



School of Education

**Dialogue and consultation in higher education
policymaking: a critical policy analysis of the tertiary
funding review in England, 2017–2019**

Anthony Peter Weale Bagshaw

Student: 160137190

ORCID: 0000-0002-0324-3281

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Abstract

The UK government's "Review of Post-18 Education and Funding" (Tertiary Review), 2017–2019, should have been highly influential on the shape of the further and higher education sectors in England. But a period of policy inaction and political turmoil arising from Brexit meant that the policy process, when judged against its own ambition, was a damp squib. I focus in this inquiry on the consultation which formed part of the evidence-gathering approach to support the report from Philip Augar's expert panel. From this I draw conclusions which have value for practitioners, as the outsiders in the policymaking process, to support their future engagement with policy consultation exercises.

This critical policy analysis explores the context of the Tertiary Review and deconstructs its texts following David Hyatt's (2013a) critical higher education policy discourse analysis framework, adapted to suit this inquiry. I also use elements from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to consider dialogic aspects of policymaking. The application of Bakhtin provides the epistemic foundation for the thesis, meaning-making through dialogic interanimation, to which I return throughout the analysis.

I contextualise the review four ways: medium-term socio-political context; epoch; immediate socio-political context; and contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures. These chapters develop understanding of the Tertiary Review's position within the political, policy and academic discourses. I then deconstruct the review's official texts, considering in turn the concepts of authority, consultation and influence. I use the contextualisation and deconstruction to draw conclusions which identify what general lessons can be drawn from the specific case, and I articulate the contribution that this thesis makes to the higher education policy and policymaking literature. I propose a dialogic policy consultation framework as a practitioner tool, and I invite the application and testing of the framework in practice as the natural extension of this practice-oriented, but theoretical, work.

Acknowledgements and dedication

I am enormously grateful to the many friends, colleagues and family members who have supported me on the journey which has culminated in writing this thesis. The Doctor of Education (EdD) staff at The University of Sheffield have consistently demonstrated their care and dedication to research and teaching in higher education – my thanks go particularly to my supervisor David Hyatt and to his current and former colleagues Heather Ellis, Caroline Sarojini Hart, Vassiliki Papatsiba and Gareth Parry. I owe further thanks to my internal examiner Heather Ellis and external examiner Malcolm Tight from Lancaster University.

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My aunt, Annie Jackson, provided assiduous proofreading; any errors remain my sole responsibility. I also benefitted from the insightful feedback of Monty Allen and Darren Craig. My wife, Hilary R.A. Bagshaw, has been a consistent and enthusiastic supporter of my study through the many changes in our personal and professional lives: I am very fortunate to have her by my side.

I chose to explore the application of the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin in this thesis because I heard so much about his life and work while my late mother, Hilary B.P. Bagshaw, studied for her PhD – *Reason and faith: religion in Mikhail Bakhtin's thought, and the application of his thought to the study of religion* – at The University of Sheffield under the supervision of Craig Brandist and David Shepherd. The opportunity to engage with her work and interests is an indulgence, and a reminder of her wide interests and capacity for deep thinking. I learned many things from my mother including the importance of intellectual inquiry and of sharing knowledge with others. I dedicate this work to her.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Topic selection | 5 |
| Currency and the novel coronavirus | 6 |
| Choices and rejections | 7 |
| Ethics and personal position | 9 |
| The practitioner's perspective | 11 |
| Thesis structure and conclusions | 14 |
| Part 1. Boundaries, context, approach and method..... | 16 |
| Chapter 1A: Boundaries and context..... | 17 |
| The boundaries of the inquiry..... | 17 |
| Consultation in the policymaking process..... | 28 |
| Chapter 1B: Approach | 32 |
| Bakhtin and dialogue | 32 |
| The value of dialogic concepts for this inquiry..... | 37 |
| Chapter 1C: Method..... | 39 |
| Application of the critical policy analysis framework..... | 39 |
| Part 2. Contextualising the Tertiary Review..... | 45 |
| Chapter 2A: Medium-term socio-political context..... | 46 |
| Current issues in tertiary education funding | 46 |
| Higher education funding 1997 to 2017 | 49 |
| Chapter 2B: Epoch..... | 53 |
| The links between economic growth, productivity and skills | 54 |
| The role of the market in tertiary education | 55 |
| The balance of public and private benefit..... | 56 |
| The discourse of value for money | 57 |
| Chapter 2C: Immediate socio-political context..... | 60 |
| Brexit and policy inaction | 60 |
| Tertiary education policy..... | 61 |
| The position of universities..... | 62 |
| Chapter 2D: Contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures . | 67 |
| Insiders: key policymaking actors..... | 68 |
| Outsiders: policy stakeholders | 74 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Part 3. Deconstructing the Tertiary Review | 77 |
| Chapter 3A: Authority..... | 79 |
| What problem is the Tertiary Review aiming to solve? | 80 |
| Warrant in the Tertiary Review | 87 |
| Authority and power in the Tertiary Review | 91 |
| Chapter 3B: Consultation | 93 |
| What indicates insiders' appetite for outsiders' responses to the Tertiary Review? | 94 |
| What do the <i>Call for Evidence</i> questions imply about the consultation? | 100 |
| How did respondents shape their responses to the <i>Call for Evidence</i> ? | 102 |
| Chapter 3C: Influence | 106 |
| What did the Tertiary Review policymaking insiders value most? | 108 |
| Which outsider voices would matter most in the Tertiary Review? | 111 |
| What can be seen to have had impact on the Tertiary Review? | 114 |
| Part 4. Conclusions..... | 120 |
| Chapter 4A: Critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review | 121 |
| Why analyse the Tertiary Review? | 121 |
| Policy deconstruction | 124 |
| The policymaking process | 125 |
| Consultation and the Tertiary Review..... | 128 |
| Implications | 129 |
| Chapter 4B: A practitioner framework for dialogic policy consultation..... | 132 |
| Practitioner lessons from the Tertiary Review | 132 |
| Policymaking through dialogic consultation | 134 |
| The dialogic policy consultation framework | 134 |
| Chapter 4C: Final remarks | 142 |
| Method and approach..... | 142 |
| Contributions..... | 144 |
| Bibliography | 147 |
| Appendix A: Call for Evidence questions..... | 166 |
| Appendix B: Dialogic policy consultation framework | 167 |
| Copyright..... | 168 |

Introduction

The doctoral thesis is a project which for me combines intellectual, professional and personal motivations. In this introduction, I outline the reasons for choosing the topic and the approach; I also highlight some of what has not been chosen. I reflect on the ethical considerations relevant to the thesis including my personal position and potential conflicts of interest. I explore the practitioner lens which guides the design of this inquiry and I conclude by outlining the structure of the thesis and the primary conclusions.

