaching also carries with it various implications for the work effort bargain. During the fieldwork other groups are keen to suggest what constitutes a 'good lecturer' in post-incorporation FE. Such accounts (infused with forms of ideological control) incorporate a predominant theme, being the maintenance of standards and a quality product. Senior management stresses the need for proactive and flexible practitioners, who facilitate forms of market and ideological control. The necessary characteristics of a good lecturer are wedded to the dominant ideology and framed through recruitment and training, whereby questions on quality are commonplace with training being focused on outputs in line with a market based discourse. Despite various conceptions of how lecturers should serve the quality regime a Leader Affiliate in College C reports: "Ticking boxes- doesn't make for a good lecturer, and that it [conceptions of a good lecturer] was more complex and multi-faceted".

The rhetoric and reality appear to be at odds, when comparing views from other groups. Perceptions of lecturers as to what management requires from them focuses more on participating in the maintenance of systems and standards, with a view to reaching and improving on targets. Similarities exist between the way senior managers comment on the Funding Council being out of touch with reality at meso level to the comments amongst some lecturers that college management is also divorced from the reality of micro level delivery. Many lecturers in the study think that management conceptions of being a 'good lecturer' fail to address or impact on everyday classroom needs due to a lack of classroom contact and understanding of operations by the latter. The perception of many lecturers is of management (including middle management) being preoccupied with quality system outputs. Lecturers consistently refer to 'records'; 'checklists'; 'targets'; 'evidence'; 'standards'; 'paper filling' and 'targets/PI's', being part of the corporate managerial expectations and regulatory mechanisms in colleges. For many lecturers, quality

impacts on them as an audit process, whether in the context of teaching materials or evaluating the success of course units and course programmes. A lecturer in College B comments:

> Quality is about slavish adherence to irrelevant procedures, doing whatever is necessary to avoid criticism from outside agencies regardless of whether this has a positive effect on the students or anything else.

Meeting the requirements of tighter curricular models is characterized by reduced delivery times, (up to 25 percent reduction in a 40 hour unit of teaching). Teaching to assessment has become the norm to cope with the pressures of completing modules. More intense systems of moderation are being implemented to ensure students are meeting certain performance criteria. Lecturers are of the opinion that they are then being evaluated by regulatory quality models that consistently assure their performance.

Changes to the contractual framework in post-incorporation FE increases the amount of time spent in the classroom. One outcome is of lecturers having less autonomy, teaching to the assessment to cope with the pace and volume of work. Added value is at a premium. One respondent (College A) indicates frustration by stating:

> The problem is our Higher time [Scottish National Qualification] got cut…so that's at the same time as we talk about better quality for the students … so it makes you very cynical about quality when you think, you haven't actually got time to teach and assess, so assessment is falling outside class time all the time.

The reduction in available time to teach units is a familiar story across all the colleges in the study. What the accounts of lecturers illustrate is that while unit delivery times are subject to reduction, the amount of sessions lecturers can teach is also being increased. Such diminution coincides with the removal of development

time to produce teaching materials. A lecturer (College C) illustrates how a lack of development time appears to contradict with ideas about a quality product.

> I think there seems something a bit ridiculous in the quality process that you are expected to go and stand and teach a 40 hour unit but yet you've never been given time to develop it, and I just feel you are constantly having to beg for development time or to justify how you can actually get development time. I feel that should be tied to quality procedures, where if there are new things then management should accept that resources are allocated.

Other lecturers in College A highlight how the division of sessions into shorter periods of time has intensified the working day. Under such business efficiency models lecturers are expected to teach more sessions during the day.

> I think that the quality of teaching is poor compared to what I used to because I don't have time to do proper preparation for classes. I'm lucky I'm not as bad as some people. I've maybe three different classes one after another with no gap in between… you drop off one set of notes and pick up another because you're teaching three different classes in the morning… if you've got 6 hours the day before you've got very little time to get yourself tuned in.

Likewise, a colleague (College A) confirms the levels of intensification:

> I don't think the quality is good at all, it was better before when we had four envelopes [different sessions] a day teaching classes, so, maximum you could do was four and not six different subjects [present load]. We've now got 22 hours and a compulsory meeting so it's eroding time.

Another added:

> On Monday, I've got 5 sessions and then a meeting after… I think there has been an overload increasing our work and then to contribute more in the

> administration so quality has to go down. You're doing more and you have even less time.

There are similarities with some of the classroom experiences between middle managers and lecturers (middle managers having gained promotions through from lecturer level). However, lecturers in the study have to teach anything up to and over 24 hours contact teaching time, which means less room to accommodate additional tasks. A lecturer in College A comments:

> If we go back to all this 'quality', filling in all these forms in and having the meeting that we have you just don't have the time to prepare for your classes and the short notice that you're given doing these classes. We're producing a new course for next year and have had no time to develop it and there's no time given to getting the resources together… no development time is given … this is always something put forward…its been raised at meetings and some solutions are that if we take double the class and then someone else could do the development…this just means more intensive work.

In keeping with middle managers, evidence points to lecturers also feeling the 'pinch' as the devolution of responsibility occurs, both in terms of meeting targets and taking on additional tasks. The findings demonstrate that the work effort bargain for lecturers is subject to being continually violated. There is more awareness of quality issues amongst lecturers, but also more involvement, often as a consequence of devolved responsibility, requiring participation i.e. not opting out. A lecturer (College A) comments:"my job has totally changed in the last five years, there's more paperwork and moderation". Similarly, another colleague (College A) reports on the impacts of increased administration.

> I wouldn't mind filling in meaningful figures, it's the meaninglessness of them that is frustrating… Here is a box to put in reasons but you still think, where are these figures going? They are going somewhere, but where? My perception is I fill in more sheets of paper to what end? Is this going to

> improve quality? Because half the time I don't think it does. I'd rather improve the quality in the classroom instead of filling in several sheets… I rarely get feedback from these sheets.

The redefinition of the lecturers' workload and the level of effort necessary to maintain standards are evident in the examples above. The objectives of corporate agents to improve labour utilization (to include more monitoring of lecturer activities) while reducing the time to complete tasks has impacted on worker discretion. Task discretion is becoming a particular focus of management with quality as a tool, which legitimates a diminution of conditions

6.4.2 *Professional autonomy and ownership: impacts of extensification and intensification*

The ownership of quality has become contested due to the loss of autonomy at classroom level, established through curriculum changes, intensification of time to deliver courses to students, compounded by the construction of an auditable performance. There is a separation for lecturers, between the demands of the profession in terms of a quality education experience for students and the somewhat separate requirements of corporate quality, which often appear as an adjunct in the discourse used by respondents.

A growing involvement in quality processes has not brought additional influence for many lecturers. The requests for more information (often through the adoption of technology by email) appear to impact on lecturer workloads, with evidence suggesting little respite and lack of influence due to primary agent status. A lecturer (College A) states:

> We're asked for more information than we used to… They've tried to make Course Reports easier but what happens to the reports? … We've been making comments for the last ten years without results.

Another colleague (College A) reports:

> The meetings are becoming a waste of time because nothing ever happens, no matter what the students or we say… Only minor things.

What is also apparent in the findings is a variable paperwork burden across this group associated with levels of responsibility, whether as programme leaders or co-ordinators, through to Grade 1 lecturers and part-timers. A general consensus exists across the colleges of practice having to change to accommodate the audit burden. Some programme leaders have more input into course reports and other administrative functions, although with a minimal reduction in classroom contact. Work burdens are out of proportion, to the time allocations, which affects levels of acceptance of lecturers and creates associated frictions. There is a feeling that internal moderator (verification of the standard of students work) duties, as one respondent (College A) comments, is a shift in job roles, which is perceived as violating the work effort bargain. A lecturer in College A comments, "It [internal moderation] was done by a different group of people before it was a senior's job". More significantly, in many cases, there is a perception that the work-effort bargain is continually being violated by requests for further involvement. A lecturer in College A states:

> I'm an internal moderator [verifying the quality of work] I don't get time for that and there is no agreement that we do this … The union is trying to reach agreement on this. It used to be done by SL's [Senior lecturers] but these have vanished and so we have a lot less promoted staff. The CL's [Curriculum Leaders] have to do the other things that SL's and Heads of Section used to do and they are … most of them horrendously overworked and so ordinary staff have got some of that work as well mostly IM [Internal moderation] and they are not happy about it … it was just imposed.

Another lecturer adds:

> I was just nominated with no consultation … they can't do it all themselves so they nominate … they don't like it either.

While a respondent in College B reports:

> They obviously nominate the people who'll do a decent job… the moral is you do a decent job as one of my colleagues who retired recently said 'no good turn goes unpunished'.

The impact of the quality agenda on lecturers' work also means various types of involvement, which increases time devoted to, paper burdens associated with classroom registers, meetings to accommodate quality reports and quality visits. Evidence of lecturers teaching students to do assessments rather than develop a wider understanding of subject disciplines is an outcome of cuts in hours, which is then subject to performance scrutiny. Some lecturer respondents note that they do their teaching and then the quality requirements come after this. This is manifest in terms of systemic quality requirements, although the findings point to lecturers' work intensifying to the level where the day is frequently extended to cope with increased demands.

6.4.3 *Agents of self-evaluation: manufacturing control and consent*

Many lecturers comment that the idea of evaluation is positive (it is something that is done to inform professional practice) but impacts tend to be manifested in paper driven exercises that discount the notion of being reflective. Several elements are palpable in the findings. Lecturers comment that Self-evaluation is a team exercise, where lecturers get together to, "look at PI's [performance indicators] and negotiate a grading'- so we are all involved in that as well", as one lecturer put it. Similar responses are evident to those of middle managers, about the time consuming nature of the exercise.

Respondents report that the process of Self-evaluation impacts adversely because it is an 'unnatural exercise'. This 'phoney' process, delivers an unnatural picture of what happens in colleges and is poorly resourced in terms of time allocation. Lecturer affiliation to the quality regime means decision making mainly focuses on course reports and meetings with middle managers. A lecturer in College B exemplifies a

general position: “There are certain areas where we can’t really control things to improve them there are things where we are constrained really in lots of different ways.

The impact of Self-evaluation (for lecturers) means quality exercises often detract from the process of teaching due to a restrictive quality framework. Some lecturers are critical that Self-evaluation does not accurately reflect the student experience, being a symptom of external pressures for colleges to be more efficient, effective and economic with resources. The impact of Self-evaluation on lecturers’ time commitments is that teaching is regularly put to one side or curtailed, to accommodate meetings and other displacement activities. A lecturer (College A) reports “Now sometimes the teaching of classes is the kind of thing I’m trying to fit in”.

Powers to self-regulate are inhibited by initiatives such as Self-evaluation. Some evidence exists which illustrates that lecturer submissions in the Self-evaluation process, are subject to being altered either by middle managers, or further on in the process by corporate agents. The purpose of intervention in documentation is to give the right impression, or use the language format, expected by either more senior personnel or external agencies i.e. The HMIE.

There is a general feeling amongst lecturers that Self-evaluation is engulfing them, whereby they are obliged to add value, which is measured by spurious performance mechanisms. In short, involvement in quality has become a regime expectation. Communications with lecturers appear to encourage participation in Self-evaluation although a perception exists that such initiatives are rarely explained in terms of time commitments or work effort requirements. A union representative (College A) explains:

> So there is a bit of communication missed somewhere in terms of what is it you [management] are really asking me to do and why [in relation to

> evaluation]. I think if people can be convinced about the value of what they are doing they would be much happier to go with it.

6.4.4 *Agents of standards*

While official results may appear to be improving year-on-year, there is a perception amongst lecturers that the curriculum has been consistently 'dumbed down'. For some lecturers, there is a conflict with a wider institutional and sector agenda meaning bigger classes and less time to teach them in. A lecturer in College B sums up a general perception about inhibitors to improved quality:

> I suppose at a wider level, in the time I've been here I think there has been a reduction in quality in terms of reductions in class contact time, the amount of time you get to teach Higher [national qualification] has been reduced and I can't see how that has improved quality one iota…The environment in which we teach, I think there is also little importance attached to that and the fact that much of this accommodation is inappropriate for its purpose and that impacts upon whatever you mean by quality in terms of you know, do students who come to [College B] get the best shot? And I would have to say that in some cases they don't, due to situations beyond our control.

Solutions to intractable problems for lecturers are invariably at the expense of the student experience. Such a scenario is considered by lecturers as being detrimental to standards and a 'real' quality education experience. A lecturer in College C reports:

> We have no guidance time and we all go into our own break times and lunch hours counselling students and that's really detracted from the quality of the teaching… it's rushed… it's teaching to outcomes [performance criteria] it's more, there are certain issues… they [students] are pushed very much harder and you're teaching in a much narrower and blinkered way because you know that you have to… You don't really have time for the exploration and explanation.

Ideas about innovative teaching and learner engagement appear to be lost in the vacuum of quality as lecturers and students experience intensification in the work-effort bargain. The requirements of the quality regime have 'eaten' more and more into teaching time. Cancelling classes to attend quality events, or an example of, regularly spending ten minutes of a teaching session registering students [for funding purposes] are indicative of impacts. Also, changing lessons to suit the HMIE experience is common practice across all three case studies. A sense of irony also emerges from respondents, who report that students are beginning to change their normative behaviour to suit observations in the classroom during visits by HMIE.

This viewpoint is not uncommon in the research, being associated with other comments over whether the students really think standards have improved despite positive student satisfaction surveys. The notion of a 'slicker' delivery in 'brighter buildings', exists alongside other ideas about improved academic standards, but both are also disputed. It is clear from all case studies that skills discretion is declining and the room to make professional decisions has been squeezed.

6.4.5 *Vulnerable and insecure agents*

Elsewhere across the colleges there is evidence that the impact of the quality regime has had a particular effect on part-time lecturers. There is evidence of significant additional workloads. One example of where the tentacles of quality have become more intrusive is by part-time members of staff taking on moderation, course leader and reporting duties. Part-time lecturers receive a fraction of their pay for preparation and development, but their time increasingly focuses on attending quality events or contributing to planning processes rather than attention to teaching materials While these processes suggest colleges are being inclusive, this often results in more value being added to the labour process for little associated costs. The effects on the part-time lecturer, is of an increasing affiliation to the quality regime, but with little or no influence. A union representative from College B questions the commitment of management to a serious quality agenda, stating:

> I think some of the things would need to be looked at if we are serious about quality would be the way in which; the preparation time is provided for within the college. There have been big changes in recent years in the way in which part-time, temporary staff are paid and the amount of time they are given for preparation time that has consequences. I know many part-time temporary staff talks about the amount that they are doing outside their contracted hours in order to prepare for classes, that's not good.

One of the issues to emerge from the fieldwork is that part-time lecturers are utterly disarmed by the quality agenda. Opting-out could mean loss of employment at a future date. A part-time lecturer in College A recounts a conversation with a line manager, which illustrates some of the pressures "I said …'there is extreme pressure to pass students – you can't make a silk purse out of a pig's ear'… she said, 'well pass them! … Pass them'!"

Also, a union representative (College C) comments on the legitimacy of the quality discourse.

> Workload is the thing, no one would object to improved quality, because that's the argument, it's the old trick of moving forward so we provide a quality service. So no one could argue against quality…

The inference in the testimony of the union representative is that it is difficult to stand in the way of perceived progress and improvement. Some groups i.e. part-timers and students have a tenuous affiliation to the decision making processes associated with the quality regime. Such groups are subordinated in particular ways to the powerful discourse of qualifications, credentialism and targets confined within regulatory structures having few choices and little influence.

While evidence exists of part-time lecturers feeling more pressures in keeping with the wider impacts on lecturers there is also a sense collegiality, with inclusiveness marked by identity to particular occupational disciplines. A part-time lecturer from

College B reports that support from colleagues is a decisive factor in developing a quality culture:

> Coming in as a temporary [part-time] member of staff and I feel very much that the quality has been the staff themselves… I'm covering someone who is on maternity leave and I tried to pick up where someone has left off… the team if you like and how the staff responded to me and made me feel welcome and to the students, that says to me a lot about the quality…so a lot of the quality emanates from the staff themselves.