Topic selection

For many people working in higher education policy in England – as I was – the period 2017 to 2019 was a particularly busy one. The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 provided a new regulatory basis for the higher education sector and established the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which subsumed the work of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), Research Councils and Innovate UK (Great Britain 2017a). The General Election of 8 June 2017 heralded further change with the Conservative Party's promise of a review of funding across further and higher education (Conservative and Unionist Party 2017, 53). The government's "Review of Post-18 Education and Funding" (hereafter, the Tertiary Review) was launched in February 2018 and the report of its expert panel led by Philip Augar (the Augar Report) published in May 2019 (Augar 2019). By the time of the General Election of 12 December 2019, the re-elected Conservative government promised to consider with care the Augar Report's "thoughtful recommendations" (Conservative and Unionist Party 2019, 37). Bookended by the General Elections of 2017 and 2019, the Tertiary Review provides a time-bound and significant topic for an exercise in policy analysis.

The Tertiary Review offers the policy analyst multiple dimensions for interrogation; the scale and structure of the review make it a more extensive policy process to consider than other, perhaps equally interesting and pressing, issues. Across the same busy period for higher education, it could have been valuable to interrogate key systemic issues such as the attainment gap for Black students (Doku 2018), controversies like "grade inflation" (Bagshaw, A. 2017d), or topics where there may be insufficient policy attention, for example the educational experience of taught postgraduates (Bagshaw, A. 2017a). With the Tertiary Review, there is an opportunity to investigate key elements of the policymaking process and

the extent to which the development of policy is conducted in an active dialogue with the further and higher education sectors – which, together, make up “tertiary” education. The review process appears – at a superficial level at least – to be *dialogic* in the sense that it is a collaborative engagement with the interests of the sectors it directly affects: the review had an expert panel drawn from across the sectors and industry, a public call for evidence and the publication of the evidence summary (Department for Education 2018a; Department for Education 2018b; Department for Education 2019; Pye Tait Consulting 2019). I choose to explore how this consultative element sat within the overall policy process with a view to understanding the nature of this presentationally dialogic engagement.

In making this topic selection, I have a view to two distinct but related goals: the first is to contribute to the sum of knowledge on higher education policy and policymaking generally, with a specific focus on funding policy. This is a timely thesis in that it follows closely on the Tertiary Review activity; it also applies a considered analytical frame and conceptual approach to create a novel policy analysis. Therefore in both the content and form it has the potential to make that contribution to knowledge. The second goal is to make a contribution to practice. I have a professional interest in the creation of action-focused, practitioner-relevant, resources (see Bagshaw and McVitty 2020); this thesis is an opportunity to bridge from the specific case of the Tertiary Review to general conclusions from which those working in and around higher education policymaking might benefit.

Currency and the novel coronavirus

Doctoral theses written in 2020 will inevitably be coloured by the worldwide experience of the novel coronavirus which has caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands. Inevitably, a prolonged event with such significant health, economic and social consequences affects the landscape of higher education. With public finances being reconsidered – balancing the competing needs of investment to stimulate economic recovery with repaying debt borrowed to fund a crisis response – the position of every publicly funded service is subject to review. With this in mind, the historical positioning within this thesis should be read alongside an open question about whether any trends identified will continue in line with past trajectories. At the time of writing, there is significant organisational disruption for universities and many unknowns about the future for higher education, its funding, regulation and policy environment, in England and around the world (Adams 2020; Bagshaw 2020a). This thesis is not the place for predictions on future trajectories but is written with

the belief that developing our understanding of past policy developments – through their content and form – will always be useful for the critical analysis of future developments.

Choices and rejections

I have aimed to highlight throughout this thesis the active choices made to include, and to reject, aspects of possible analysis. I have been deliberate in the choices themselves – in addition to my implicit biases and preferences which I have also tried to identify and reflect upon – and in the aspiration to express them clearly in the text. The aim is to show the focus of the analysis, and where another author might have chosen to place their own different emphasis. When considering the choices to make, I have held in mind the twin goals of making contributions to knowledge and to practice. It has not escaped me that the thesis itself is a documentary artefact, one with its own historical context, intertextual relationships and authorial emphases. In this meta-commentary, there is a risk of over-problematising the thesis itself or asserting too much a sense of “a listener who is immanent in the work as an all understanding, ideal listener” (Bakhtin 1986, 165); quite the opposite is intended. The thesis is an utterance which responds to those before it, and there is every anticipation that it will be subject to critique and – hopefully – constructive engagement. Where I discuss choices and rejections, the aim is to show my own critical engagement and to encourage that future intertextual dialogue through recognition of the many tensions inherent in research (Hong et al. 2017). This approach is consistent with the Bakhtinian lens I adopt for my analysis which I explore further in chapter 1B.

This thesis is a documentary study of the Tertiary Review with a close focus on the “official” review documents supplemented by contextual literature. It could have been based on elite interviews or covered more widely the literature associated with the policymaking process; as I note in this introduction below, the professional roles that I have held provided access to many of the relevant actors in the process. This work is informed by interaction with those actors, but the evidence for the analysis comes from published material. This is an active choice, in part pragmatic, to constrain deliberately the scope of the inquiry to a manageable project (Reisigl and Wodak 2009). The use of published documents focuses analysis on that which is publicly available, and so provides others, who do not have access to more information than that which is in the public domain, with the opportunity to engage critically with the project. In working towards a practitioner resource, I have chosen to focus on an important element of the policymaking process, the consultation exercise. While

consultation can be defined and undertaken broadly, my focus is on the documentary exercise, the practice of writing in response to a published “call for evidence” or equivalent. This is known to be a significant area of work for professionals across the higher education sector, and as such provides valuable opportunity for increasing understanding, and potentially also improving professional practice (Strenk 2020). This interrogation of documentary dialogue, explored further in this chapter, is the theme which runs through the analysis and to the conclusions.

My choice on the approach and method in this thesis also reflects a pragmatic choice. In selecting a ready-made framework for documentary policy analysis (Hyatt 2013a), which I explore in depth in chapter 1C, I have sought safety in the method to apply. The framework is, however, a starting point which has been adapted critically and augmented to suit the needs of this analysis as I see them, an adaptive approach invited by the framework’s author. I see an opportunity to enrich the method with an overarching conceptual approach which draws on elements of Mikhail Bakhtin’s work to extend the concept of dialogic policymaking. The framework could be applied without this embellishment, or through an emphasis on the work of others who have influenced policy analyses. Choosing Bakhtin is an area for originality in the analysis and allows me as author to engage dialogically with his texts, albeit in translation, and with Bakhtin scholars. This choice also accepts Bakhtin’s own invitation for the interpretation and reinterpretation of texts:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless *past* and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of the past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development in the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin 1986, 170, original emphasis)

While Bakhtin may not have conceived of the application of dialogic concepts to higher education policymaking as an intended “homecoming festival”, I embrace the reinterpretation of his work for application in this new context.