The impact of the quality regime serves to create surplus value to the labour process of lecturers through the production of performance criteria and targets. Outcomes lead to increasing scrutiny to meet the requirements of a more flexible job remit. More agents are 'brought into play' as the regime evolves with the experience of part-time lecturers being an example of the regime challenging the work effort bargain.

More generally all lecturers can be considered as vulnerable as the clash between the traditional professional 'pride', of practitioners and providing a service to students, clearly collides with the wider external constraints placed on the lecturer through the business process model. A lecturer in College C explains how value is added to teaching but through intensified processes, which further conflates the work effort bargain and undermines lecturer conceptions of quality. A consistent re-occurring theme is evident:

> I think as a professional you try and give your students the best but to be honest that actually means putting in more hours than what you are actually paid for because if you care about basically what your students are actually learning in your class then you'd make a point of ensuring that your materials are good and that you try and do something for them, but within the framework that we work in that's virtually impossible to do that within the hours that we are given…You don't actually get any development time and I

> think there seems something a bit ridiculous in the quality process that you are expected to go and stand and teach a 40 hour unit but yet you've never been given any time to develop it and I just feel that you are constantly having to beg for development time or to justify how you can actually get development time. I feel that should be tied into quality procedures, where if there are new things then management should accept them as part of that process and time has to be allocated.

The challenge to professionalism emerges as a growing source of resentment for many lecturers in the study. The prescriptive nature of quality appears to have little relationship with lecturer perceptions of how to deliver a quality product to students. What is apparent is a sense that a frontier of control exists, whereby a certain amount of brokering takes place between managers and lecturers. Quality tasks are performed, but not too much attention is paid to the detail. A lecturer from College B reports on the tensions surrounding autonomy to make professional decisions.

> Now there is a big issue in relation to the management of teaching in the sense that it's not like the management of an office, you know most lecturers, particularly in [College B] is a good example have a pretty similar baseline qualification and there is this a big feeling amongst the lecturers that 'Who is that other person to tell me how to do my job?' What experience or training have they got that will make that more effective?

The further encroachment of the corporate quality agenda through classroom observation is considered detrimental to a quality process because it is a management initiated process that many lecturers believed usurped notions of self-control. Professional decision-making in the classroom is considered as being at the heart of a quality experience. Many lecturers believe their views are absent in an economized model, due to a fixation with quantitative targets and forms of measurement, which emanate from corporate agents.

6.4.6 *Agents of cynicism and resistance*

The development of Self-evaluation, through the introduction of full-scale classroom observation emerges (during the study) as an increasing source of tension for lecturers, representing a serious violation of the work effort bargain, which further disrupts the normative understanding of professionalism. Hence, the underlying purpose of classroom observation is considered by the majority of lecturers as having an external programmatic structure that is constituted in making professionals more auditable (reconfiguring the auditee).

Evidence from across the study reveals variable stages of development of classroom observation. The most active examples of classroom observation are evident in College A, where despite lecturers acknowledging observation, as a professional, reflective activity, which can have some benefits real tensions exist due to a lack of investment. Such pressure violates an already strained work effort bargain. One lecturer in College A states:

> I'd quite like it if I had time, I really love watching people teach… with tandem observation the observee is going to learn as much… it's not going to take off if you don't get time to do it.

The views on observation are underpinned by challenges to professional autonomy alongside a lack of trust about how the process and information is being managed by management. A majority view of lecturers is that management commitment extends to an audit level to meet HMIE requirements. Lecturer responses to classroom observation in College A ranges from inaction to a straight refusal to become involved in any associated activity. A lecturer comments: "There is a general suspicion the morale is low and the overall 'goodwill factor' has gone and people are very suspicious of it, that's the bottom line".

Some respondents feel that information from classroom observations can be used in disciplinary cases, with line managers choosing to identify weaknesses in the performance of individuals. A lecturer in College A states:

> I think it is potentially judgmental development… there have been difficulties in other colleges down south for example, so people are keeping one eye on what has happened elsewhere and they are worried about that it is potentially judgmental.

Classroom observation provides an example of a frontier of control whereby lecturers envisage infringements by management as an affront to professional autonomy. Decisions on delivery methods can be manipulated by managers to suit in an effort to drive wider quality initiatives by capturing ground at the point of delivery. Despite concerted resistance rhetoric from lecturers this is not entirely successful and often depends on the type of pressure exerted by line managers.

Various lecturers acknowledge that there are some perceived professional benefits to perhaps be gained from observation, although the motives of corporate management are called into question. A lack of resource investment, together with a perceived lack of control or autonomy over the processes of classroom observation, are considered as extremely important by lecturers and given as explanations, why they do not support the initiative. The underpinning motives of classroom observation, the fear of, "appraisal by the backdoor", as one lecturer put it, rather than being a purely personal developmental exercise appears to be part of a wider external regime agenda to regulate performance. This scenario of trust is summed up by another lecturer in College A:

> Classroom observation is a contentious area… Why? Because people do not wish to be observed because they feel they are being appraised and no matter how it is couched people are reluctant to do it because they feel they are being appraised and they resist…. Not everyone, but I think they think well if it's going to be appraisal let's be honest about it…

Corporate agents in College A want to make the discourse sound less threatening and build a consensus around self-governance and self-regulation with moves to convince a recalcitrant staff group, conveying a level of professionalism. Other

middle managers require more compliance factors to be built into the process of classroom observation in College A. In contrast, lecturers resist moves to broaden and fully implement the policy. However, a softer approach by management, to both the activity of observation and reporting procedures is an example of an attempt to win 'the hearts and minds' of lecturers. Cultural or ideological control may assist in a campaign of conversion. The result of management trying to introduce less threatening initiatives does mean that some observation did take place informally. Lecturers are keen to stress that they look for ways to frustrate the rules, while appearing to conform and comply with the policy initiative. Additionally, forms of aesthetic commitment are not necessarily converted into action. The complexity and time commitments necessary to make the exercise of classroom observation appear valid and credible are utilised by lecturers to stall full implementation. A union officer (College A), reports:

> I think for this year, a third of all staff have to be observed in the classroom. Currently it's voluntary and there are some staff who do not want to take part at all. There are concerns that it will be used in some way against them. This creates another issue because if we were looking at peer observation being beneficial to individual staff, not just the observer, you really have to have time to actually go and look at what you've found out and I think there is an issue over that I know of people who have been observed and that was it. It's a bit like, 'I want you to fill in this form, it's an evaluation', I want you to comment on my teaching style. I need to go and look at it and then for me, well is there any feedback on this it's the feedback opportunity that's what we are looking for, and how it's fed back in time.

The account of the union officer in College A, demonstrates that there is a professional ethos underpinning the response of lecturers to observation, one where consent is grounded in a comprehensive development exercise. The official process of improvement appears to be infested with configuring the auditee, whereby the task and associated administration becomes more important than more philosophical processes of feedback, evaluation and improvement.

The fears expressed by lecturers go to the heart of classroom control, the way materials are used in the classroom and the manner in which delivery occurs. While curriculum change results in tighter delivery models, the notion of classroom observation appears to go a step further for many lecturers, having the potential to further undermine their autonomy and ownership of delivery processes in the classroom. The creation of a more auditable performance appears as an outcome of classroom observation.

The position of College A, on classroom observation is in stark contrast to the response of a lecturer in College B. This signifies that the influence of external agencies can also be deferred through corporate agent translation at a local level, factored by whether there are benefits to adopting initiatives. A lecturer in College B reports:

> Classroom observation is not something which has ever been welcomed at all, and never been pursued except by Inspectors. But the reality is that in many sections like ours, it probably happens informally, we get used to having the senior lecturers and other staff and people going in and out and we just get on with it, but it does happen informally.

The responses in College B are contextualised by a union officer who commented that customer/student observation is integral to evaluation forms and therefore there are mechanisms already present to look at lecturers in the classroom. The formal observation exercise effectively constructs the lecturer as the auditee by using' newer' evaluative mechanisms to operationalise externally contrived audit processes. All the factors combined make it very difficult for lecturers to accept the way the regime has evolved. The state of affairs is summed up by a lecturer in College A

> If I was coming into the system now I wouldn't even consider coming into FE as a consequence of how it's changed over the years. I don't get as much enjoyment out of it now but that's because I want to be in the class doing what I want to do rather than looking at my desk doing things I don't want to

> do. I'm being pushed in a direction I don't want to go. I want to improve my class rather than improve an audit… I don't see any return on this quality they disappear into some unknown desk or computer… The quality team might see them, I don't.

The sentiments in the above account are not uncommon in the study, and exemplify the level of disenchantment over the drift in the work-effort bargain from across the lecturer groups. The outcome is that many lecturers are unwilling to accept the status of auditee, rather than professional practitioner. There is an acknowledgment among lecturers that accountability is a necessary feature of post-incorporation FE but factored by audit assurance systems, with a thinly veiled concept of improvement through practitioner evaluation. The current scenario for many lecturers is creating a contested field, albeit factored by a discourse that is difficult to challenge. As with quality, improvement appears as a concept that has been operationalised to support the audit function.

6.4.7 *Individual and collective factors supporting or inhibiting resistance*

In explaining how resistance amongst lecturers manifests itself across institutions, various factors become apparent. The length of service of respondents appears to be a central determinant in acceptance of the quality regime. It is evident that some longer serving lecturers are more cynical about quality initiatives. One explanation emerges in the study that those lecturers with pre-incorporation experience have been able to make meaningful comparisons and evaluate the worth of quality regime development.

A union representative (College A) illustrates that a more experienced staff group is likely to question the motives of management, particularly after more than ten years of incorporation.

> What you have is a workforce who reached a certain age where I think the vast majority are over 50 and I think given that, we tend to view certain things with a degree of cynicism. There is an element of mistrust there, but I

> think that experience has taught us not to just take things at face value. Younger staff comes in, they do not necessarily feel the same way as their older, more experienced, colleagues.

Those groups in the regime, who are responsible for implementing or supporting implementation, also put resistance down to lecturer experience or time served in the sector. A quality officer in College A reports:

> Classroom observation is something we are trying to work on at the moment… You may have noticed that people in this college are quite old, so people are quite old. So you have this thing of having teachers for 20 years, who argue and say to me, that "I know what I'm doing". So, there has been a certain amount of cynicism with people saying 'What is the point of these paper exercises?', 'Time consuming', 'I just want to do my job', but I think slowly as people get involved, they actually see the benefits.

The evidence indicates that management appears to have fewer problems initiating and securing compliance from post 1992 lecturers. Other features include cultural differences between institutions, which impact on the acceptance of quality. The account of a leader affiliate (College A) points to the ethos and dynamics of staff composition in a college as a factor in the acceptance of quality:

> I think it's probably because this college is a bit different from most other FE colleges. We don't have a huge craft orientation. This is very much an "arty farty liberal" college because we do a lot of academic type teaching and I think it's the culture within the staff , their first role is pull out the potential from the students and therefore quality 'ticky' boxes is an imposition because the vast majority of folk were doing what needed to be done anyway…

Former or current occupational background of lecturers, indicate that those from an industrial background are more familiar with and likely to accept quality initiatives or processes that hail from industrial models. This view is acknowledged by a

manager (College C) whereby lecturers from industry appear to more readily accept the current quality models.

> I think with the people that have been in industry there hasn't been resistance [to the quality agenda] because they've been involved in all these engineering quality systems and things like this for years.

The evolving nature of the quality regime exists in some FE institutions against a canvas of instability as a consequence of restructuring. This example of uncertainty means that challenging policy and practice is factored for primary agents against job security. This can be utilised by local management whereby quality audits generate forms of commitment and conformance towards internal processes i.e. the threat of the audit as the only way forward, used to subdue professional debate. A Leader Affiliate in College A comments:

> [T]his quality system in here hasn't been around for long enough… So for staff, especially in this college, which went through a period of finance recovery, I think staff felt committed to make it work because their own place within the college wasn't at that point secure.

So on one level acceptance and compliance can be illustrated by structural uncertainties, other explanations for accepting quality for lecturers (as with other groups) is not as a choice, but as a professional obligation to improve the classroom experience of students.

Another variable in the acceptance of quality appears to be the perceived strength of the EIS union, plus the relationship with management at institutional branch level. It is evident from the fieldwork that quality issues are becoming more contentious across all three colleges. A lecturer in College A exemplifies the levels of collective acceptance, but also the localised influence of unions despite management attempts to make the process more attractive to respondents**:**

> Yes [resistance to] 'peer observation', which they have now renamed as 'tandem observation' to make it sound less threatening and the union have boycotted it… We're just refusing to do it… but some people have always done it … team teaching they've done it already and it is fine … but certainly for the rest of the college I don't think it's going to get very far. People are very suspicious of it.

Local union influence is also evident in College B with EIS members being instructed to adhere to national EIS union policy, which is against any forms of observation other than for teacher training or official HMIE purposes. A trend emerges whereby quality regime issues are identified by lecturers as increasingly problematic, being a source of complaints to trade union officers. Also, specific examples of the regime violating the work effort bargain are raised on the Joint Negotiation Committees (JNC) meetings with management.

The disruption caused by a threatened disciplinary in College B during an inspection/review illustrates that quality has become a frontier of regulation and control. In College C, the institution of 'Workload Reviews', as part of a joint management union Working Party on workloads across the college are initiated due to the pressure of an increasing burden of administration on lecturers, much of it linked to the quality agenda. The purpose of the workload reviews in College C is to look at a more manageable way forward, with management accepting that there is too much audit. Solutions, to an increase in administration, is the creation of further elements in the hierarchy with time allocated to cope with the demands i.e. programme co-ordinators.

Despite some evidence of success fundamentally, lecturers appear to lack industrial strength, with a weakened bargaining position, as a consequence of being unable to withstand the restructuring of FE from incorporation. Such a scenario hampers lecturer efforts to defend terms and conditions against the surge of the quality agenda, with much depending on local collective bargaining power. There is

recognition from a union officer in College A of quality being driven by an external economic agenda, which is difficult to stop due to a weakened professional position.

> I think they are both [making reference to external and internal demands]. The demands over the years have been placed on colleges to be more economic, to ensure that their workforce is more efficient, generally speaking their measures of efficiency and the economics are externally driven anyway. We just have to respond to it. We have very little choice; I mean we don't have any industrial 'clout' as such, if we withdraw our labour who cares? Withdraw 'good will' then, it means you work much harder actually… There has been a real shift from what were or are Heads of School [now Heads of Department] who are at the strategic level making decisions strategically but they are losing sight of what is going on at the ground level.

What the account from the union officer does illustrate is a perception that acceptance of the quality agenda creates particular difficulties because decisions by corporate agents tends to be out of line with the reality of delivery in the classroom. Hence, the classroom appears to have been problematised by external and institutional corporate agents. The 'fitness for purpose' of quality is often at odds with lecturers at the hard end of delivery who find it difficult to accept the macro definitions of quality as conferring tangible benefits for students in the classroom. The majority of lecturers in the study are of the opinion that the quality agenda offers a deficit audit model, which means it is often at odds or fails to accommodate the fundamental purposes for FE colleges, which is to serve the community and improve the lives of students.

6.5 Conclusion and summary of findings

This chapter has interrogated some of the substantive impacts and levels of acceptance associated with corporate and primary agents. It is here that the voices of agents are a significant gauge of the regime. The results, commensurate with a critical realist philosophy, interpreted through a regime matrix portray a series of complex causal factors that have influenced the development of the quality regime,

none more so than the interplay between macro (State and Funding Council) and meso (college or institutional) levels. The structures, duties and culture of quality reveal a certain operational logic which is predominantly occupied with set policies for implementing and measuring the performance of institutions and agents. In short, the institutional auditable performance and auditee have been manifest creations from incorporation, more so since the inception of the Funding Council. A sphere has been developed for the public audit regime to continue to grow and prosper.