Ethics and personal position

This thesis is based on a documentary study and, as such, did not require the level of ethical approval that would be required for studies involving human participants. That said, the study should not be seen as one absent of ethical considerations or professional risks. As Deputy CEO of *Wonkhe* – a specialist UK higher education media and commentary business – from May 2016 to August 2018, I was an active participant in the policymaking landscape. *Wonkhe* is a publisher and event organiser which provided me, among many others, with an outlet for analysis and opinion on all manner of higher education policy issues. It was then, and continues to be, influential among actors in policymaking such as civil servants, government ministers, representative organisations and universities. In this role, I had professional, commercial and social relationships with many individuals across organisations – governments, universities, think-tanks, non-profits, businesses – which had direct interests in policymaking. I do not claim artificially to separate my personal and professional life from the research for this thesis. However, it is essential that I reflect on my position within the policymaking landscape and reference this where appropriate across the thesis. I believe that, through this reflection, I can enrich the analysis presented while highlighting my reflexivity so that the reader is armed with some information from which they can draw their own conclusions about the complexities of producing this thesis alongside those relationships.

One of the features of *Wonkhe*, and other services or publishers which sit between a general journalistic output and formal academic publication, is that there can be divisions between the “wonks” – broadly, professionals whose roles involve the development or delivery of policy – and academics, a parallel to a divide which can exist, and which I have personally witnessed, between academics and professional staff in universities. In the “wong literature” there can be the projection – intentional or unintentional, real or perceived – of a dismissal of the role of academics in the running of universities or policymaking processes (Jones 2020). This is a useful and valuable debate, one to which this thesis can contribute in part. In preparing this thesis, I have spanned these worlds: my bibliography contains academic literature including monographs from academic publishers and academic authors, edited collections, and peer-reviewed journal articles. I also make extensive use of published journalism, and of the “grey” literature which sits between these two points. In making use of a wide range of material, and subjecting that material to critique, I aim to reflect my interests and to curate that which I think is useful for the arguments contained in the thesis; I

also believe that there is much that can be learned at the intersection of these different literatures. For me, choosing work literature is not a rejection of the academic but an enrichment of the range from which I draw reference. I aim to engage with all literature critically, choosing not to accept one as better than another but to approach each on its own merits.

Before *Wonkhe*, I worked in professional roles in universities, most substantially in policy and project functions working with institutional leaders at the University of Kent and then the London School of Economics and Political Science. After leaving *Wonkhe*, I began work as a management consultant with an Australian business – Nous Group – which works extensively with universities around the world and with representative organisations and governments on policy questions. While my studies at The University of Sheffield, and the production of this thesis, are independent of any employer, my professional choices illuminate a key philosophical viewpoint on higher education. I believe that higher education institutions are, in many respects, like businesses which need to be led, to have strategies, and to make active – often top-down – choices about their activities. I also believe in the primacy – albeit with appropriate limits – of academic leadership in universities, and that the best academic leaders draw on specialised non-academic functions, within and outside their institutions, to achieve the most for their universities. This is in line with McCaffrey's approach in which he argues:

the case for a professional (or “managerial”) approach to people management in HEIs [Higher Education Institutions], and the case against amateurist, elitist and reactionary perspectives on university management – that we ought to have the same professionalism in the way we lead and manage people as we do towards our research and teaching ... to demonstrate that “managerialism” is not necessarily incompatible with collegiality. (McCaffrey 2019, 6)

I might therefore be considered a “managerialist”, and, while the term is often used with negative connotations within the higher education sector (Deem and Brehony 2005), I have come to accept this as a starting position. I will explore further in chapter 1A my views on the conflicted nature of higher education research in general. Here I agree with Bakhtin that I – as the researcher – am ineluctably within the system which is the subject of the research:

The person who understands (including the researcher himself) becomes a participant in the dialogue, although on a special level (depending on the area of understanding or research) ... The observer had no position *outside* the observed world, and his observation enters as a constituent part into the observed object. (Bakhtin 1986, 125–126, original emphasis)

In situating my personal position within the higher education policy system critically, recognising that I consider myself an “insider” of sorts, I also acknowledge that there is a wide diversity of rich and nuanced insider perspectives.

The practitioner’s perspective

I have argued elsewhere that, when it comes to engagement with the policy environment, universities – and in particular the leaders of institutions – should see active engagement in understanding, and responding to, the policy environment as a foundation for a well-run institution, and not a luxury or activity which falls to whomever is most interested at the time (Bagshaw, A. 2020b). Unusual across types of organisation, universities have the capability for self-interrogation, most obviously in the application of research techniques and the sharing of research findings through events, conferences and publishing in its various forms. The operations of all organisations can be improved through thoughtful reflection and the identification of tools which can be tried out, evaluated and embedded if they work: there are many structured ways of thinking about improvements, be they focused on systems, reducing waste or changing ways of working. For higher education institutions, this capacity for institutional interrogation takes many forms, including the practice of “institutional research” (Díaz et al. 2017; Australasian Association for Institutional Research 2020) and the concept of the learning organisation (Laurillard 1999). While universities may have the capabilities for critical inquiry, in my professional experience, those capabilities are not always directed at questions of improving the institution as an organisation. There is value therefore in thinking about how best to apply this critical engagement for different purposes, including engagement with policymaking, taking that term to encompass the development of ideas understood as “policy as discourse” represented through “policy as text” (Ball 1993, 11–15).

Connecting the policy discourse to the policy texts, I propose a hierarchy for considering how a practitioner could see their engagement with policymaking processes for the purposes of this thesis, outlined in Figure 1, in order to promote critical but practical thinking about the “why?” of policy and not just the “how?” or “what?”. This follows Ball’s invitation to pursue a more critical approach to interrogating policies: “a trajectory form of analysis may also be a way of ensuring that policy analyses ask critical/theoretical questions, rather than simple problem-solving ones” (1993, 16).