Institutions and agential projects are central to the discussion and this reflective summary spanning Chapter Five and Chapter Six will assist interpretation in the next chapter. The analytical framework provides a powerful tool to illustrate how agential projects initiate, establish, diffuse, reproduce, yet also resist a clearly identifiable quality regime. The main focus will be on the contingent comparative factors between institutions and agents, which enables the identification of particular approaches that colleges are continuing to develop for the management of quality.

The evidence from Chapter Five illustrates that all agential projects are subject to external demands as a consequence of their affiliation to the regime. Messages of the quality audit and the rhetoric that support a quality agenda are accepted in different ways according to location in the regime. For some in the study this either results in self-recruitment to support the regime or in some cases at college level, 'press-ganging' affiliates to engage with a form or process synonymous with external influence.

Corporate agents have more scope for influence on state agencies as a consequence of intra-organisational group membership. Yet the institutional configuration of quality across all colleges with its associated demands of audit scrutiny and levels of involvement lead to questions about whether it is quality from within or outside.

In contrast middle managers and lecturers have clear auditable remits and are constructed as auditable with the reinforcement of mechanisms of control. Contested

notions of ownership without authority are a reality for primary agents, due to weaker regime affiliation in the decision–making and agenda setting process.

In Chapter Six, the impact on, and the ability of, all agents to exercise forms of professional autonomy is subject to various inter-related causal factors that either facilitate or inhibit actions. The impetus behind this approach is the theoretical framework in Chapter Three with core themes around professional self-regulation and the manufacturing of control and consent in the labour process.

Corporate agents, across institutions are obligated in several ways to drive policy but are also able to mitigate effects depending on level of seniority. Making everything and everyone auditable, while being subject to the public audit regime agenda is translated in outcomes at institutional level. The quality regime is facilitating career building strategies (an example being through the HMIE as an Associate Assessor). Colleges are generally positively predisposed to encouraging managers to become Associate Assessors. Very few corporate agents believe the quality regime itself is totally flawed, but the levels of regime investment could explain such a position.

In contrast middle managers are cast as 'institutional lynchpins', being 'squeezed' by the regime and subjected to work extensification and intensification. The quality regime is merely envisaged as an adjunct of corporate managerialism by many respondents who are creative in the presentation of data, and pragmatic in how they accommodate various demands. Some respondents are either utilizing more pragmatic means or constructing better 'game plans' to stall further incurrence of normative professional practice.

Cast as primary agents, lecturers have experienced growing intrusion with the work effort bargain being violated due to increasing control mechanisms. The notion of professionalism is somewhat flexible but constituted in a corporate control discourse that is difficult to challenge. The challenge to autonomy and self-control is evident as lecturer workloads are being intensified due to contractual remit and curriculum transformation embodied in the guise of quality initiatives. Primary affiliation to the

quality regime requires conformance to a hybrid assurance/improvement model with some agents (part-time lecturers) more vulnerable than others as a consequence of insecurity. While few appear able to change the rules of engagement lecturers cannot be considered as docile pawns.

The three case studies demonstrate that there are some distinct differences in the development of the quality agenda at institutional level. Such differences between institutions assist in the formation of models. Pre-existing structures, influenced by institutional ethos form part of the manufacturing of the regime. Colleges respond to state pressures and official regulatory discourse is being translated in institutions to combine assurance and improvement models of quality.

Variability in resource dependency across the three case studies results in different levels of capacity to both cope with and expand the quality regime. Colleges (A and C) with the larger global budgets have physical structures of quality that are more visible that are matched by the staffing levels. Such evidence does not hide the relative pressures of expenditure on quality matters as the smaller institution College B is subject to the same demands from external agencies.

Arguably, the institutional aspiration towards a certain ethos is also a variable that assists in explaining the way the quality function is organised across the colleges. One such example is the curriculum portfolio of organisations, where Colleges A and B consider their institutions have a more academic rather than vocational portfolio. Also, local adoption of quality awards has much to do with the subscription of leader affiliates (being a 'hobby horse') and reflects how management want to be portrayed as having, or seeking to encourage, a certain institutional philosophy. This is evident in College B, due to a perception that the IiP award is more qualitative in approach and better placed to suit the needs of the institution. Conversely, both the larger institutions are moving away from IiP because it is not considered to be adequately rigorous, with performance criteria being too easily satisfied.

While all the colleges stress they are moving away from assurance towards continuous improvement certain differences emerge in the findings. In College C, (with a more vocational curriculum orientation) evidence indicates a strong business efficiency model (factory logic) underpinning a very formal structure. Such features nurture the development of industrial assurance based techniques, with systems of compliance. The quality function is very visible and organised as a team with particular responsibilities from audit, administration and quality awareness. Reporting lines are directly to senior management. The terminology used by quality functionaries alludes to an intense monitoring and policing operation, with low official levels of non-compliance in a strong *regulatory regime*. Bureaucratic, regulatory and technical control mechanisms are consolidated features of quality management with non-conformance labelling and sanctions being part of the regime. Middle managers are subjected to portfolio presentations to senior management in justifying performance with lecturers being questioned on the quality of teaching materials by internal auditors. Investors in People, is used in the college, although corporate agents question the rigour of the award. Given such factors, making the audited auditable has become a de facto concern of the regime.

In comparison, College A (the largest institution) has a well-developed quality regime, with a visible presence and academic staff seconded (spending half of their time in the quality unit) to assist in the quality management function. Particular goals for College A include making progress towards enhancement models that require increasing consent alongside compliance. The institution has embraced (at least in theory) the HMIE ethos of classroom observation. 'Winning hearts and minds' is a feature of manufacturing consent and part of the proposed future development and reproduction of institutional quality in College A. This institutional formation represents moving forward to an *evaluative regime*, given an academic institutional ethos, towards enhancement with strong underpinning quality structures. While more general transformative orders are evident various mechanisms of ideological control are considered as a device to establish and diffuse quality within the institution. Consolidation of the regime is through incremental movement towards more evaluative quality. Despite various successes with quality initiatives there is also an

acknowledgement by corporate agents in College A that the recalcitrance of other agents is a feature of regime development. A 'softer' approach is being advocated to smooth the progress of enhancement activities. However overcoming traditional orders is proving difficult, which exist in opposition to official institutional stories of quality.

In College B, (the smaller institution) quality is developing into what can be described as a *hybrid control regime* model. The findings illustrate that various agents espouse the rhetoric of traditional orders (more so in College B than in the other two institutions). The structures of quality are less visible and in comparison to the other colleges the quality manager is given some remission from teaching to fulfil quality duties. Moreover, College B has made attempts to avoid the more threatening elements of regime formation and corporate agents advocate the benefits of quality badges such as IiP. Having said this, much of the evidence is based on corporate agent rhetoric and not everyone subscribes to such views. Senior managers advocate the use of slogans in the media to sell achievements of the college (i.e. 'talk a good game'). While corporate agents are keen to stress a partnership model with unions, other groups in College B tend to cast doubt over management rhetoric and actions, which seriously questions the basis of a 'partnership'.

Labour – management relations are influential in the three case studies. From a collective perspective, there is a clear contrast in outcomes between colleges, although whether this can be definitively associated with union strength and ability to influence events or corporate agential passivity is difficult to assess.

While classroom observation is to some extent established in College A, as a driver for promoting continuous improvement, it is in a period of initiation in College C (at the time of the fieldwork). In contrast, this particular method has been dismissed in College B as being 'against the spirit of a partnership policy' with the local EIS union branch, which in turn has advised members to abide by national policy on classroom observation. A degree of reciprocal influence in work between management and trade union representatives in FE institutions echoes sentiments in

the wider labour process literature by Friedman (1977). Likewise, Workload reviews in College C through management-union arrangements are due to a number of post-incorporation pressures (increased levels of administration among them) which has created certain status levels and demarcated various tasks. Outcomes from the reviews tend to shift workloads, intensifying work pressures at middle manager levels, much of it associated with quality.

Other causal factors can be said to have an influence on the development of quality in the colleges, i.e. restructuring in College A. In keeping with critical realist philosophy it is possible to suggest reasons that allow management to implement certain measures are linked with employees expressing levels of insecurity. In doing so, employees are more likely to adopt and adapt to change for reasons other than because of sound decisions by managers. Previous periods of industrial strife and financial instability in College B, is a contributory factor and may account for the development of, what can only be loosely termed a 'partnership' between management and unions.

The data cannot overplay the strength of institutional union resistance because the evidence illustrates corporate agents as generally being successful in initiating and establishing quality. However, a need to maintain good staff relations across colleges is present, but so is an agenda by management to 'win the hearts and minds' of employees in an effort to manufacture the reproduction of the regime.

Arguably management – labour relations also appear to have some ameliorating effects on management policies with examples in College A of agential intervention to mediate the impacts of initiatives on classroom observation. Resistance by primary agents has led to a dilution of original management intentions, with a re-labelling as 'peer observation' to encourage participation and avoid overt management influence and participation in the process. The contested nature of such efforts by management and the ability of workers to resist, resonate with a wider appreciation in the labour process literature as demonstrated by Smith and Thompson (1999). Evidence suggests all three organisations are moving towards continuous improvement

models, although they are doing it at a different pace and with varying degrees of success. Outcomes suggest corporate agents are prepared to reinvent or take a softer approach to ensure success in the reproduction of the regime.

Prevalent across all levels and colleges are criticism of external agencies, but also work intensification, with diminishing discretion and skills acquisition. This perhaps accounts for why many agents regard official versions congratulating improved standards in college and student performance to be coloured by levels of dubiety. Rather than overt responses of resistance, more pragmatic strategies of inaction and forms of institutional misbehaviour are evident. Such behaviour can be construed as non-compliance to the rules of the game. While control is a familiar tenet in the regime, it does not go uncontested.

The next chapter will further consider an interpretation of the results before outlining the contribution of this thesis to our understanding of the management of quality in FE and examining policy implications in the conclusion.

CHAPTER SEVEN: INTERPRETATION

7.1 Introduction: reflections on the outcomes from the fieldwork

What follows in this chapter incorporates the conceptual frameworks and research questions by presenting an interpretation to this thesis. Given that previous chapters established a foundation and method of interpretation for this thesis, the following represents a discussion of the success of the aforementioned conceptual framework, together with research questions in capturing the influence of the state on quality in a quasi-market setting. The crux of the debate is whether the conceptual frameworks contribute enough weight to capture the complexity of quality regime development, the impact on and acceptance by professionals in FE.

The research was undertaken in three case study organisations from within the Scottish FE sector and is in keeping with the core aims (identified in the Introduction) of the research. The findings from interviews represent the views of agents that are contextualised by college frameworks, which are effectively, incorporated structural conceptions dominated by quasi-market relations.

Time is initially spent, in explaining the configuration of quality as a consequence of the interplay between central state structures and local level transformations, illustrating characteristics and features of post-incorporation quality regimes. Here the robustness of the conceptual framework adapted from Clarke and Newman (1997) and developed as a 'regime matrix' facilitates several levels of analysis. The model is nuanced by tools from labour process analysis (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) which accommodates and facilitates the exposure of micro resistance factors. The test is to challenge the adage that FE is an over-controlled environment. The literature review chapters establish 'logic of discovery' and from that point emerged questions for the fieldwork activity. Having grasped how new structures developed this section then examines perceptions (from across all groups, managers/lecturers) before illustrating the type of impacts and levels of acceptance of quality regimes.

7.2 Characteristics and influences on quality

What are the characteristics of and influences on quality regimes?

The explanations of the features and characteristics of quality in FE (see Chapter Five), relies on an exposition of the conceptual framework as previously outlined in Chapter Three. While the findings also acknowledge the degree and pace with which change is initiated and established in FE, as has been noted elsewhere (Burchill, 2001). Wedding the findings to the conceptual framework illustrates the causal mechanisms, institutional and state inspired (state agencies) which exert downward pressures and shaped, redefined and restructured college affiliation as corporate entities (Reeves, 1995). The findings expose that there is nothing 'natural' about 'quality' and that such systems, infested with political and economic bias can be linked to certain ideas about government. At the same time, the forms, levels and frequency, factored into modes of operation at institutional level demonstrate the quasi-market control mechanisms have considerable influence in shaping FE policy and practice (see Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b). It is clear that because the management of quality in an institutional setting is subject to the direct and indirect influences from the state, this has a concomitant effect on the working practices of FE professionals. A variant in the transformation of the post-incorporation workspace is to make agents more auditable. Audit has become a benchmark for legitimacy and echoing Davies (2003) accountancy agential functions have become prominent features of education.

Respective institutions are subject to state structural influence, together with diverse and sometimes contradictory rafts of regulatory, legislative economic pressures from a variety of quality bodies to comply. In effect this creates many similar quality structures, processes and experiences (built on control and compliance). This study also highlights how the management of quality and other areas of policy are significantly affected by externalities, which demand an adherence to market and corporate philosophy. Certain control mechanisms appear as familiar across sites. Institutional configurations including the size, budget and curriculum portfolio (i.e.

whether it is more academic or vocational offer to students) have an effect on the quality function.

Overall, clarity is gained through considering the meta-level, where it is clear that structures and agents (Scottish Ministers, Auditor General and Audit Commission) are predetermining how the constituent aspects of the economic rationalist and corporate managerial political agenda should be instituted in FE organisations. The isomorphic leverage from the Scottish Government demands the reinvention of governance and accountability in the FE sector. On a structural level, government induced change from 1998, with the inception of the Scottish Parliament resulted in the creation of a host of agencies, to signify the consolidation of a movement from direct control to control at a distance. Also, a catalyst was provided in this context of market relations for quality mechanisms to stem the anxiety of the state funding bodies and develop more effective monitoring mechanisms, mirroring the analysis from other studies, on FE and the wider public sector (Elliott, 1996 b; Power, 1997; Clarke and Newman, 1997; Clarke et al, 2000).

The study reveals evidence of influence at a macro-level whereby (from 1999) market and corporate pressures from the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SEFC) now the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to enhance the management of quality are exerted with increased intensity, due in part as a consequence of criticism from the Audit Committee (Audit Commission, 2003). The Funding Council's Service Level Agreement with the HMIE provides further evidence of contracting-out functions to executive agencies (Ainley, 1995) which work within politically induced external frameworks, embodying a managerialist imperative.

The data is also able to provide evidence of the capacity of agents (mainly senior managers) to influence events through affiliation to the regime. Such corporate agents develop and sustain strong affiliated links with public funding and quality bodies e.g. HMIE, being privy to policy information. The attraction of career building strategies confirms Littler's (1981) contribution and illustrates how

bureaucratic control provides a rationale for nurturing regime support from agential projects.

Evidence is clear that the Funding Council are considered to be political masters in the relationship with colleges. The notion of big, unified state bureaucracy (along typical Weberian lines) is perhaps questioned with the development of the contracting state through the reconfiguration of market controls in the public sector (Corby and White, 1999). Across all the institutions, it is evident that colleges have responded to state pressures to develop distinct quality functions, propelled by a business process model. Such models tend towards a reinvention of, with as much, rather than less bureaucracy. The official regulatory discourse (from 1993) is being translated in institutions, more latterly since the inception of the Funding Council to combine assurance and improvement models of quality.

Some similarities are evident with Hodkinson's (1997) prognosis of hybrid quality models aligned with Fordist and post-Fordist conceptions in FE. Additionally, it is the case that Alvesson and Thompson's (2005) observation holds true, questioning whether public sector reform is effectively built on attacking an over burgeoned bureaucracy. Evidence illustrates that the 'new quality' structures, posts and type of agential affiliation in the institutional and relational environment embody the classic Weberian processes of calculability, predictability and quantification. The different requirements (governmentally induced by Ministerial Priorities) through the meta and driven by the macro structures of asymmetric agencies (forces of the regime) are naturalised in the discourse and structures of quality, being sympathetic to the establishment and reproduction of a regime (relations of the regime). Overwhelming evidence indicates that the system of command in FE means corporate agents are very much initiators (depending on position at meso level in the institutional hierarchy) yet subject to mechanisms of control promoted by a neo liberal philosophy.

The general desire and necessity to become more 'business-like' is through an obligation to external command structures. The findings demonstrate that

externalities contribute to organizations establishing and reproducing quality through positive institutional images. Also, strategic objectives are synonymous with the neo-liberal meta-operational logic, actualised through NPM in order to achieve legitimacy. Therefore, corporate agents as 'movers and shakers' are pioneers in a 'brave new world' of FE.

Regime transmission highlights emerging tensions between normative rules constituted by managerial objectives and professional judgment, which accord with reorientation or paradigmatic clash (Randle and Brady, 1997). The framework (Chapter Three) establishes a similar vein to insights from the recent FE literature exploring transition and transformation of working practices (Elliott, 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Alexiadou, 2001; Mather and Seifert, 2003). The findings uncover further tensions between professional groups concerning the variety and level of control. In particular, professional classroom practitioners are vulnerable (Robson, 1998) and hampered in legitimately challenging and influencing regime structures. Such outcomes acknowledge Halliday (1994) whereby some agents are less well positioned to induce outcomes in the policy process.

In keeping with the critical realist philosophy of this thesis agential projects are constrained or empowered to a greater or lesser degree by the external state mechanisms, which are evident factors in the initiation, establishment and diffusion of quality at institutional levels. Yet in turn, using an example, corporate agents (mainly senior managers) through relational affiliation i.e. Principals Forum and various Funding Council Committees, are better positioned to, configure institutional structures and processes at a meso level. Even so, such agents are less likely to influence the transformation of policy structures in the wider FE sector, particularly on financial matters.

This thesis illustrates as with other more recent contributions on the development of the Third Way philosophy in the wider public sector (Callinicos, 2001; Clarke, 2004; Cunningham, 2005; Mooney and Scott, 2005) that the influence of New Labour

policy has been through a process of consolidating and to some extent radicalising regime features inherited from a transformative New Right reform agenda. The emergence of tensions within institutions over the discourse of self-regulation and trust is evident. Also the normative glue of audit is applied to maintain performance measurement through enhanced monitoring and control of standards. Work activities are affected by a need to meet the priorities of quality and targets (Clarke et al, 2000; Clarke, 2004) which are promoted by greater scrutiny from official bodies (Audit Commission, 2003). Modernisation is used as a password for making agents auditable, with more quality being taken for better quality, which in turn has become valid and legitimated through a public audit regime.

7.3 Perceptions and interpretations of influences on quality

How do managers and employees in FE perceive and interpret influences on quality? The results illustrate that the characteristics and influences on quality are translated as a regime constituted by a series of operations and demands. The shifts and number of changes in the organization of FE, evident in this thesis corresponds with other contributions (Holloway, 1999) as the legitimation of isomorphic processes corroborates the way colleges operate. College cultures and structures are being framed with a parallel nature, with illustrations of the drivers in the transformation of the wider public sector incorporated in the New Public Management (NPM) literature. Outcomes suggest macro driving forces are similar for FE. As argued in Chapter Three, normative pressures from central and local government agencies (Corby and White, 1999) have significant implications beyond the content of policies.

Chapter Five explores the significance of meta, macro and meso demands and the particular relationships between structures and agents across the sector. The specific political control factors at meta level (e.g. Audit Commission edicts) assists an explanation of macro demands from the Funding Council, but also the relational allegiance with the quality function (HMIE). It is possible to illustrate how externalities are significant in shaping meso level (college) activity through factors of

control. Similarities are evident with Smyth et al (2000) as they identify various mechanisms to control teachers. The above findings make clear that in the interplay between state and institutional configuration of quality, audit scrutiny combined with a multiplicity of demands are familiar to all colleges. Likewise, cultural factors also influence the reproduction of regimes.

Organising the data around agential auditable remits illustrates the extent to which agents can influence events, given as with Halliday (1994) position in the hierarchy. Agential influence on the nature of regime discourse facilitates an understanding of ideological control as a contingent mechanism. Several other contingent control mechanisms; market, corporate, technical, bureaucratic and regulatory are diffused in institutions. Such aspects are interpreted through an appreciation of agential autonomy in relation to the operations of unified administration and management systems in the shape of performance targets, systems formality and continuous improvement.

Demands are examined through forms of control, which concur with the conceptual tools and illustrate regimes of control (Reid, 2003). The extensive external demands can be characterised as a consequence of the unique degree of political control that FE institutions are subject to, whereupon Ministerial Objectives are translated through the mediums of the Funding Council and HMIE. Therein, market and corporate control mechanisms reflect government economic and social objectives and are incorporated or translated by agential projects in running FE colleges using a business process model.

The characterising of remits also enables distinct agential remits to be established, which are explained as a consequence of the redefinition and restructuring of colleges. So, reconfiguring the contractual and procedural framework of actors (a factor acknowledged by Moreland and Clark, 1999) provides a basis for initiating and establishing an auditable remit.

7.4 Shared meaning, understanding and language of quality

To what extent is there a shared meaning and understanding of quality in Scottish FE? To what extent has the language of quality changed?

The evidence reveals the public meanings agents attach to quality are generally influenced by their position in the hierarchy. Also, career motivation and sector investment (particularly for those agents involved as Associate Assessors through the HMIE) are significant factors in discourse exchange. Conceptions of quality range from one-dimensional quasi-market interpretations, espousing factory logic, to more complex ideas about autonomy, judgment, empowerment and continuous improvement. It is evident that the meta discourse extols the virtues of corporate managerialism, predicated on market principles (in keeping with Avis, 2002). It is also clear that the quality audit process is a change mechanism supporting neo-liberal philosophy at meso or college level. The observation by Power (1997) on the rhetoric of public accountability clashing with that of expert professionals is borne out in the findings. However, such views, suggest that the totalising entity and nature of audit is far from being consolidated but contested.

The Gramscian appreciation of settlement enables this thesis to consider how the powerful common sense discourse of quality, filtered through society from the meta level is a source of ideological control. The quality framework is institutionalised, formalised and legitimised, echoing the observations of Avis (2002; 2003) whereby forms of professional dissent are framed by and in managerial terms as disloyalty. The success of consolidated regimes and the notion of a hegemonic discourse is in part reliant on silent voices, although to overplay the power of discourse alone, would be to ignore other sources of power. The earlier concerns of Halliday (1994; 1997; 2003) about how quality is communicated with the discourse of quality being distorted, as a consequence of the use of forced language has validity. Ideas of 'fitness for purpose' and a culture of continuous improvement (as managerial objectives) appear to be difficult to establish due to violating previous shared traditions, which stress other values e.g. collegiality.

The meta and macro demands of the regime are multiple and the translation at institutional level is varied. There is evidence that corporate agents (senior managers) are keen to translate some of the rhetoric of quality into more acceptable formats to accommodate the establishing of a shared tradition. The emphasis on language has appeared to shift from a technical systems approach towards the use of cultural descriptors. Key exponents in the transformation of the language are the HMIE, although there is a distinct interplay between institutions and the macro structures, which is translated and diffused through colleges by a number of quality supporters (either agents or structures). Initiating discourse change away from control systems descriptors is hampered due to the prevalence of audit practice, because quality has to be made auditable.

The meaning of 'quality' is therefore encapsulated by a series of audit routines, which is similar to Power's (1997) interpretation of regulatory programmes being harnessed to quality management. Corporate agents envisage the internalising of Self-evaluation to be fundamental to the success of continuous improvement in a process, which can be interpreted as a combination of ideological, bureaucratic and technical control through the manufacturing of consent. Managers are attempting to use rhetoric, which is imbued with notions of surplus value given the quality audit is the mechanism for measuring efficiency and effectiveness in FE.

Convincing primary agents of the merits of continuous improvement programmes, despite further increases and intensification in workloads is riddled with contradictions. While the location of public sector employees is different from the private sector, similarities are becoming increasingly evident. Such developments echo Burawoy's (1985) interpretation whereby employers are faced with the problem in capitalist enterprises of keeping surplus value hidden. This thesis agrees with Shaoul (1999) that the public sector is subject to the dubiety of government policy, which does not necessarily produce desired consequences. Service provision has been opened up to realising a yield of return on capital to government (as the hub of capital). The realignment of public services to resemble those of the private sector, wherein institutions are expected to generate more of their income, has meant that

agents have become a potential source of profit. The quality regime is part of a hierarchical organisation, which bridges the gap between bureaucratic powers (Corby and White, 1999) and relationships associated with the ownership of capital. Quality is a device (in the public sector) for ensuring additional and intensified demands in the work–effort bargain, but also legitimating such surplus value.

Despite the influence of external agencies over the features, characteristics, demands and operations of the quality regime, outcomes at an institutional level, do exhibit variations. The critical realist philosophy facilitates analysis identifying some of the underlying causes behind these variations. To outline factors, also elicits some idea about similarities and differences, which adds to a more nuanced understanding about 'types' of quality regimes that are evolving.

The results illustrate several variant factors worthy of attention. The first, corroborates evidence to support a business process model whereby across all the institutions, it is evident that colleges have responded to state pressures to develop similar distinct economized quality regime functions. Second, specific institutional pressures mean that colleges with the larger global budgets linked to size and levels of activity (see Chapter Four) have physical structures of quality that are more visible, which is matched by a hierarchy and staffing levels. Such evidence does not hide the relative pressures of expenditure to sustain quality as the less well -funded institution are subject to the same demands from external bodies. Third, in all cases, the official regulatory discourse afforded to quality from state agencies is being translated in institutions more latterly since the inception of the Funding Council, whereby institutions have made attempts to combine assurance and improvement models of quality. The influence on the implementation of quality models appears to be linked to a specific institutional perception of the curriculum portfolio of organisations. Arguably, institutions with a more vocational emphasis on their portfolio have organized the quality function with visible 'factory logic'.

Manifested in this third cause and inter-related is a fourth causal mechanism, specifically the influence that leader affiliates have on the adoption, implementation

and abandonment of quality initiatives. The fifth causal factor suggests some influence from the interaction between management and the recognised trade union (EIS) over the adoption and implementation of quality initiatives. To suggest reciprocal powers, perhaps overplays the profile, involvement and efficacy of trade union intervention in a structural, collective and individual sense. The sixth variation focuses on the regime demands made on agents, specifically managers, (as corporate agents) across and within institutions who are responsible for initiating, establishing, diffusing and reproducing auditable remits. Such scope for agency is less apparent amongst primary agents (lecturers and senior lecturers), although contested management actions is commensurate with other labour process contributions (Smith and Thompson, 1999).

The interplay of the aforementioned causal factors does suggest that FE institutions are not passive in accepting demands of the wider public sector quality regime. Institutions retain some control although questions are posed on the scope for agency within such domains. Specific responsibilities imply driver capabilities, for some agents. The quality regime agenda has specific implications for the working practices of all in institutions. Likewise, the legitimacy of the regime is dependent on the manufacturing of consent (akin to Burawoy, 1979) given particular impacts and levels of acceptance.

7.5 Impacts on working practices and professional autonomy

How has quality audits impacted on working practices and professional autonomy?
Having established the characteristics and operational demands of the quality regime in FE Chapter Six explores the impacts of the external state imposition on aspects of the labour process. The main focus is on changes to work in terms of extensification and intensification, professional autonomy, the impact of continuous improvement initiatives (Self-evaluation) together with skills and standards. Several other contributors have examined change to aspects of the labour process (Randle and Brady, 1997; Avis, 2001; Mather and Seifert, 2003) in FE and as with this thesis there is a sense of an overburdened profession. In acknowledging Robson (1998;

Robson et al, 2004) this work accepts that certain regulatory powers position agential projects, which means discretion is present for professionals, although subject to increasing the value of the product i.e. less time to teach modules than the recommended allocation but expected to imbue additional value for students.

Despite the rhetoric of ownership and empowerment (associated with Self-evaluation) outlined in earlier chapters, the case studies suggest how state – FE relations appear to reflect the aforementioned tensions in New Labour's consolidation agenda that imply a continuation of NPM (see Martinez Mackenzie, 1999; Avis, 2003). More specifically this thesis accepts such insights but also advocates a rolling forward of a more aggressive audit focused variant in FE. Institutions are coerced to consolidate governance and accountability through the heightened characteristics of systematic performance controls and a continuation of the managerial prerogative. This thesis presents further depth to our understanding of this climate and its impact on professionals. So, a clear causal factor behind, and the underlying issue of general work intensification are triggered by a demand for new forms of governance, which has been accentuated since the inception of the Funding Council (1999).

In a similar vein to broader studies illustrated in Chapter Two, (Elliott, 1996 a; 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Alexiadou, 2001) examples of a loss of autonomy combined with work overload and intensification are present in this study. Managers, (in work elsewhere) are seen as the 'mediators of change' (Alexiadou, 2001) but also subject to it, responding in particular ways (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). Such complexity is borne out in this thesis, which also accepts lecturers are often in conflict with managerial paradigms (Elliott, 1996 b; Randle and Brady, 1997; Mather and Seifert, 2003).

In keeping with the top and bottom end of the institutional occupational hierarchies there is a polarization in terms of workload, task orientation and expanded roles. Micromanagement is evident as an external pressure on corporate agents, but is also initiated and reproduced within colleges, becoming mechanisms and contingencies,

utilised across several levels of management to intensify work and institute a regulatory and bureaucratic context. Chapter Six also identifies particular agential roles across all groups. As initiators and diffusers of the quality regime, managers in all three case studies are able to transfer or deflect tasks, thus increasing work intensification for other agents in the institution.

Impacts are disproportionate and dependent on agential affiliation to the regime. In making connections with the work of Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) it is possible for this thesis to engage with the dynamics of regulation and trust. The professional authority (see Dent, 2003 on the health sector) of FE practitioners can be configured with Ackroyd and Thompson's model as outlined in Chapter Three of the literature review. A more general observation is a shift over time in the FE sector towards processes of work associated with low trust, akin to that in the private manufacturing environment (as noted by Martinez Lucio and Mackenzie, 1999). This thesis illustrates an inevitable aspiration to grasp the control imperative by corporate agents with others (primary agents) adding value as the process of learning becomes intensified. Such transformation suggests a movement towards more direct control, being allied to a decline in task discretion as illustrated elsewhere in the recent skills debate (Felstead et al, 2004; Grugulis et al, 2004). Other impacts are the potential for deskilling (Mather and Seifert, 2003) and, suggests as one outcome, a trend towards proletarianisation (Randle and Brady, 1997).

More accurate in the context of these findings is a more complex scenario(s) which accommodates the disproportionate impact across the hierarchy in colleges. Some agents in the study perceive high regulation, in a high trust managerial regime environment, with the notion of regulation being inevitable in protection of the public purse. Alternatively, and in similar vein to Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) are professionals who take high regulation to mean low trust, a scenario in common with the perceptions of many primary agents in the study. This position suggests that professional autonomy is challenged and undermined by the instruments of fiscal regulation, with new forms of governance to justify core practices of quality. While responsible autonomy is in keeping with Friedman (1977; 1990) a more likely

prognosis in FE, is of controlled autonomy as a likely outcome, to meet with the various managerial objectives. Such articulation of autonomy recognises that for some agents, scope still exists for professional authority (as noted by Dent, 1998, in the health sector). Much depends on the type of affiliation agential projects have to the regime and how susceptible they are to constraints and regulation. Also, agents are not docile or passive in an over controlled environment, which accommodates the complexity that Glesson and Shain (1999) advocate from their findings on middle managers.

The data is clear about how and why regime impacts on practitioners are changing from quality being marked by an autonomous understanding of academic life and collegial relationships, to a more active management with structured quality frameworks. The professional lecturer in the study appears to sit within this context, with 'quality' once the forte of the professional service, being constructed as a series of systematic evaluators. Such examples, which accompany curbing decision making and normative authority, reduce the likelihood of a return to the 'promiscuity', associated with a pre-incorporation era.