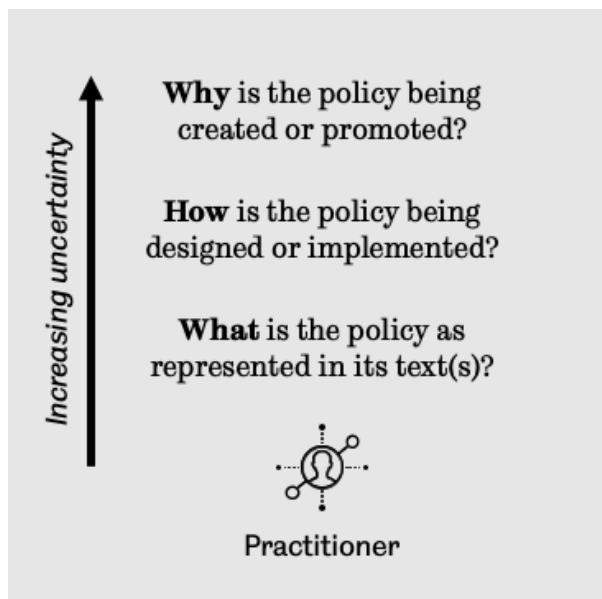


Figure 1 | Policy from the practitioner's perspective

At the bottom of this tripartite framework is the “what?”: in the case of the Tertiary Review, the “what?” can be related to the specific recommendations made in, and represented in the text of, the expert panel’s report (Augar 2019). The “what?” is closest to the practitioner and, noting that policy texts can hold significant ambiguity, represents that which is most “certain” from the practitioner’s perspective. Above the “what?” is “how?”, the mechanisms by which a particular policy may be enacted. And finally, the highest order in this framework is the “why?”. This is designed as a representation for the practitioner – the professional working to understand their own policy context for institutional ends – rather than a researcher, journalist or another actor such as someone affected directly by the policy context. A deliberate choice here is to identify the practitioner, rather than their institution, to reflect that this level of policy analysis may be done *for* an institution but *by* an individual. Pursuing the “why?” of policymaking, for the practitioner to attempt to understand that which is uncertain and beyond the proximate texts, is the underlying principle for understand the practitioner’s interest and thereby guiding this analysis to that which serves their interests.

This pursuit of the “why?” is the purpose of this thesis and drives the choices made in the selection of topic, evidence, approach and method. This starts from the premise that there is value to be derived – for the individual professional, and for their organisation – from aiming for greater understanding of one’s context. Thus looking “from the practitioner out”, as well as “from the policy process in”, I propose that the act of critical policy analysis can be practical and useful, and not simply an intellectual exploration for its own sake or confined to

the generation of knowledge without practical application. As indicated in Figure 1, the uncertainty increases moving from the proximate “what?” of the texts to the consideration of the distant “why?”, so equally value increases through interrogation. Following Ball (1993), this thesis aims to demonstrate that an exploration of “what is the policy as represented in its text(s)?” is, for the practitioner, less valuable than “how is the policy being designed or implemented?” and in turn that is less valuable than an understanding of “why is the policy being created or implemented?”. This aim to be practical drives the method (see chapter 1C), the application of a suite of approaches which illuminate the “why?” of policy from the individuals involved to structures, histories and trajectories. This approach also drives the overarching conceptual approach, that meaning can be derived from the interanimation of texts (Shepherd 2001). As discussed earlier in this chapter, I have chosen to undertake a documentary study: the use of texts and pursuit of knowledge generation through textual analysis are the intersection where the application of Bakhtin brings value to this study (see chapter 1B).

This thesis makes a further selection to interrogate a specific part of the policymaking process relevant to the Tertiary Review: the consultation exercise. Consultations are a routine part of the policymaking process, an important tool available to politicians and civil servants as they develop policies (Mansfield 2019). The reception of consultation exercises within any given sector, including higher education, is where the interested parties – whether they are formally considered stakeholders, providers in a regulated industry, or consumers of a product or service – are expected to respond in order to answer the questions set in the consultation design. In universities, the task of responding falls on different individuals or groups depending on the topic of the consultation and the resource within the institution tasked with policy engagement. In many instances, the role of policy engagement falls on an individual practitioner, often a policy officer working to the head of institution – typically the vice-chancellor – or within a communications function (Strenk 2020), a position which I have held in two English universities. The task of producing responses is time-consuming, and there is only limited confidence that this is an effective way of influencing policy (McVitty 2020). The practitioner responding to the policy consultation is the specific practitioner I have in mind for this thesis within the general frame outlined.

Accepting potential conflicts and tensions in my personal position, I have chosen to research that which I am interested in and on which I believe I can bring my knowledge and

experience to bear. This thesis is aimed at the practitioner audience, a deliberate choice not to focus more on other – rightly interested – parties such as government, think-tanks, students or academics. The consequence of this choice is to focus on the production of a potentially useful artefact which will be accessible to the practitioner audience, the respondent to a policy consultation. This should take this thesis from purely a documentary policy analysis to a tool for application.

In writing this reflection on my own position, I recognise an additional conflict: in my professional roles, I have sold commercial services to universities and others in the higher education sector. I have a potential financial interest in the process of policymaking and in institutional responses to policy. I hope however that this thesis, through its rigour and transparency of approach, will speak for itself as I work to contribute – without expectation of material reward – to the sum of knowledge on higher education and to the practice of those working in the sector.

Thesis structure and conclusions

The thesis begins with part which sets the scene for the analysis. It does this by evaluating the literature on higher education policymaking and a range of topics associated with this inquiry in chapter 1A. This is followed by an exploration of the high-level conceptual approach – with elements drawn from Bakhtin – in chapter 1B. I then outline the method which is based on a frame developed by David Hyatt (2013a) in chapter 1C. In part two of the thesis, I provide the context for the policy analysis taking four distinct viewpoints as proposed by Hyatt, across four chapters, which illuminate the institutional, historical and contemporary contexts for the policy; this part includes further critical engagement with the literature to provide a rounded context for my policy analysis. In part three, I deconstruct the policy through three lenses – authority (3A), consultation (3B) and influence (3C) – which are defined for this purpose. In part four, my analysis of the Tertiary Review is synthesised in two chapters. I return to the questions defined in this chapter to draw the conclusions. outlined in Table 1, situated within the overarching finding that the Tertiary Review did not progress as planned as a consequence of political events and consequent policy inaction.

Table 1 | Conclusions

| Question | Conclusion |
|--|---|
| What is the policy as represented in its text(s)? ^p | The potential redesign of the approaches to, and mechanisms for, funding further and higher education in England was proposed by the Tertiary Review. |
| How is the policy being designed or implemented? | A formal review process centred on an expert panel assessment akin to previous exercises, specifically the Browne Review of 2010, was created to report to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Education. The Augar Panel sought to gather evidence from which to draw the conclusions outlined in its public report, including through a stakeholder consultation exercise. |
| Why is the policy being created or promoted? | The paradigm of skills development through education to meet national productivity for economic growth was dominant in the Tertiary Review. The review has an aspiration of pursuing system-wide value for money. The review further aimed to address perceived failings on the part of English universities in line with a contemporaneous political discourse on the deficit in performance by these institutions. The tertiary lens applied, which promotes policies spanning further and higher education, was consistent with a broader national and international discourse on increased policy coherence across the two sectors. |

From these specific conclusions, I offer general findings. In chapter 4A I consider how and where the thesis can contribute to the understanding of higher education and to policymaking processes. I conclude that:

1. The policy agenda in a sector can be trumped by bigger issues, even when there is significant political weight behind an initiative.
2. Policy watchers should be interested in longer-term trajectories.
3. Engaging with policy processes can be valuable, even if the result appears negligible.

In chapter 4B, building on these general conclusions, my analysis is used to develop a practitioner framework to support engagement with the documentary consultation process which is often a feature of policymaking. This framework is represented in full in Appendix B. The final chapter (4C) concludes with reflections and recommendations on the approach and method, limitations in the analysis and avenues for further inquiry.