Further education professionals engage in the appropriation of work through forms of inaction and manipulation. Conveying the right impression of commitment (similar to that noted in Chapter Three on the work of Callaghan and Thompson, 2001, which focused on call centres) becomes important in agential forms of co-operation, compliance and creativity. Other factors from the research also reveal why FE professionals are likely to be vulnerable to further incursions, being synonymous with Robson (1998) and Robson et al (2004). The collegial basis and former, or current occupational background of professionals, is a factor in response to quality. There is evidence in the study to suggest that those from an industrial background are more familiar with and likely to accept quality initiatives (or processes) that hail from industrial models. The rationale for this is that a shared tradition of language with industrial models is more easily assimilated in to working practice. Other determinants, in the responses (not just of lecturers) are in line with the length of service of professionals in the sector and whether managers have previously spent

time in the classroom. Also, whether lecturers adhere to advice in a collective sense from trade unions over working practices associated with quality initiatives e.g. classroom observation. To overplay the affinity between corporate and primary agents in the context of managerialism (as others have done, Loots and Whelan, 2004) is to misunderstand the complexity and contingent control mechanisms in FE. Additionally, to suggest a convergence of professionalism and managerialism, which Briggs (2004) has illustrated is one such variable, although this scenario would feature a naturalised audit function, with the trust and the limited or manufactured collegiality of FE being in terminal decline.

7.6 Impact of a quality process i.e. Self-evaluation

What has been the impact of a particular quality process i.e. Self-evaluation in Scottish Further Education?

The above findings generally illustrate that management in the three organizations have invested a degree of effort in ensuring as many people as possible shared the quality values of the organization. While evidence suggests external economic control, this is not matched by a similar emphasis on external cultural control, amongst senior corporate agents. Corporate managers do consider that Self-evaluation is a tool to engineer consent, as it constitutes a mechanism with which to consolidate regime support.

Ownership of quality, through Self-evaluation, is considered (by senior managers) to be a vehicle for altering the nature of relationships, rules and practice that tend to be prevalent in assurance-based models. Corporate agents are keen to encourage other regime citizens to internalise the principles of continuous improvement, signifying how individual and group consent is necessary for evaluative practice to flourish.

For others in the regime i.e. middle managers (as primary agents) Self-evaluation has impacted to intensify workloads due to a specific logic of administration, which embeds forms of quasi-technical control. The ‘totalising’ impact of quality does provide scope in other areas as some respondents envisage career-building strategies

emanating from involvement in quality initiatives. Such strategies are central to subjugating agents to forms of bureaucratic control. Work intensification, associated with Self-evaluation and more regulated forms of bureaucracy also produces clashes with work – life balance and evidence exists of agential health being threatened, due to unmanageable workloads.

Detachment from structural modelling means primary agents are subject to the forms of evaluation against intensified working practice. Some primary agents are more susceptible to such developments and this is illustrated with the example of part-time lecturers as 'vulnerable agents', feeling compelled to comply due to insecure employment status. Self-evaluation has become a focus for additional meetings, increased scrutiny over performance indicators and a vehicle to institute forms of discipline. The impact on professional autonomy is in keeping with labour process analysis suggesting that classroom activities are increasingly being made more auditable against a backdrop of direct control. Such devices include tighter curricular models, redesigning delivery and forms of deskilling (Mather and Seifert, 2003) which are Taylorist in nature. Perceptions of Self-evaluation demonstrate contrived notions of teamwork, supplemented with controlled discretion (Friedman, 1977; 1990) which suggest more indirect control as an attempt to harness support through the manufacturing of consent (Burawoy, 1979). Work practices are constituted as task autonomy, being largely fragmented and broken down into a series of mundane audit maintenance activities.

The higher 'trust' consent models of quality (associated with Self-evaluation) appear to be being overlaid on a low trust environment. Accordingly, corporate agential failure to convince practitioners of the benefits of an economized quality, have resulted in management deploying more indirect forms of control. Such developments, have witnessed a dubious re-labelling of primary agents as managers of learning, with the achievement of targets signifying good professional practice. A clearly identifiable milieu in Scottish FE appears to be a drain on the sector (as audit 'overkill' becomes a norm). The audit culture is cast by many respondents as creating a culture of low-level report writing, where data falsification is an open

secret, but a necessity to avoid further external scrutiny. Such a scenario has applications to Burawoyan notions of 'making out', but is also reminiscent of how forms of representative and mock bureaucracy (Gouldner, 1954) are constructed in organisations.

7.7 Improvements in standards of service

Do quality audits improve the perception of standards of service?

The data illustrates that the demands of external institutions have influenced changes to working practices, which are subject to a series of direct and indirect pressures by state bodies, and presented a mixed picture. While official discourse contextualises quality in a series of good news stories, the findings reveals a process of dilution in skills to accommodate agents being made more auditable. Such findings are in common with Grugulis et al (2004) as definitions of skill have, and are changing, to comply with notions of flexibility. The reconfiguration of contracts, have embedded alternative forms of flexibility into working practices in FE. The impact of work intensification within the sector, in particular, its links with skill dilution, alongside reduced task discretion echo findings elsewhere on the private and public sector (Felstead et al, 2004). Evidence illustrates improvement models have impacted at various levels of the occupational hierarchy with the introduction of a number of low-level work tasks, which nullify forms of discretion, although do little to enhance overall standards. The dilemma of better quality with less real expenditure is noted elsewhere (Rainbird, 2004) and is a problem for the public sector.

The routinisation of quality can be explained in colleges due to audit models and the associated factory logic that is being applied. High levels of audit control means FE professionals are increasingly subjected to forms of work that are routine, monotonous and futile. Various factors emerge to clarify skills dilution. Despite Self-evaluation raising awareness (across all levels) with some reflection being possible, the majority response amongst primary agents is that any new skills are minimal, task orientated and time displacement is commonplace. Also continuing professional development related to quality issues tends to be 'done to staff', in an effort to

increase the productivity of quality. Encouragement to attend various quality events, and participate in 'quality weeks', as part of continuing professional development is characterised by attempts to enhance particular skills and attitudes that also contributes towards agents being more auditable. Managerialism is seeking to control the language of and approaches to, quality, with targets defining good professional practice.

Perhaps an unintended effect of the regime becomes apparent with agential projects becoming smarter and more creative, as characterised in a labour process interpretation (Thompson, 1989). Agential manipulation of data is evident in the above findings for various instrumental and institutional benefits. While the introduction of improvement models suggests less external and more internal self-regulation, particular emerging tendencies are evident in the study. Consequently, Self-evaluation has resulted in more repetitive processes, with low-level report writing tasks (mainly for middle managers). Such working practice also accords with the findings of Mather and Seifert (2003) as management has secured control of the processes of quality, and then subsequently deskilled reporting styles into more auditable forms.

Arguably, corporate agents (in the role of pioneer or corporate modernizer) are faced with a dilemma of placing Self-evaluation in the context of a pre-existing quality regime characterised by high levels of regulation. Being compelled to make institutions more auditable and introduce externally led initiatives (i.e. Self-evaluation is HMIE inspired) infers that this process is subject to translation. Corporate agents are tasked with eulogising the benefits of a 'cuckoo-like' phenomenon, which makes the process of establishing quality contingent on establishing shared traditions. Again, such contingencies acknowledge Smith and Thompson (1999) because they include the influence of labour management relations, which are variable across the institutions.

The sector (and to some extent institutional) official discourse is keen to stress improvements in standards across the sector. The responses from the study illustrate

a conflict, in that state inspired rhetoric is often at odds with the respondents' views, across all levels in the study.

These findings illustrate some similarities to other studies (Randle and Brady, 1997) that have explored the impacts of work intensification in FE and skills dilution in other quasi-market settings (Cunningham, 2005). For example, studies undertaken of employees reacting to forms of work intensification and skill dilution by circumventing management's formal targets that clash with their values in service quality (Callaghan and Thompson, 2001). Yet in contrast, this thesis is far less optimistic on the development, reproduction and outcomes of Self-evaluation than previous research (Laird, 2002) in the Scottish FE sector.

Overall, respondents acknowledge the need for 'quality' but there is a significant level of opinion that 'quality' in its current official guise has not resulted in an enhancement of creativity, real improvement or upskilling within institutions. More likely, is a reduction in the discretion of workers, which is similar to work elsewhere (Felstead, 2004). For many respondents, certain standards are improving i.e. the aesthetic appearance and marketing of colleges, although there is a view amongst many respondents that teaching in the classroom has not improved in terms of specific outcomes. More accurately, the 'bar has been lowered' in terms of the curriculum, student qualifications and achievement In short audit culture appears to undermine the standards it is intended to improve.

Finally, in this section, FE institutions are not docile or agents merely passive. Agents influence the normative rules of such fields, more so if as corporate managers, they have strong relational affiliation in the sector.

7.8 Acceptance of quality cultures

To what extent do FE managers and employees accept audit cultures? How do academic staff contribute to the maintenance of the institutional quality environment? How and why are quality audit cultures accepted and how do control, consent, resistance and recalcitrance manifest itself?

At this juncture, the research questions reveal three areas of increasing control by the state on FE institutions and professionals. Specifically, these issues are the management and design of quality, professional autonomy, together with control and consent. Yet, this thesis agrees with Gleeson and Shain (1999) and there is also evidence from the findings to suggest that the impact of the state is not wholly uncontested or that, traditional arrangements for structuring institutions have entirely disappeared. The data about how quality is accepted by agents illustrate some of the causal mechanisms that drive quality regimes in Scottish FE. Moreover, it is evident that agents use contingency measures to accommodate and maintain relationships and structures of the regime.

Several themes facilitate an understanding that quality is part of a consolidated yet contested regime in Scottish FE. Dysfunctional consolidation of regimes illustrates unintended effects. The evidence supports the contention (as with Alvesson and Thompson, 2005) that agents remain committed to the maintenance of the prominent features of bureaucracy, whereby central regulation, rules conformity, in conjunction with a hierarchical authority and career building is manifest in the regimes. Nevertheless, this coincides with missions and visions of quality, notions of empowerment, with agential projects adapting to the quasi market relations suggesting hybrid forms referred to by Alvesson and Thompson (2005). The findings have something in common with Hodkinson's (1998) prognosis on the development of neo-Taylorist regimes in education, although this falls under the umbrella of NPM. There are allowances for some flexibility through continuous improvement, but these are tied to making agents jump through external hoops. So, this scenario accounts for the level of scrutiny and level of burden the regime places on agents,

constrained by micromanagement, but who in some cases strive to become ‘good bureaucrats’ (see du Gay, 2000) by maintaining the regime values.

Alternatively, other actors are propelled to searching for loopholes to accommodate and resist bureaucratic control. Such regulation appears to clash with the value systems (akin to Gouldner, 1954) although given that opting out is not possible various pragmatic resistance through the appropriation of work (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) or ritual of humour suggest more complexity in acceptance, reproduction of and resistance to the regime.

Despite intense external pressure to adhere to public audit regime values, institutions are able to exhibit some agency in the face of pressure from state and regulatory bodies. To reiterate, agential scope within the quality regime is important and this research also accepts agents contribute to the recreation and reproduction of pre-existing structures. This is apparent both from managers (as corporate agents) being administrators of the systems, fulfilling a policy agenda by dealing with the translation of external requirements, but also those who are involved more actively in the process of quality on the ground. Less common is evidence in the study to say that agents can transform pre-existing structures. Yet while not definitive types, this thesis is able to discern certain regime formations (regulatory, evaluative and hybrid) which are characterised by institutional ethos, degree of pace and agential intervention.

The massively recurring rhetoric of quality in the Scottish FE sector as common sense or part of the ordinary way of seeing things, suggests hegemonic regime formation (Gramsci, 1971). Challenging the rhetoric is made difficult by a form of technicism (also see Avis, 2002; 2003) and administrative logic (consolidated by New Labour administrations) which is incapable of being hypocritical. Although the quality regime appears to be able to absorb criticism, the converse is that consent based models are still evolving and subject to contention. This thesis advocates that the success of quality regimes, needs on going empirical attention as a counterweight to official renditions.

The fertile environment characterised by business process models, has led to perceptions of institutions being 'audited to death', with embedded quality regimes, whereby the control imperative is integral in the type of 'control regimes' suggested by Reid (1997; 2003). Conversely, there are enough examples in this research of displacement and dysfunction, whereby costs to institutions (due to the levels of audit burden and scrutiny) have real policy implications. More accurately, quality regimes (although equally pernicious) are vehicles that compliment the intensification of work in FE.

While the research utilises hegemonic interpretation, to understand shifts in regime, there is an acknowledgement (through a multi levelled framework) which allows for causal variants. Guarding against being seduced to accept an omnipresent discourse (a pitfall with Foucauldian interpretation) as an all powerful mechanism, which controls docile participants is avoided. The danger for practitioners that evaluation based models are consolidated using the lowest common denominator of 'audit speak' and procedures for practice is one explanation of a source of power.

This study uncovers how the cost pressures generated by externalities are unrelenting and exerting considerable pressure on management to introduce changes in colleges. This brings the discussion back to the apparent unremitting nature of the quasi-market revealed in this case study. Institutions can attempt to resist, although coercive financial pressures mean that acceptance becomes an obligation. To conceptualise events in FE organisations in terms of either colonization or decoupling as with Meyer and Rowan (1977) perhaps relegates outcomes to binary classifications, which exclude other relations. This thesis finds some grounds for agreement with Power (1997) in searching for more complex outcomes, which could include forms of cooperation or anomie. Searching for reasons why agential projects collude or not, in the process of quality means understanding the auditor/auditee.

In keeping with the intensive nature of the research design, the aim is to uncover and focus on issues that led to agents turning to action, whereby they withdraw forms of goodwill. More specifically, certain externally inspired initiatives, which are

supported by leader affiliates within institutions, cause considerable distress and disillusionment among respondents.

The identifiable quality audit regime does have a pre-existing structure and does have certain powers that influence group behaviour, dependent on the particular features of that regime i.e. if it is measurement orientated rather than improvement led in the truest sense. This is apparent both from managers as administrators of the systems, agents who are obligated to fulfilling a policy agenda by dealing with the translation of external requirements, but also those who are involved more actively in the process of quality on the ground.

By seeking to manufacture consent (Burawoy, 1979) senior managers (as corporate agents) adopt policies and interpret external pressure points (translators) but at the same time reconcile the impact on their own institutional practices (persuaders and diffusers). Senior managers meet the requirements of the Funding Council and other award bodies (as Accountable Officers) in the quality regimes, while decisions also have institutional repercussions. In short, they are agents of obligation, 'translators', 'persuaders' 'regulators' and 'challengers'. Yet some corporate agents create scope for career profiles as agents of 'pragmatism', illustrated by the Associate Assessor role on behalf of the HMIE, where relational affiliation ensures usefulness to both an institution and external body.

Conversely, middle managers (as with other studies, Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Alexiadou, 2001) appear as a 'thin slice in a thick sandwich' exposed by their role as 'mediators' or 'brokers' but compressed and overwhelmed by the quality function. Having line management responsibility provides some scope for influence. However, a predominantly primary agent status in organisations means middle managers have an operational role that is subject to the most profound intensification to the point of being 'swamped' by increased administration. An impression of such agents is of, being distanced from the classroom, but subject to various technical controls in the development of the curriculum. Such vulnerability is further compounded by quality initiatives (e.g. Self-evaluation) either in the sense of implementation or having to

encourage others to take part. Effectively, middle managers are cast as 'brokers without authority', being subject to more control and a loss of autonomy, as a consequence of the dysfunctional side effects of auditing.

Despite an erosion of professional autonomy, the persistence of middle managers and lecturers to engage with quality creates a double edged sword for the protocols of the regime. Having said this, evidence in the study is rare, to say that such agents can totally transform pre-existing structures, particularly as primary agents. Question marks exist over the efficacy of consent building models, as resistance to the quality regime is palpable in the most visibly regulatory structure (College C).