Part 1. Boundaries, context, approach and method

This part introduces the thesis, defines key terms, and situates it within the extant literature on the topics under consideration. It provides the context from which to understand why the topic – the Tertiary Review of funding in England, 2017 to 2019 – has been chosen, and the potential that exploration of the question has for extending knowledge of policymaking processes, and higher education policymaking specifically. The part introduces the conceptual underpinning for the thesis – the application of elements of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to policymaking – and makes the case for the value in the application of this lens. The part concludes with a description of the method by which the thesis will proceed, Hyatt's *Critical Higher Education Discourse Analysis Framework* (2013a). The chapters in this part demonstrate the rationale for the thesis and articulate how the later analysis has the potential to make targeted and rigorous contributions to knowledge and practice.

Chapter 1A: Boundaries and context

This chapter provides the foundation for the thesis, situating the later analysis within the themes of the extant literature. It explains in broad terms why there is value in exploring policymaking, and higher education policymaking specifically, to extend the discussion of why there is value in exploring the Tertiary Review. This chapter also provides key definitions which provide boundaries for the following analysis.

The boundaries of the inquiry

Tertiary education, as distinguished from primary and secondary education – which takes place predominantly in schools and with compulsory participation – refers to the non-compulsory education typically provided to adults. Various, tertiary education is called post-compulsory or post-18 or is commonly divided into further education (often known simply as FE) and higher education (HE). The terms “technical learning” and “vocational learning” have been used as synonyms for further education but these are more general topical signifiers which can span many levels of education (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2020). For this inquiry, as it follows the Tertiary Review process, I will focus on all post-18 education in England and divide that as necessary for specificity into the further and higher education sectors. Figure 2 describes English tertiary education: the Augar Report recognises that some of these numbers change frequently (2019, 19) and so for the baseline understanding of the landscape I will use the same figures as the Tertiary Review.

| Purposes | Funding |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote citizens' ability to realise their full potential, economically and more broadly. ▪ Provision of a suitably skilled workforce. ▪ Support innovation through research and development (R&D), commercial ideas and global talent. ▪ Contribute scholarship and debate that sustain and enrich society through knowledge, ideas, culture and creativity. ▪ Contribute to growth by virtue of post-18 institutions' direct contributions to the economy. ▪ Play a core civic role in the regeneration, culture, sustainability, and heritage of the communities in which they are based. | <p>Following a major refunding of the higher education sector in 2012, universities and university students are both cared for and cared about. They receive the majority of public funding and attention: in 2017-18, over £8 billion was committed to support 1.2 million UK undergraduate students in English HE institutions.</p> <p>There are 2.2 million full and part time adult further education (FE) students receiving £2.3 billion of public funding, a large under-investment relative to the state support afforded university students.</p> |
| | Size |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 141 higher education institutions (HEIs) • 200 general, tertiary and specialist Further Education College (FECs) • 1,179 private sector Independent Training Providers (ITPs) • 312 other publicly funded providers of further education and training |
| | (Augar 2019, 5, 15-19) |

Figure 2 | English tertiary education in 2019

Higher education is often used as a shorthand for “universities” and further education for “colleges” but, as Figure 2 shows, the largest category – by number of organisations – is independent training providers. These are therefore not useful catch-all terms for the sectors. The Augar Report (2019, 19) also notes that higher education is provided in some colleges (“HE in FE”) and that some universities are included in the “other publicly funded providers” category as providers of “FE in HE”. I aim to be specific in the language used about the education landscape and believe that the greatest clarity comes from defining further and higher education according to the levels of study where level 4 – equivalent to the first year of a bachelor’s degree – and above are higher education (Quality Assurance Agency 2014). This is an area where I diverge from the definitions in the Augar Report which chooses to refer to further education up to level 6 (the terminal year of a bachelor’s degree) where it is delivered in that sector (Augar 2019, 18): to increase precision where necessary I refer to all level 4 and above provision in colleges as “HE in FE”. It is not the case that the Augar Report’s interpretation is wrong and mine right, but the divergence reflects the complex

nature of defining the precise bounds of further education in particular (Parry 2015). For the purposes of this analysis, these definitions should provide sufficient clarity.

Globally, the funding of tertiary education systems is an important and relevant policy area with significant interest in the activity, costs and outcomes of education systems within individual countries and comparatively (see Norton and Cherastidtham 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019; Usher 2019). In the United Kingdom, the four national systems – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales – each have different approaches to the funding and regulation of education. Among the many differences, one of the most significant is in fee levels and student support systems for domestic undergraduates (Augar 2019, 70). It is in this context – a hotly contested policy area and subject of global enquiry – that the prospect of close analysis of developments in English policy has particular interest. England is not alone in approaching a review of its education system across a tertiary lens: in 2017, New Zealand’s Productivity Commission reviewed its tertiary system (New Zealand Productivity Commission 2017); in 2019, Australia’s opposition Labor [sic] party entered the General Election with a promise for a full-scale tertiary review (Hare 2019). In Scotland, the government conducted its “learner journey review” which considered education from the ages of 16 to 24 (Scottish Government 2018). In Wales, the higher education funding council will likely merge into a single regulator – the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research – for higher and further education from 2023 following an external review (Hazelkorn 2018; Blaney 2019; Dickinson 2019). The question of the funding and organisation of tertiary education is therefore not a uniquely English problem but one which exists within an international context of education policy and its associated literature.

Having defined tertiary education and noted that it is a topic of interest within both UK and international public policy discourses, I now consider the bounds of the Tertiary Review itself and identify the key texts which will be the subject of this policy analysis. In February 2018, then British Prime Minister Theresa May announced a review of education funding across the post-18 education provision. The outline of the proposal had been stated in the Conservatives manifesto of 2017:

To ensure that further, technical and higher education institutions are treated fairly, we will also launch a major review of funding across tertiary education as a whole, looking at how we can ensure that students get access to financial support that offers value for money, is available across different routes and encourages the development of the skills we need as a country. (Conservative and Unionist Party 2017, 53)

The statement from the manifesto is the starting point for this inquiry. Figure 3 below shows the timeline for the period under consideration, starting with the UK General Election in 2017 and concluding with the UK General Election in 2019. The numbered texts of the Tertiary Review represent the official texts which I will explore in this policy analysis.

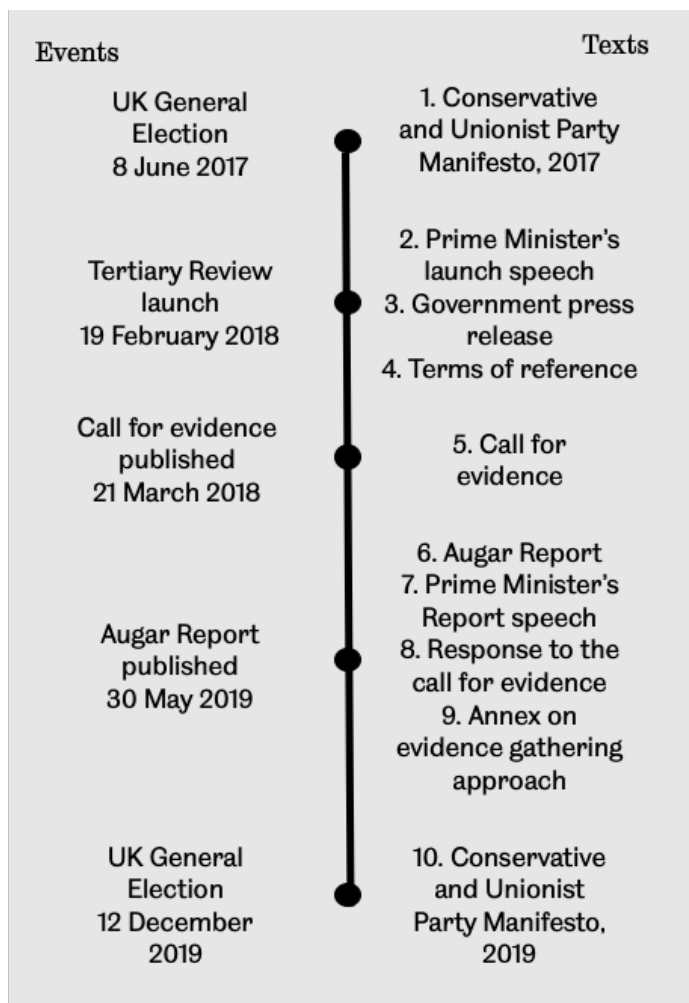


Figure 3 | Tertiary Review timeline 2017–2019

While the Tertiary Review was initiated by the governing Conservative Party, it is important to understand for context that there was at the time of its initiation a more widespread political interest in policies across further and higher education. Across the

political spectrum there was consensus in the 2017 UK General Election that there ought to be initiated a review of funding in the tertiary system. Looking at the manifestos for the 2017 elections, I identified that “[t]here is much more convergence between the parties in the area of skills, vocational and technical education, and the emergence of a ‘tertiary’ system which may bring together the higher and further education sectors” (Bagshaw, A. 2017). The themes and contemporary debates on the tertiary education system will be explored further in part two.

I noted in the introduction to the thesis that my professional interests lie in working in universities and the broader higher education sector. The emphasis of my analysis of the Tertiary Review will, therefore, be on the higher education side of the tertiary system, and in particular the interaction of universities with the policymaking process and other parts of the tertiary landscape. I choose the catch-all term “universities” to describe those higher education institutions which hold the formal title “university” but also those which are university-like such as the (current and former) colleges of the University of London. These are the semi-autonomous degree-awarding bodies with missions to provide higher education, all but a very few doing so as charities or with another non-profit status (European Commission 2019). Research into higher education is typically described as a “field of study” rather than a discipline, one which engages with a number of disciplinary, trans- and inter-disciplinary approaches and frameworks (Brennan 2007; Tight 2014). The boundaries of the field are both contested and evolving, and so should not be considered immutable (Clegg 2012). For the purposes of this inquiry I identify that, within the field, there is significant interest in policy questions and in the exploration of funding education systems. In Figure 4, I outline four quadrants which provide a guide to the broad themes of the literature directly relevant to English tertiary education funding policy and policymaking in higher education. In this part, I aim to explain this broad literature landscape, and later I will engage with the literature as relevant to the contextualisation of policy and to its deconstruction.

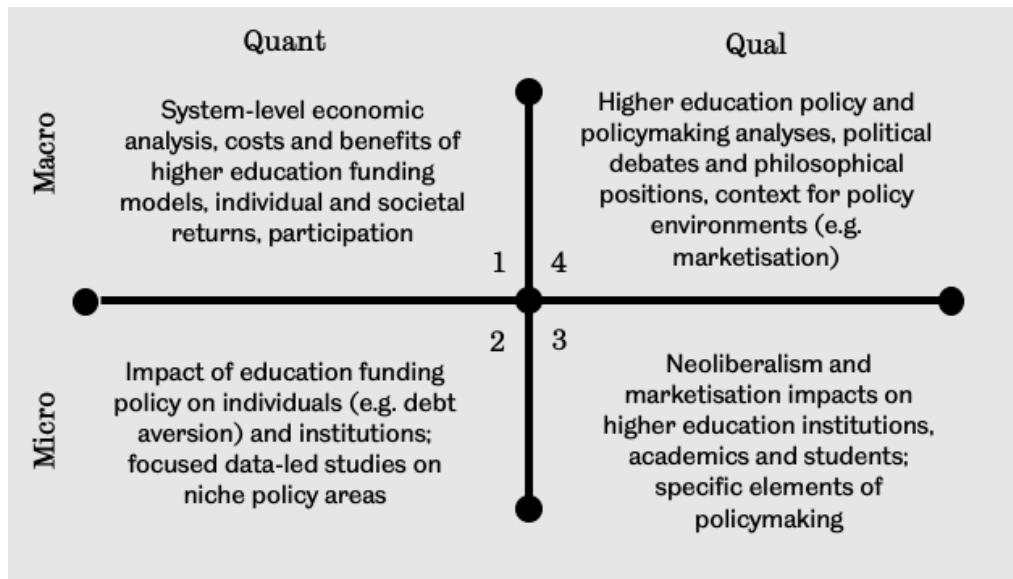


Figure 4 | Higher education policy and funding literature landscape

This two-by-two matrix is divided in crude terms to illustrate key elements of the literature but not to propose that any individual researcher or piece of research might sit neatly or exclusively in one of the quadrants. While acknowledging that there is some flexibility, the two dimensions provide a useful delineation of the types of literature I have encountered in the course of my research for this thesis. In the vertical dimension, I have used the term “macro” to refer to system- or sector-level analyses or commentary. I have used “micro” to identify that research which considers the impact of those top-down system policies on individuals and/or institutions. The horizontal axis is divided into “quant” (quantitative) and “qual” (qualitative) reflecting norms within the literature in terms of method adopted. I now look at the themes of the literature in each quadrant in the sequence indicated by the numbering in Figure 4.