Manifestations of mock bureaucracy (Gouldner, 1954) are evident, although such pragmatism is also discernible across all institutions by a frontier of control, over aspects of value with self-inspection. Spotting loopholes in the regime resonates with the labour process theorists (Thompson, 1989) who extol the virtue of the creativity of workers. In bureaucratic and technical control systems, creative data manipulation is (for middle managers) a way to avoid further scrutiny to cope with the demands of the quality regime. Also corporate and union representatives report emerging problems for management within organizations, as a consequence of the consistent violation of work-effort to meet increasing demands of quality. Such events, clash with practitioner demands for more realistic forms of measurement in FE, and result in pragmatic responses (Gouldner, 1954).

Primary agents (middle managers and lecturers) are subject to increasing levels of intensification with less time to deliver education in the classroom, corresponding with, more acute forms of control and measurement through quality models. Being primary actors (as with middle managers) lecturers have limited scope to influence the decision-making and agenda setting processes, being subject to the manufacturing of control by corporate actors. Job insecurity makes part-time lecturers particularly vulnerable in this context. Forms of bureaucratic, ideological, and technical control are employed to frame the 'good teacher' alongside the hegemonic discourse. The impact is a challenge to the traditional normative bureau-

professional models, with changed conceptions over the meaning of ownership. The outcomes illustrate resistance to corporate management pressures by clinging onto conceptions of quality in the classroom rather than adopting the wider corporate agenda.

To explain successful management attempts to embed classroom observation initiatives, suggests practitioner acceptance, generated by consent through the assimilation of workplace normative values (Burawoy, 1979). Possibly, the characteristics of cultures, for future advancement of quality initiatives in other institutions include strong organizational values and evaluative team missions. Also, (in conjunction with managers) where some discretion is conferred to practitioners e.g. on the method of implementation for classroom observation, self-regulation and a willingness to conform to the quality regime, outcomes imply forms of controlled autonomy.

Evidence also illustrates that management do not always pay much attention to the regulatory detail of quality processes, which suggests various 'game plans' are in operation. In the findings, there is evidence of practitioners not fully committing to institutional targets, but focusing instead on giving the right impression (a form of 'presenteeism') to convince managers. Rather than resistance agential projects resort to finding a balance between minimalist input to complete tasks and meet institutional requirements. There is a resonance with Burawoy (1979) and notions of consent through 'making out'. Moreover, some agents appear better placed or are more adept at playing games than others. Certainly, management is not above game playing with external bodies or resorting to misbehaviour for instrumental reasons or when it protects an institution. Also forms of misbehaviour (akin to Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) are evident, which do not necessarily lead to change but are nevertheless important in understanding the contested nature of the regime. Again, the analytical framework must be credited as a tool for uncovering the micro politics of resistance.

Management's response (where it chooses) to non-conformance and recalcitrance on the part of primary agents reveals something more about the changing nature of FE organizations in this climate. While management resorts to 'partnership rhetoric' to subdue recalcitrance, forms of sanction are employed to deal with perceived resistance and misbehaviour, ranging from disciplinary measures to professional embarrassment. Again, the above echoes with other studies in similar settings that reveal how management introduce more regulatory systems and mechanisms of control (Randle and Brady, 1997).

The results from this part of the thesis provide us with a more sophisticated appreciation of interplay between structures and agents in the FE sector. It reveals a relatively heterogeneous configuration of actors in FE. Yet the interplay of the aforementioned causal factors demonstrates that successful management of quality is not a foregone conclusion in FE, with a general impression from the interviews being that forms of organizational commitment to quality are contested and complex.

Financial factors are of great significance to FE organisations although many tensions are apparent around the arena of quality due to having an inherent economic function. It is here that managers appear to need to win 'hearts and minds'. The high trust consent models of Self-evaluation and classroom observation appear to be being overlaid on a low trust audit environment. The contradiction appears to exist, whereby consensus views (Laird, 2002) are more optimistic that technicised intervention can improve the current economised quality regime in FE. This thesis is critical of such apologist views, which fail to adequately acknowledge the wider economic, political and social context.

It is clear from this study that the intensification of forms of control by the state over aspects of the employment relationship in the FE sector appears to varying degrees to be undermining practitioner autonomy, commitment and consent among the workforce. Quality is an arena, which accentuates an appreciation of change in FE organizations. In addition, there is some evidence that specific management interventions built around the generation of consent and enabling a greater awareness

of the pressures of the external agencies and environment among FE professionals is establishing a specific softer governance discourse.

In conclusion, the comparative case study methodology of this thesis also accomplishes a focus to suggest that FE organizations can be subject to the same pressures from the state, although the impact of these pressures can be mitigated by other institutional factors. Degrees of variability appear as outcomes in the specific case studies due in part to emerging tendencies between agents. Nevertheless, a very unmistakable environment has been created in Scottish FE (SFE) for the tentacles of quality audit to spread, creating a culture of report and information requests, which appears to be draining the sector. While professionals acknowledge and accept the need for "quality" there is a significant level of opinion that "quality" in its current official guise does not result in an enhancement of creativity, real improvement or skills within institutions. It is not clear whether the needs of the students/clients/customers or those of bureaucracy, are being met due to audit mentality. In short, 'quality' may be the currency for scrutiny (profit-loss) in SFE influenced by a Funding Council and inspectorate discourse that assumes status and value, although this is disputed by many professionals, as tending to undermine the very standards and consent that the quality rhetoric purports to nurture.

It is in the light of these findings that the final chapter will pull together the various strands of this thesis. A case will be made emphasising the distinctive contributions of this thesis before discussing particular policy implications for the Scottish Further Education sector.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1 Reflections on the research

This conclusion will begin with some reflections on the research before proceeding with a summary of the key arguments and distinctive contributions of the thesis. Furthermore, this final chapter will consider scope for future areas of research, given the findings and limitations of this dissertation. To conclude, this thesis will consider the implications of these findings for policy relating to the management and development of quality in the FE sector.

To reflect on this research, necessitates a return to the logic of development for this thesis. The approach to the literature outlined in Chapter Two of this study, reveals particular drivers on several levels (meta, macro, meso and micro). On a meta and macro level, since incorporation, the FE sector has been propelled from being a 'Cinderella service' (Randle and Brady, 1994; Hyland and Merrill, 2003). There has been a significant increase in the profile of FE, as a consequence of the political importance attached to vocational education by successive governments across the political spectrum. Structural transformation has precipitated the restructuring of institutions, with a proliferation of quality mechanisms accompanied by official advice on how to address quality in FE institutions. Such a scenario reflects the adoption of a business process market model with quality supporting a neo liberal philosophy in the macro drive for economic and political prosperity.

Chapter Two enables various themes to emerge, which illustrate that the overall societal changes and attitudes to public welfare have resulted in an 'audit explosion' (Power, 1997). While the increased profile of FE has been accompanied by enhanced revenue inputs, the sector has been subjected to a reinvention of governance and accountability through various control mechanisms to improve outputs. Changes in a macro structural sense, are associated with the development of asymmetrical forms with specific functions (i.e. Scottish Funding Council) spurred on by a market control imperative. The price for such transformation has been increased control by public sector regulatory and funding bodies over areas of quality and the

manifestation of corporate control in the organization of work. Chapter Two also identifies the impacts of managerialism on college systems, operating on meso and micro levels, whereby organizational ideals, regime values and professional orientations are altered.

The quality audit provides the level of scrutiny necessary to evaluate surplus and added value in FE. In short, quality has therefore become the currency in FE for economic rationalism, a profit- loss indicator, being the raison d'être for models of public accountability in a public audit regime. A resonance exists with other contributions (Avis et al, 1996) whereby quality supports the drive for economic and political prosperity. Despite certain characteristics and features being prevalent, commentators have previously avoided capturing 'quality' in the context of a regime.

Having established particular themes, Chapter Three proceeds to utilise the 'regime' as a conceptual device. Reflections on regimes (as a cluster of interpretations) are adapted to develop a conceptual framework. Accordingly, the development of quality management can be traced within the context of regime configuration and the political processes that dominate the public sector. Utilising the regime means powerful analytical tools are sculptured to assist in understanding the quality revolution. Distinct mechanisms are exposed in the interplay between structural factors and agential projects.

The research applies a critical labour process tradition, accepting a structured antagonism and the control imperative in the employment relationship. Having established the location of public sector work this thesis notes the need for the state to employ control mechanisms to restrain professionals, due to their capacity for disruption (Offe, 1985).Thereafter, employing labour process analysis, whereupon the exposure of the control imperative becomes evident in 'control regimes' (Reid, 1997; 2003) avoids the possible unproblematic transfer between private and public work (Cousins, 1985; Reid, 1997; 2003).

The setting out of regime characteristics in Chapter Three facilitates exposing themes of bureaucratic and management strategies factored by forms of control and consent through a variety of literatures, which acknowledge the conflict between managers and employees. It is also possible to suggest the management of quality can be interpreted through the development of traditional, disruption, transformative and consolidated regimes in accordance with Gramscian settlement shifts. The overarching political and economic context enables the focus for the management of quality to be established.

The logic of discovery (through the literature) and subsequent formulation of the conceptual framework, allows some reworking of Clarke and Newman's (1997) 'derived regime categories'. Moreover the development of a 'regime matrix' (in the interpretation of the findings) assists in making sense of how the quality regime has come to develop distinctive characteristics in post-incorporation FE. Establishing structures and features of regimes is condoned through the perceptions of agents. Likewise in Chapter Six the impacts and levels of acceptance of regimes, compliments the aforementioned interpretation of events. The next section illustrates the key arguments and distinctive contributions of this thesis.

8.2 Summary of key arguments and distinctive contributions of the thesis

The core aims of this thesis are to uncover the impact of the developing quality regimes in Scottish Further Education. While this research is conducted against a backdrop of some understanding about the momentum of New Public Management (NPM) with quality as a distinct feature, it is an under researched area of activity in FE, despite playing a prominent role in organisational life. This research is arguably:

> The most systematic, in–depth analysis of the FE sector in the UK and the only significant study of Scottish Further Education.

To date, there has been a lacuna in the specific attention paid to quality as a change mechanism in FE, which has allowed official articulation to go virtually unchallenged. Yet this thesis guards against the taken for granted assumption that

official quality discourse is both ‘all powerful’ and an established form of common sense. Providing such a unique insight into FE organisational arrangements on quality is by far the most extensive undertaking from an independent researcher. Additionally, this thesis facilitates a critical research agenda on the Scottish FE sector, which to date has been somewhat invisible. The thesis illustrates comprehensive empirical studies, provides scope and contributes to informed assessments about events in FE. The research acknowledges that quality has become embedded in educational settlement and is articulated as systems and strategies of control.

Secondly:

> An original framework of analysis that extends conceptions of neo-liberalism and New Public Management by incorporating the importance of the quality agenda (part of the audit regime) as a mechanism of restructuring and control.

This thesis confirms that the neo liberal philosophy consolidated by New Labour modernisation programmes has continued to promote NPM within the context of organisational settlement. While the wheels of managerialism have rolled forward, the reframing of governance and accountability has propelled quality processes (as a new way of legitimating organisational change) to the fore with an insistence on making all agents auditable.

This thesis sheds more light on the existing body of literature and places the management of quality in to the spotlight, worthy of distinct empirical scrutiny. The radical multi-levelled conceptual framework incorporates aspects from the labour process debates, while also, locating the legitimation and managerial state literatures. A unique insight and greater depth to our understanding of the complexity of quality regimes and its impact on professionals is made possible. The multi-level analysis honed our understanding of the impact of market and corporate pressure on working practices in the FE sector by utilising the concept of a ‘regime’. Quality has become

a legitimating technology within the public audit regime, which supports state philosophy and accommodates the fiscal crisis of the state.

This thesis also acknowledges as with others (Cunningham, 2005; Mooney and Poole, 2005) that the variant factors which contribute to change, between and within services are an important part of the debate. This research disputes ideas that outcomes are distinctly different across education systems in the UK. In common with others (Mooney and Scott, 2005) this thesis is not seduced by the idea of a 'New Scotland' under a devolved Parliament. Additionally, this thesis exposes discursive myths about a distinctive Scottish Further Education environment which is in some way immune from the ravages of NPM, as being a fallacy.

Thirdly:

> An enhanced understanding of control structures – their drivers and effects – through a multi-levelled analysis of 'regimes'.

Through the articulation of 'regimes', where principles are fundamental in transformation, this thesis examines events on a number of levels (meta, macro, meso and micro). This thesis creates a framework that incorporates the 'bigger picture' with events at institutional and agential levels. Consequently, the research is able to capture the isomorphic pressures, and reveal contradictions between these influences from different levels of the state. So, this thesis illustrates how the state is able to extend and implement aspects of neo-liberal priorities through managerialism. Additionally, the thesis provides evidence that a variety of inter-organizational relations and causal factors (contracting-out being a feature) relational allegiances and a constellation of interests, interlink to help to shape different outcomes in the working practices of managers and lecturers in the FE sector. This study makes an important contribution to our understanding of how and why organisations respond to state influences. What is clear is that the quality regime agenda has implications for all in institutions. While exposing the interplay between state and institutional

configuration, it is evident that corporate bodies are not merely passive or agential projects pawns, in a relationship with state bodies and actors.

Fourthly:

> An updated, expanded and enhanced labour process analysis of the work of an under-researched group of semi-professional workers.

While, the work of professionals in the FE sector is influenced by a variety of issues that are familiar to other sectors, such as the loss of or challenge to professional autonomy, with outcomes of intensification to working practices (Randle and Brady, 1997; Dent, 1998; Cunningham, 2005) transformation of regimes appears to have been more rapid. Therein, a more aggressive audit focused variant of quality has permeated FE in the name of governance and accountability. Quality regimes have become a quasi legitimating technology to control the labour process in FE through input and output mechanisms, which serve to justify public spending.

The thesis reveals how structural pressures placed on the sector can impact on how corporate bodies and agents define quality (across professional groups) intensify professional work, and reconstruct the notion of careers, discretion and skills. In particular, the thesis illustrates how business process models contribute to a steady erosion of professional autonomy across a number of levels in the hierarchy due to a series of demands articulated as market, corporate, bureaucratic, quasi-technical, ideological and regulatory control mechanisms. Increased regulation has challenged notions of professional self-regulation and trust. Such outcomes suggest an overburdened profession, although this thesis (as with others, Gleeson and Shain, 1999) avoids one dimensional interpretations, which suggest FE is an over controlled environment.

To clarify, the relationship between control, consent and acceptance reveals a multifaceted quality regime in FE. Also, as a consequence of influencing the shape of work activities, the level of independence of incorporated bodies (FE colleges) to

define work practices is at the same time enhanced, but also challenged. Pressure on the labour process, from state agencies in the FE sector is exerted through a variety of structures and agents. Ultimately, an increased quality audit burden along with associated frameworks to support bureaucracy leads to varied responses.

While developing a framework to understand the regime, this thesis goes further by employing analytical tools to examine the potential for agential misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) and the micro politics of resistance. As with other studies (Gouldner, 1954; Burawoy, 1979) this thesis utilises a framework to capture worker behaviour and forms of mock bureaucracy that are characteristic of the FE workplace and act as coping mechanisms for professionals. Establishing a deeper understanding on the reconfiguration of quality also requires a re-think about how bureaucracy and control regimes have been manifested in post-incorporation FE. The thesis identifies that NPM institutionalises 'death by audit' within the context of consolidated quality regimes. So, the control imperative is dominant in 'control regimes' (Reid, 1997; 2003). A debate has ensued about the merits of bureaucracy that espouses notions of lean structures (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005); although the reality is hybrid structures that in turn act as a mechanism to compliment the intensification of work in FE.

The FE professional appears to be somewhat more vulnerable than those in other sectors due to a weak or thin culture and this thesis confirms earlier work (Robson, 1998; Robson et al, 2004). These empirical findings do not agree that a dilution in managerialism (Gleeson, 2001) has occurred or that corporate and primary agents ultimately share common realities (Loots and Ross, 2004). Therefore, this thesis illustrates (as with others, Clow, 2001) that a cohesive view of professionalism is missing.

Fifthly:

> The thesis seeks to deepen our understanding of the interplay between structure and agency, primarily by utilising critical realist insights into how

> agential projects are involved in initiating, establishing, diffusing, reproducing, yet also resisting the regime.