Dominant in the first quadrant – of macro, quant literature – is the output from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) which describes itself as “an independent research institute ... with the principal aim of better informing public debate on economics in order to promote the development of effective fiscal policy” (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020). IFS and the network of researchers with full- and part-time affiliations to the Institute have produced a number of large-scale studies which described the education funding landscape (Belfield et al. 2018c), estimated the costs of different degree programmes (Britton et al. 2019), evaluated differential access to, and outcomes from, education (Crawford et al. 2016) and presented funding options for tertiary education (Belfield et al. 2017). Its work is influential in policymaking in part because IFS researchers have conducted large-scale studies for the

UK's Department for Education, including evaluating the labour market returns from different degree programmes (Belfield et al. 2018a). This notable work, which brought together earnings data and student loan information, is an example of large-scale economic analysis using and combining huge datasets to derive information for politicians and policymakers which was hitherto unknown. The findings were significant:

By showing the earnings outcomes for graduates of universities when comparing similar students, these figures strip the student composition effect and highlight how the value that degrees directly add to graduates' earnings varies by institution and subject. The findings are stark. Different institutions and subject combinations have vastly different impacts on the earnings of their graduates, and despite common perceptions to the contrary, can matter more for earnings than student characteristics on entry to university. (Britton and Belfield 2018)

The literature in this quadrant has the potential to be attractive to policymakers in part because it provides system-level analysis to complement system-level policy change. Further demonstration of the organisation's significance is that IFS analysis was referenced extensively in the Augar Report (2019).

Other influential literature includes comparative international studies, again using economic lenses for analysis (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019). This quadrant also includes historical studies which look back over longer periods rather than focusing on the temporally proximate policy environment (Callender 2014). If the "macro quant" studies are ones suited to "top-down" policymaking, a contrasting proposition is offered by the "micro quant" studies which focus on the impact of the systems of education funding on individuals. One significant area of research here is in the impact of student funding arrangements and indebtedness on the likelihood of a student to participate in higher education. Some of these studies use survey methods (Callender and Mason 2017) but a recent literature review highlighted potential problems with the research including an over-reliance on secondary datasets and, in some cases, inadequate survey methods (de Gayardon et al. 2018). By their nature, micro quant studies focus on niche areas of inquiry to interrogate a specific rather than general question such as an individual policy where an organisation seeks to use data selectively for policy impact (Richmond 2018; Farham and Heselwood 2019).

The third quadrant covers "micro qual" studies which have different foci for the purposes of the literature landscape relevant to this inquiry. This set includes studies which focus on the impact of policies within institutions and in particular on academics, the

challenges posed to the academic profession by the neoliberal construct of higher education policymaking – including market-emphasising ideologies – and the impact of managerialism on the organisation of institutions (Ball 2012; Lynch 2015; Sutton 2017; Dougherty and Natow 2019; Tight 2019). Ball is particularly effective at drawing parallels from across the breadth of education in his research to describe efficiently the impacts, as he sees them, of neoliberalism:

There are various sites or practices in contemporary education where this drama of self and government unfolds: school league tables, the Higher Education Research Excellence Framework, annual staff reviews, performance-related pay, for example. These are all “sites of veridiction”. They articulate truth as the practice of government. (Ball 2016, 1131)

As in the “micro quant” quadrant, here we see both the focus on the policy recipients and the taking of different slices of analysis by policy topic. In the higher education policymaking literature, there is some recent material to draw on which illuminates the processes, including first-hand accounts of policy development from civil servants (Knight 2020), influence from sector organisations (Hammonds and Hale 2020) and general reflections from those directly engaged in the process (Mansfield 2020). There is also consideration of students in policymaking processes (Brooks 2018; Wright and Raaper 2020) and the role of data (Browne and Rayner 2015; Mitchell 2020).

Considering these first three quadrants is important context for this inquiry as they each reflect important elements of the discourse of tertiary funding and policymaking. This inquiry aims to span quadrants three and four, using qualitative methods and balancing a top-down assessment of policymaking with the interaction of individuals and institutions with that process. For the fourth quadrant, a key reference point is Michael Shattock’s 2012 work *Making policy in British higher education 1945–2011*. Alongside this overview of key policy areas and the ways in which policy is produced, there is other literature published around the same time which explores the funding landscape, philosophy and policy context for English higher education (Collini 2012; Brown and Carasso 2013; McGettigan 2013). Given the time of publication, the coverage of these works ends with the publication of the Coalition government’s 2011 White Paper *Students at the heart of the system*, a document which did not result in a parliamentary Act (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2011).

The period following the 2011 White Paper saw significant changes to the regulatory and funding landscape for English higher education. While these developments have been covered variously, there is no reference-point literature, and the consequences of the changes are in some cases not yet known in full (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014). The “£9k fee” was introduced from 2012 under the Coalition government. The subsequent Conservative government introduced its higher education Green Paper in 2015 and its White Paper in 2016, and eventually saw through the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) shortly before the end of the 2015–2017 government (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016b; Great Britain 2017a). HERA resulted in the closure of Hefce and the end to independence for the Research Councils. Two new bodies, UKRI and OfS, took on Hefce’s functions for research and education respectively. HERA, and the associated establishment of OfS and UKRI, marks a major change in the relationship between universities and the state, including the removal of the implicit “financial safety net” in the case of institutional failure (Barber 2018). Shattock’s work ends with a question about the future sustainability of institutional autonomy and a reflection that “[m]ass higher education increasingly signalled an increase in state control; with the merger of the two sectors [universities and polytechnics] in 1992, universities were no longer special in the way they had been before 1981” (2012, 254). Prior to the conception of OfS, Shattock’s statement could be seen as a prescient one for the way the regulation of universities would develop in short period of years following the book’s publication.

In the context of the literature outlined above, a critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review presents an opportunity to advance knowledge on the topic of higher education, of the funding of tertiary education, and of policymaking processes. This thesis aims to cut across these areas and to situate the findings within the available relevant literature, which will be discussed in more detail in later parts. In terms of content, there is a clear gap in the literature for a considered policy analysis of the most recent developments in English tertiary funding, and of understanding that debate through the changed landscape of policymaking in the reforms expressed in the 2016 White Paper (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016b).

While there may be a gap in the literature that this thesis can fill, it is essential also to interrogate critically the position of higher education research in which there is an inherent conflict where individual and institutional identities may be at odds:

There are numerous difficulties of positionality, related to the authority relations amongst those involved. There is a possibility of a tension between the professionalism of those involved in the research (as researcher and researched) and the research virtues of honesty or integrity. (Stern 2016, 64)

At its most problematic this is perceived as the “[n]on-independence of research” which is perceived by policymakers as having “the unfortunate consequence of making it more difficult to obtain perspectives that are not heavily influenced by the prevailing attitudes and ‘common wisdom’ of the sector they are trying to study” (Mansfield 2020, 89). Regardless of whether this level of scepticism is justified, I believe that this is a tension which exists in some form and should be explored. It is also worth noting at this point that the level of self-interrogation within the higher education sector was commented on within the expert panel’s report in a manner which implied that this conflict was perceived as problematic:

The sector is studied by specialist university departments and by education think tanks, some of which are funded by the sector they are thinking about. The universities also fund several mission groups – including Universities UK (UUK), University Alliance, Million+, Guild HE and the Russell Group – who lobby on their behalf. The mainly university-educated media is deeply interested in their activities. We note this without criticism. (Augar 2019, 5)

Researching those topics which one knows best can be advantageous as well as problematic: the researcher already has some understanding of “issues to do with power, control of distance,” but, “while you may know a lot about the context for your study, you could be too close and too committed” (Tight 2012, 226). Where universities – as organisations collectively, and their researchers individually – have the advantage of the capability for self-interrogation, they also need to recognise that there exists a tension – at the very least in perception – and must work to understand this phenomenon. As demonstrated in the introduction above, I believe that this tension is best explored through the articulation of the researcher’s personal position and a reflexive approach to one’s research. Where I apply Bakhtin in this thesis, as explored further in chapter 1B, I also recognise the social construction of language and texts, and thereby note that the discourses of higher education research, policy and policymaking are inevitably and inherently conflicted. Within this paradigm it is therefore impossible to assert the idea of the disinterested researcher, but there is significant value to be found in the active exploration of the researcher’s position in the dialogue (Bakhtin 1986, 125–126).