Not only does this research make a case for the explicit application of a critical realist philosophy (Sayer, 2000; 2004) in FE, but also illustrates that being clear about the scope for agency often depends on the contingent affiliation and position of actors within the regime, which is complex. Such attention also indicates that state executive policy agendas, have varied implications for actors in the quality regime. Being able to assess the space people occupy within the regime and make assessments about causal powers and causal tendencies is a particular strength of the research. This thesis 'teases out' a series of continuities, changes and emergent responses across groups of corporate and primary agents, which stress similarities and differences in initiating, establishing, diffusing, reproducing, yet also resisting the regime. While some corporate agents (as dominant policy implementation groups) are in a more favourable position, with primary agents being more acutely subject to regime demands, with diminished agential resources to influence events, rarely are any actors in the regime able to completely transform structures. Such insights provide a unique, sophisticated and nuanced understanding of emergent regime formation.

Sixthly:

> The thesis revisits and revitalises understandings of the importance of consent in the reproduction of quality regimes

Ongoing efforts by state and corporate agencies to consolidate quality regimes in FE rely on convincing professionals of the efficacy of approaches that denounce factory type logic. Self-evaluation, which fosters notions of ownership, empowerment and self regulation, can be interpreted as a combination of ideological, bureaucratic and technical control devices through the manufacturing of consent. Self-evaluation appears to suggest a more consent based model, which stresses and reinforces the idea of an evolving internalised institutional regime. In short, official versions of

quality tend to espouse the virtues of evaluation and continuous improvement in a 'brave new world'. However, violations of previous shared language traditions means establishing a status quo through embedding specific regime values, while having some success has proved somewhat difficult. Such outcomes in this thesis, also contest notions of the hegemonic dominance of the quality regime within the educational settlement.

This thesis does not share the optimism of other contributors to the debate (Laird, 2002) who suggest more positive outcomes in FE. Subsequently, a comprehensive empirical appreciation underpinned by a critical theoretical framework, questions the validity of ideological discourse and success stories, which are somewhat at odds with the practice of agents engaged in quality type activities. Rather than empowerment and cultural embeddedness associated with 'winning hearts and minds' as outcomes, this thesis suggests saturation in the work-effort bargain as a consequence of official attempts to consolidate the regime.

Finally;

> By evaluating not only the origins, but the effectiveness of regimes, the thesis can make a distinctive contribution to policy debates by identifying some of the dysfunctional content and consequences of quality practices that suggest mediocrity rather than excellence.

Despite quality regimes in FE reaching a stage of becoming consolidated, yet contested entities, remnants of previous configurations (traditional, disruption and transformation) are still evident. Such outcomes serve to substantiate the challenge to official pronunciations about the merits of quality management in Scottish FE. Official models espouse sector success stories about quality, in which individual colleges are encouraged to gain 'bragging rights' through benchmarking and target achievements. Within such frameworks more quality equals better quality, although this thesis contests such outcomes, which suggest that the interests of various groups are universal. Forced 'HMIE audit speak' or externally inspired quality processes

serve to thwart creativity in the regime and can be envisaged as false remedies. The unintended effects of the regime have contributed to a perceived dilution of skills.

This thesis provides a stark example (in the management of quality) of the neo-liberal state wrestling with the need to control spending in the public sector. Earlier media exposure in the Times Educational Supplement on the initial results for this thesis has contributed to the quality debate in FE focusing on the audit burden and other dysfunctional aspects of the regime, *"Millions 'wasted' on audits"*, (Henderson, 2006). This thesis makes a case for research based policy, which confronts partisan assumptions of events. Quality regimes are of greater concern in understanding neo-liberal hegemonic dominance through notions of legitimacy, which detract from the efficacy of quality measures in improving the experience of students.

8.3 Future areas of research

While the scope of this thesis is comprehensive, it is useful to consider some future areas of research. Aspects of the research suggest further lines of investigation are necessary, while the framework of the thesis prevented other specific areas from being pursued. Scope is provided by this research to investigate further the perceptions of Funding Council actors. Moreover, a closer examination of the role of the Audit Committee would allow a more in-depth evaluation of its capacity to influence the Funding Council. Although access to the 'corridors of policy' is perhaps more difficult to obtain and sustain. Additionally, the Scottish National Party (SNP) political agenda could provide scope for a radical rethink on the role of quangos, resulting in change in organisations, which provides opportunity for research on the governance of the FE sector.

The geographical element of this study is focused on Scotland, although there is perhaps a need to examine more comparative aspects of FE across the United Kingdom. Suggestions that differences exist in the systems of England and Scotland are noted although it is also acknowledged (in the interpretation of the research findings) that outcomes appear to be similar, given English based study evidence and

commentary. Evidence from this study suggests intensification, erosion of autonomy and burgeoning bureaucracy. Such trends perhaps account for the meta-level neo-liberal political framework that could as Avis (1999) has acknowledged be the significant factor. If the complexity of events is to be appreciated then following events and accounting for devolution and national differences in the implementation of policies could still provide scope to understand the development of diverse quality regimes in the quasi-market. The merger of the SFEFC with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) to the Scottish Funding Council in October 2006 provides a topic for future research. Comparisons across sectors in education may provide scope to suggest progressive changes for the quality systems of FE.

Further, some of the particular institutional areas that are afforded attention in the study could benefit from more analysis. Insights gained in attempts to change the labour process of practitioners through classroom observation could be developed further as HMIE initiatives evolve. Such an analysis would also benefit from more questions being asked about the role of part-time lecturers and those on fractional appointments, arguably the most vulnerable of all practitioner agents in the regime. The findings illustrates that such agents are subjected to producing additional value, without adequate remuneration. Additional questions, surrounding the employment of part-time staff warrants a broader exploration because quality issues are just one aspect of the work-effort bargain where they are subject to increasing exploitation. Likewise, the current system of quality coerces students to participate in events. A closer, critical examination of student involvement in quality type activities and the impact on their course studies would perhaps clarify the purpose of their increasing participation in the quality regime.

Finally, developing an enhanced understanding of the role of Board of Management members in the quality regime at institutional level would shed further light on events. Tasked with constructing the missions and strategies of colleges, a certain detachment from operational matters is likely to affect an understanding of the purpose of quality for many board members. Analysis of this area of college life could shed light onto the sort of quality type information that Board of Management

members encounter and how quality matters relate to governance and accountability. Future developments in the quality framework are likely to devolve more roles and responsibilities to institutions, which could mean more involvement for individual Boards of Management. To date, research on this aspect of college life is missing. Understanding and interpreting outcomes more clearly, will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving impacts and acceptance of the public audit regime.

The aforementioned requires challenging approaches and as is indicated in Chapter Four, not all participants in the wider FE quality regime are eager to participate in research or have inquisitive researchers ask questions. Despite institutions massaging the rhetoric of community and openness, the reality is somewhat different. The FE sector is a hostage to a 'here and now' culture, which is diametrically opposed to the development of a creative research culture, whereby certain professional autonomy can contribute in a constructive critical manner to a vibrant learning community. The current arrangements mean that colleges are obliged to collaborate with a deficit model of audit culture, in the name of quality. Such structures undermine creative capacity and ultimately the experience in the classroom for students. It is only by those researchers that have the opportunity, being committed, determined and being willing to speak with a critical voice that change is possible. This thesis calls for a critical research agenda to be established if the Scottish FE sector is to become a progressive service.

8.4 Wider policy implications for the Further Education sector

Previously, the results lead to some reflection on the management of quality in the FE sector. In concluding this thesis, considering some implications and future courses of action for FE quality regimes necessitates an initial focus on meta, macro and meso institutional factors. The current political climate means that FE is still a major plank of government policy to inspire growth and competitiveness in the economy. While levels of expenditure are rising in FE, this is in the context of a public audit regime, which scrutinises value for money with an increasing intensity, signifying more and better quality. To say that the Scottish sector has been immune

or that outcomes do not reflect the continuity of New Labour modernisation (Corby and White, 1999; Mooney and Poole, 2005) inculcated by neo-liberal philosophy, is to ignore the blatant impacts of such derived policy. The demands for governance and accountability have resulted in more regulation and the rise of institutional control, but also in a series of regressive implications for the sector. Looming economic crisis is likely to compound all aspects of audit.

The first implication is more general, whereby the allocation of resources by colleges to the quality function will reflect the internal priorities of organisations, translated through mission statement and strategic objectives. It is in the context of the public audit regime that institutions are being coerced and buckling under the weight of making professionals consistently more auditable. Further devolution to colleges will be in the context of more audit and scrutiny from the centre. Such priorities do not necessarily accord with improving student experiences. The results illustrate that the financial costs of the quality audit burden are substantial and to a greater extent reflects external political anxieties. Greater awareness of policymakers of the impacts and many unintended effects would assist in dispelling myths over the efficacy of audit culture.

The second implication reflects on resource and cost implications of supporting structures for colleges. Other dysfunctional side-effects of initiating, establishing, diffusing and reproducing quality regimes appear to be manifest in the creation of ‘not so lean’ bureaucratic support structures, whereby quality management has become established as a very prominent part of college life. The inequity or various susceptibilities for colleges in the funding of similar quality structures, also has implications for smaller institutions being able to maintain levels of infrastructural support for the quality function over a period of time. The price of failure to achieve some kind of balance in meeting the demands for cost versus quality in the quasi-market could be significant, especially for smaller FE institutions. Such colleges could be considered to be a higher risk as they continue to struggle in coping with the dual, but contradictory forces of cost constraints, alongside the reproduction of

bureaucratic structures (part of the problem with incorporation) and subsequent pressures of maintaining a quality service.

Moreover, and leading to a third implication, is that the sustenance of the quality regime has increasingly (for many classroom practitioners) been at the expense of classroom delivery, which ultimately impacts on students/customers/clients. Likewise the opportunity to create a culture of research, which contributes to the sector, is non-existent. The displacement of time to accommodate quality regime functions, whether for HMIE or other external bodies is against a canvas of incremental cuts in delivery time of the curriculum, which has intensified the classroom experience for the practitioner professional and students. Additionally, unlike other service industries (where feedback comments on service are optional) students are increasingly subject to 'feedback fatigue', being forced to evaluate disparate elements of a course through the repeated completion of questionnaires. Professionals are expected to evaluate the results, in a time consuming exercise, which meets with external approval and forms the basis for official success stories. Given such a scenario, standards are unlikely to improve, while practitioner skills remain focused on enhancing the mundane rather than inspiring students. A possible outcome is the degeneration of skills across all participants in the regime over a longer term.

Additionally, and focusing on a fourth implication, the present system of quality is undemocratic, exclusive and fragmented by structural arrangements. The HMIE (quality function) are constituted as an unaccountable executive agency that reinvents itself every so often to provide more effective audit scrutiny. In short, the quality regime in FE is a self-perpetuating industry. Despite certain advantages of macro quality regime participation (for corporate agents) this form of democratic mechanism is not available to practitioners or students, which means that both voices often go unheard across the sector. While the more recent message from *Learning to Improve* (Scottish Executive, 2005) is of the need for an inclusive quality community, existing arrangements deny practitioners and students adequate leverage in any debates. Currently, the FE sector is run by management committees factored

by relational allegiances, with the quality function contracted to the HMIE as an unaccountable audit agency.

In response, there are several options open to FE organizations in their attempts to drive a quality improvement agenda within colleges and across the wider sector. Despite participation at the more senior levels of management the realisation of a consolidated quality community (as advocated by Learning to Improve) is lost because across the wider sector, and at institutional level, the voice of many stakeholders is absent due to non-involvement in initiating and establishing the quality regime. The onus on the reproduction of imposed systems of audit using a forced language fails to establish shared traditions. One improvement is through professional recognition for lecturers via a national body, whereby such structural accreditation confers a more significant voice in policymaking.

The success of such a strategy would depend on the commitment of individuals, groups and institutions to forge closer links in a proactive manner, acting as an agent and conduit for change, rather than be the recipients of external policy edicts on quality, filtered through the HMIE. Moving towards a more inclusive, less economized definition of quality, but one which stresses a community of ideas rather than management by committee, would also present a challenge to the current configuration of quality in the sector. Presently, ideas are largely HMIE inspired and enforced by the same body through the overarching framework of audit, disseminated by confederates at college level.

Given the current criticism of the HMIE (in this study) the structures for the organisation of quality appear introspective and lack creative impetus. The use of Associate Assessors (as audit agents) to manage and assess elements of the quality process has propelled the existence of a whole industry, which obfuscates the development of more innovative ideas around quality. Such agents merely mimic in a ‘parrot-like’ fashion the discourse of audit (as objectives of the HMIE) being controlled by career aspirations. Such a scenario thwarts a healthy critical debate. Inspection has changed to review, but the process appears as enhanced audit. While

there is a reluctance to use the term ‘audit’ in the discourse, in reality Self-evaluation has become a vehicle, whereby agents are passed fit for auditing, with being auditable and compliant considered as markers of success. Definitions for the good practitioner are those which capture and are indicative of the audit function. Currently, room for debate about the value of such a system has at best a limited platform, and at worst, it is not available due to an assumed consensus.

The relationship of the SFC and HMIE accentuates quality as being political, with a lack of integrity in what and who is being made auditable across the regime. Levels of confidence in the AA model will depend on whether the legitimacy of the HMIE as an initiator of regime, continues to be challenged by professionals. Certainly, there is a significant body of evidence from the results of this study that illustrates the HMIE as serving particular needs, which are not entirely beneficial to the wider educational community. The HMIE is considered to be a political puppet of the Funding Council. Moreover, AA’s are the political messengers or quality confederates, advocating external regulatory regimes at institutional level. Innovation in the regime appears to be thwarted by HMIE demands to conform in a particular manner. The discourse for the current approach would seem to suggest that the HMIE and AA’s continue to advocate ‘digging deeper’ at college level, being more concerned with making professionals auditable than the substance of a quality product delivered to a high level.

Also a significant number of professionals continue to parody a system which has created a ‘fear factor’. Currently, developments result in more self-regulation for those institutions that conform to a system of audit. While accountability is driven downward the question is posed over ‘Who guards the guardians?’ because the HMIE appears to be beyond being accountable. Making the HMIE more visibly accountable would go some way to instilling more confidence in the regime.

The present model is infested with levels of instrumentalism from institutional benefits to individual career building strategies. The lack of a self critical voice is likely to create a system that is incapable of being hypocritical. Such tensions

illustrate that policymakers across FE are perhaps advised to interrogate the success stories on quality more diligently. Rather than excellence a growing mediocrity is a likely outcome in Scottish FE.

Consequently a change would mean a departure from the economized value-based organizational judgments of quality that are currently in operation. A radical re-evaluation of structural arrangements could possibly happen, given that a Scottish National minority government intimated there would be a 'quango bonfire' on coming to power in May 2007. Another option open to institutions is to act together to pressure the Funding Council and Scottish Government to address more adequately a re-think about the purposes of quality in the Scottish FE sector as millions of pounds appear to be invested in the current model, which has a series of debilitating and degenerating effects across the sector. College Boards of management will need to be more proactive in addressing and challenging on various levels. On a meso level, making Chief Executives more accountable but also on a macro level by disputing (where necessary), what often appear, as official Funding Council dictates. This implies a degree of 'value' cooperation and partnership that may lead to a more distinct institutional ethos and quality community.

The current configuration of quality in the sector means that it is unlikely critical voices will develop, because the quality function (HMIE) and its current mode of operation maintain an equilibrium but constitute inertia. This thesis advocates that given the contracting state, the HMIE has developed in the time (from incorporation) into an institution, which has become moribund, but which continues to seek ways to reinvent itself as being useful to political masters and the sector. Such endeavour on the one hand, has been cultivated by a discourse inveigled by a softer, 'lighter touch' with less direct control. On the other, the identity of the HMIE has become one, which promotes more economised audit forms. More audit, rather than less is the likely outcome if the current arrangements and political philosophy remain in place.

There is a risk for the sector in becoming too reliant on external sources of 'expert' information with a spurious ownership in existence. Developing a degree of

autonomy for the sector will also mean re-establishing a national framework of relations in Scottish FE, which would be weighted towards interdependence of colleges rather than independent corporations. More urgency for the greater involvement of the EIS Union at institutional and wider sector level would perhaps promote a more effective lobbying force. The impact of the administrative logic attached to the quality regime has been a significant force for a diminution of terms and conditions of professionals, which appears to have largely gone unnoticed. The initiation of a return to national strategy in Scotland would also create a distinctive national sector model in the UK. Likewise, a framework of strong national partners would among other things be more inclined to create a more objective model of quality, with education rather than audit as a focus. In doing so, it would obviate the inordinate costs of quality audit, while recognizing the need for scrutiny, and should meet the criteria for achieving value for money.

Any further devolution of responsibility without real autonomy is likely to create additional tensions in a sector, which has more recently had a series of scandals under the current financial regime arrangements. Given the media coverage focused on the financial failure of some corporate agents and institutions, it is likely that outcomes result in more intense scrutiny. Yet current systems of governance, built on the feudal privileges of some corporate agents, appear to go virtually unchallenged and remain undemocratic. Arms length control, despite quasi market freedoms, has allowed politicians to abdicate responsibility and accountability in FE. On the one hand, quangos do the bidding in the context of asymmetric political frameworks while on the other private capital prospers across all aspects of provision through capital building projects and franchise arrangements. Outcomes from such arrangements do not necessarily represent value for money.

During the writing of this thesis, media attention was focused on an institution with alleged debts of £6.8 million (Munro, 2007) as a consequence of mismanagement, with restructuring, redundancies, industrial conflict, with the loss of some provision for students as outcomes. This follows a long running dispute at another college involving the dismissal of a prominent national union figure (Munro, 2006). Rather

than a radical rethink about relational structures being more robust, within a national framework with clear accountability to Parliament, likely outcomes for the sector are enhanced levels of governance and scrutiny. Being the raison d'être for models of public accountability, allaying political anxiety in a public audit regime, will remain the forte of quality.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Profile of Case study respondents

Preliminary discussions started in January 2003 and the fieldwork was completed end of March 2004. Also, supplementary follow-up discussions were used for clarification of issues, which was finished by the end of June 2005.

Interviews: 66 in total, involving 119 staff across three colleges (67/56% female, 52/44% male).

Duration: 30 -60 minutes, with additional Preliminary and Supplementary discussions.

Overall profile for the fieldwork

Individual = 44 interviews.
Pairs and group sessions = 22 interviews.

Pairs x 7 = 14 respondents.
Group sessions (3) x 4 = 12 respondents.
Group Sessions (4) x 6 = 24 respondents.
Group Sessions (5) x 5 = 25 respondents.

1. Principal x3 (2 female/1male)

2. Vice Principal, Depute Principal, Associate Principal x 10 (inc. Finance x3) (Quality function x3)
   Senior Management including Principal = 13 (5 female/ 5 male) (11%).

3. Head of Faculty/Division x15 (10 female/5 male).
   Head of Faculty/Division = 15 (13%).

4. Cross-College x5 (inc. Staff Development/Open Learning) (2 female/3male).

5. Quality Managers x 4 + 3 Vice Principal with Quality remit (inc. Quality Team College A =1+2; College B = 1; College C =1+2) (2 female/2male).

6. Senior lecturers/Head of Section/Curriculum Leaders x 38 (20 female/18 male) (32%).

7. Lecturers including some with responsibility i.e. Programme Leaders/Programme Coordinators x 36 (23 female/13 male) (30%) + EIS Reps = 33% + others =36%) + College B with remission Quality / Guidance x2; College A Quality Team 0.5 lecturers; EIS Reps x 3).

8. EIS x3 (3 male)

9. Staff Development x3. (2 female/1 male).

College A (from June 2003 –end of March 2004 - 10 months)

24 Interviews = 36% of the total interviews.
43 members of staff (27 female/16 male), including an observation of an end of course review).

1. Principal.

2. Vice Principal's x2 (including Finance & Resources; Learning &Teaching).

3. Cross College x 2 (Head of Educational Development including Staff Development and Open Learning Manager).

4. Head of Faculty x 5 (Childcare Education & Social Care; Creative Arts; Health, Recreation Science &Technology; Languages and Tourism; Training & Development).

5. Quality Team x 3 (Quality Manager + 0.5 lecturer secondment x2).

6. Curriculum Leaders x14.

7. Lecturers / Programme Leaders x15 (+ Quality Team x2, EIS Rep).

8. EIS /Academic Board of Management Rep (lecturer grade).

Individual x 14
Pairs and Group Sessions = 9
Pairs x 6
Group Session (3) x 1
Group Session (4) x 1
Group Session (5) x 2
Focus across three areas in the college: 1) Childcare Education & Social Care. 2) Creative Arts. 3) Health, Recreation Science &Technology

College B (September 2003 – end of March 2004 – 6 months)

21 interviews = 32% of the total interviews.
40 members of staff, including 20 female / 20male.

1. Principal.

2. Associate Principal x 4 (Finance & Personnel; External Services; Information Systems &Services; Quality, Curriculum & Board Services).

3. Cross College x 2.

4. Head of Faculty x 5 (Arts, Languages & Social Science; Maths, Science &Technology; Education Care & Sport; Information Technology &Business Studies; Business Development).

5. Quality Manager x 1 (6 hours remission with teaching responsibility).

6. Senior lecturers x 14.

7. Lecturers x 11.

8. EIS Rep (also lecturer).

9. Academic Board of Management Rep (also lecturer).

Individual x 15
Pairs and Group Sessions = 6
Group Session (3) x 1
Group Session (4) x 3
Group Session (5) x 2
Focus across three areas in the college: 1) Arts, Languages & Social Science. 2) Maths, Science &Technology. 3) Education Care & Sport.

College C (July 2003-end of March 2004 – 9 months)

21 interviews = 32% of the total interviews.
36 members of staff, including 20 female/ 16 male.

1. Principal.

2. Depute Principal's, Associate Principal's x 4 (Depute Principal; Associate Principal Human Resources & Quality Development; Associate Principal Resources/Finance; AP Student Services & Marketing).

3. Divisional Leaders (Head of Faculty) x 5 (Communication, Media & Social Sciences; Technology, Science & Maths; Care, Health & Sport; Business & Computing; Continuing &Supported Learning).

4. Cross College x 1 (Staff Development).

5. Quality Team x 4 (Manager x 2, Assurance x1, Exams x1).

6. Head of Section (Senior Lecturer role) x 10.

7. Lecturers x 10.

8. EIS Rep (also lecturer, previously on the Board of Management).
   Individual x15
   Pairs and Group Sessions = 6
   Pairs x1
   Group Session -3 x2
   Group Session -4 x 2
   Group Session -5 x 1
   Focus across three areas in the college: 1. Communication, Media & Social Sciences. 2. Technology, Science & Maths. 3) Care, Health &Sport.

Appendix 2:

Interview Schedules for management respondents

Question bank used to prompt discussion

Section 1: Working life –characteristics and perceptions of quality

- Describe a typical day in your life at the College.
- What management role do you play at the College?
- What are your priorities?
- What do you understand by the term ‘quality?
- Describe quality pre-incorporation (then) and post –incorporation (now).
- What has been your experience of quality audits in respect of College working life?
- Who do you generally discuss quality issues with?
- Who is the key person you associate with in terms of quality? How frequently do you come into contact with them?
- Do you have contact with external bodies in relation to quality? Tell me about your experiences.
- Have there been any changes instituted in the College regarding quality?

Section 2 Perception, impacts and acceptance of quality

- Describe a 'quality' incident you have been involved in during the last year that stands out in your mind.

- Tell me about the impact of quality procedures on your working (day, week, month, term, and year).

- What is your perception of quality audits?

- What has your experience been of measuring quality?

- What kind of tools have you used to measure quality?

- What is your perception of the impact of: 1. External bodies on the quality systems of the College? 2. The development of institutional mechanisms.

- Has your experience been one of ownership of quality audit mechanisms?

- Can you tell me about any particular issues that have arisen regarding quality matters? Have any quality audit issues had an effect on your decision making?

- What has been your experience in relation to external influences affecting both quality and day to day working life at the College?

- Can you tell me about any particular issues that have arisen regarding quality matters? Have any quality audit issues had an effect on your decision making?

- What has been your experience in relation to external influences affecting both quality and day to day working life at the College?

Appendix 2i: Questions for Head of Department/Faculty

Bank of questions for respondents who have not had a Preliminary discussion

Section 1: Characteristics and perceptions of quality

- What is your role in the College?

- Outline a typical involvement that you will have with quality issues

- Outline the network of people that you are involved with in relation to quality

- Who is the key person you are involved with on quality matters?

- Describe contacts you have with key post-holders on quality matters.

- Describe changes that have taken place in the last two years in relation to quality.

- If you were in FE pre-incorporation describe your quality experiences compared to post –incorporation.

- Who are the key figures in the College when it comes to quality and changes in quality?

- Tell me about particular incidents in relation to quality. How are they dealt with?

- Do you have any links to external agencies on quality matters?

- Describe your experiences of influencing quality matters both in the institution and in relation to external agencies.

Questions for Head of Department/Faculty (following preliminary discussion)

Section 2 Perception, impacts and acceptance of quality

- What are your experiences and typical involvement in quality matters?

- What management role do you have on quality matters?

- Outline your involvement with staff re quality.

- What are your priorities on quality matters?

- Outline any positive and negative experiences have you had in relation to quality matters.

- What contacts do you have with external agencies on quality matters?

- How would you say your work has changed over the past ten years or how do you think about quality now as opposed to pre-incorporation?

- Can you tell me about any particular issues that have arisen regarding quality matters? Have any quality audit issues had an effect on your decision making?

- What has been your experience in relation to external influences affecting both quality and day to day working life at the College?

Appendix 3:

Interview Schedules for Curriculum Leaders/ Heads of Section and Senior Lecturers

The purpose of this exercise is to look at the characteristics and influences on quality in the College. Also to examine how quality audits have affected working practices and the extent to which you contribute to the maintenance of institutional quality. The information that you give is totally confidential. Your names will not be written on anything and recorded transcripts will be given back to you to reflect on and clarify if you wish.

Before looking at the first set of questions can you note down what each of your job remits are, how long you've been in your job? The FE sector? Your background before that?

Section One:

Initially I want you to write down on a piece of paper your own opinions in relation to two questions

1. What you understand by the term 'quality'?

2. What do you think management is looking for from (CL's, Heads of Section, or Senior Lecturers) in relation to quality? Curriculum Leaders, Heads of Section and Senior Lecturers

Section Two: Evaluation of Quality

The next set of questions concerns your day-to-day work. I want you to describe events that incorporate quality audits in as much detail as possible for e.g. a quality process (Self-Evaluation).

An example of this would be the following:

Can you give me an example where quality procedures led to an improvement of…?

I would like you to give as much detail as possible. All questions will be phrased in the following manner – 'can you give me an example of where you were: 'able to'… 'Or unable to'… or 'for better'… 'For worse'…

- Can you give me examples where you have contact with external curriculum bodies or quality audit agencies?

- Can you give me an example of where you are involved in setting targets in line with performance indicators? An example of when targets are set for you either a) externally or b) internally? Examples where you or your team can affect this process?

- Can you give me an example where your experience has been one of ownership of quality audit mechanisms? An example where this was not the case?

- Can you give me an example where you have influenced quality matters? a) In the institution b) in relation to external agencies. Also where you have not been able to influence matters in either case?

- Can you give me an example of any changes instituted in the College regarding quality audits that have affected you? Your team? a) For the better b) for the worse?

- Can you give examples where quality audits or procedures have had a positive effect on curriculum innovation and delivery? Adverse affect on curriculum innovation and delivery?

- Can you give examples where you feel quality audits and procedures have improved standards? Or led to a reduction in standards?

- Can you give me examples where writing Quality Reports has led to changes being implemented for you? For your team? For the better? For the worse?

- Consider a particular quality process i.e. Self-Evaluation. Can you give me examples where self-evaluation has led to changes in practice a) for the better b) for the worse?

- Can you give me specific examples where quality audits impacted on your working life and professional identity in a positive sense? An adverse sense?

- Can you give me examples where quality audits have increased your workload and that of your team? Also lessening your workload and that of your team?

- Can you give me an example where quality initiatives have enabled you or your team to gain new skills?

- Can you give me an example where you have been able to make decisions about how quality procedures should be carried out? Also where you were unable to make decisions?

- Can you give me an example where quality has led to additional duties being given to you and you willingly complied? Or you complied because you had no option?

- Can you give examples of when quality audits/ procedures have affected communication in your team, a) for the better? b) For the worse?

- Can you give me an example of where an audit requirement led to staff being resistant or refusing to implement? Any examples where you have been resistant or refused to implement?

Appendix 3i:

Interview Schedules for Lecturers, Programme Leaders, Co-ordinators and Guidance Tutors

The purpose of this exercise is to look at the characteristics and influences on quality in the College. Also to examine how quality audits have affected working practices and the extent to which you contribute to the maintenance of institutional quality. The information that you give is totally confidential. Your names will not be written on anything and recorded transcripts will be given back to you to reflect on and clarify if you wish.

Before looking at the first set of questions can you note down what each of your job remits are, how long you've been in your job? The FE sector? Your background before that?

Section One

Initially I want you to write down on a piece of paper your own opinions in relation to two questions

1. What you understand by the term 'quality'?

2. What do you think management is looking for from lecturers, Guidance Tutors, Programme Leaders or Programme Co-ordinators in relation to quality?

Lecturers, Programme Leaders/Co-ordinators and Guidance Tutors
Section Two: Quality Evaluation

The next set of questions concerns your day-to-day work. I want you to describe events that incorporate quality audits in as much detail as possible for e.g. a quality process (Self-Evaluation).

An example of this would be the following:

Can you give me an example where quality procedures led to an improvement of…? I would like you to give as much detail as possible. All questions will be phrased in the following manner – 'can you give me an example of where you were: 'able to'… 'Or unable to'… or 'for better'… 'For worse'…

- Can you give me examples where you have contact with external curriculum bodies or quality audit agencies? Internally with the Quality Team?

- Can you give me an example of where you are involved in setting targets in line with performance indicators? An example of when targets are set for you either a) externally or b) internally? Examples where you or your team can affect this process?

- Can you give me an example where your experience has been one of ownership of quality audit mechanisms? An example where this was not the case?

- Can you give me an example where you have influenced quality matters? a) In the institution b) in relation to external agencies. Also where you have not been able to influence matters in either case?

- Can you give me an example of any changes instituted in the College regarding quality audits that have affected you? Your team? a) For the better b) for the worse?

- Can you give examples where quality audits or procedures have had a positive effect on curriculum innovation and delivery? Adverse affect on curriculum innovation and delivery?

- Can you give examples where you feel quality audits and procedures have improved standards? Or led to a reduction in standards?

- Can you give me examples where writing Quality Reports has led to changes being implemented for you? For your team? For the better? For the worse?

- Consider a particular quality process i.e. Self-Evaluation. Can you give me examples where self-evaluation has led to changes in practice a) for the better b) for the worse?

- Can you give me specific examples where quality audits impacted on your working life and professional identity in a positive sense? An adverse sense?

- Can you give me examples where quality audits have increased your workload and that of your team? Also lessening your workload and that of your team?

- Can you give me an example where quality initiatives have enabled you or your team to gain new skills?

- Can you give me an example where you have been able to make decisions about how quality procedures should be carried out? Also where you were unable to make decisions?

- Can you give me an example where quality has led to additional duties being given to you and you willingly complied? Or you complied because you had no option?

- Can you give examples of when quality audits/ procedures have affected communication in your team, a) for the better? b) For the worse?

- Can you give me an example of where an audit requirement led to staff being resistant or refusing to implement? Any examples where you have been resistant or refused to implement?

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