The discussion of contextual literature thus far has focused on the areas of higher education research, and in particular on discourses of funding policy and policymaking more generally. This is the natural contextual setting for a policy analysis which aims to extend knowledge in the field of higher education research. However, this inquiry also intersects with other discourses, including – through the focus on dialogue and dialogic policymaking – with public relations theory and literature from the media and communications fields of study. Recognising that public relations is itself a contested field (L'Etang 2013), I have identified key elements of the discourse relevant to this inquiry. Within the public relations discourse, there is a focus on business-led communications which in some cases are seen alongside concepts of public diplomacy or deliberative democracy (Macnamara 2012; Edwards 2016). The literature also explores ways in which organisations can conceptualise “engagement” with audiences, and the dialogic opportunities afforded by online interactions generally, or applied to a specific goal such as corporate social responsibility (Kent and Taylor 2002; Taylor and Kent 2014; Kent and Taylor 2016; Paquette et al. 2015). The ethical dimension of dialogic engagement is explained through emphasis on the intention of the communicators:

dialogic communicators not only care about other interlocutors' values and beliefs, but also feel obligated to design their communication interactions with other people to facilitate interaction, self-discovery, and cocreation of reality. Dialogic communicators are open-minded, patient, and empathetic. (Taylor and Kent 2014, 388–389)

While Taylor and Kent in their various publications present a firmly-expressed view on dialogue's ethical and practical application, and their 2002 article is extensively cited as the point of introducing the concept of internet-based dialogue into the field of public relations, others have questioned whether the concept is well understood (Pieczka 2011). Another use of dialogue comes from citizen-engaged policy formation:

Dialogic policy-making is a process in which citizens actively participate in the creation of public policies. It encourages and values collective deliberation. To be more specific, dialogic and deliberative approaches to policy give citizens an opportunity to exchange relevant viewpoints and arguments prior to the adoption of a policy. The dialogic process might be overseen or facilitated by public officials. Alternatively, public officials might provide one voice among the many in the dialogue. The dialogic process might be a way of reaching a decision or an exercise in consultation. (Bevir 2009, 68–69)

In this definition, those engaged with policymakers are drawn from the broad citizenry, often to engage on local issues (Michels and De Graaf 2010), not just those with a professional interest in the topic. Exploring the literature from outside research into higher education is a useful addition which provides supplementary context for this thesis.

In the introduction, I wrote that I aimed to speak to a specific practitioner audience; it is valuable to connect the macro policy environment with the micro context of the institution in which that professional operates. In my aim to bridge to the practitioner, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the individual works within – but is not the same as – the institution as a whole. The reality is that the institution is made up of its staff who play their various roles in the leadership, management and operations. The groups working within universities have a limited literature on the topics of institutional management and leadership (McCaffrey 2019); and there is much less tailored at the smaller audience of those university staff members whose roles require them to address the external policymaking process (Bagshaw and McVitty 2020). Within universities, the position of leaders, and particularly professional staff, in knowledge-creation is a contested field; the hybrid “third-space” professional (Whitchurch 2013) is a common position which is explored in part, but not fully. Universities could learn from other contexts, for example the museums and heritage sector, on the concepts of where and who is legitimate in knowledge-production and which tools are valued (Pringle 2020). This exploration of the literature adjacent to higher education research, and consideration of the material most directly related to this inquiry, has identified that there remains a gap for the role of the higher education professional – the individual practitioner – in policymaking dialogues, and therefore my stated focus on the practitioner remains an area in which this thesis can contribute to knowledge.

Consultation in the policymaking process

Policymaking processes often involve forms of stakeholder engagement, either very broadly in the form of citizen-democratic approaches or more directed interaction with specific interest groups. The Tertiary Review is an example of adopting the latter approach, although its *Call for Evidence* was an open one to which anyone could respond (Department for Education 2018b). “Stakeholder engagement” is a broad term which is used at times synonymously with consultation. Here I aim to draw some distinctions to consider the different elements of stakeholder engagement in the Tertiary Review. A key distinction

required is to refer to the *written* consultation process as the request within, and responses to, the *Call for Evidence*. The choice to focus on the written consultation comes from its position as the only part of the Tertiary Review which was accessible to any and all actors outside the policymaking process: some outsiders had access to site visits, private conversations, commissions of research, but the one that *all* had access to was the written *Call for Evidence* (Department for Education 2018b). When considering the Tertiary Review as an example of a policymaking process, it is this open element which provides a basis from which one can seek general conclusions relating to parallel processes: the conclusions will be applicable to those *without* more privileged access.

Formal guidance for UK policymaking is that consultation with policy stakeholders is a normal and valuable part of the process: the Better Regulation Executive's *Code of practice on consultation* included a foreword from the then Prime Minister Tony Blair which stated the reasons for policy consultation: "Effective consultation is a key part of the policy-making process. People's views can help shape policy developments and set the agenda for better public services" (Better Regulation Executive 2005, 3). While more utilitarian in their presentation, the updated UK government guidance on consultations reiterates the points from earlier guidance and states that "[w]e have amended the principles ... to demonstrate the government's desire to engage more effectively with the public" (Cabinet Office 2018). Iain Mansfield, a former UK civil servant who had worked in higher education at the Department for Education, described this process when explaining what happens to consultation responses: "Other than to fulfil statutory obligations, there are three main reasons why government might carry out a consultation: To decide whether or not to do something. To decide on how to do something. To find out what people will think if it does something" (2019). For more formal guidance, and looking beyond the UK, the OECD's handbook on consultation situates the importance of engagement in policymaking processes as core to democratic societies:

Democracy rests on the consent of citizens. In order to assure this consent, representative democracy bases itself on a set of traditional formal rules and principles – such as on elections and accompanying campaigns. Representative democracy is also based on ongoing interactions among government and citizens in between elections. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001, 15).

The involvement of stakeholders during the policymaking process builds on the principle that this is a good in a democratic society, and provides information and perspectives to support policymakers' decision-making in the policy formation process.

Undertaking written consultation exercises represents a significant investment of policymakers' time, and potentially additional resources such as external support. In the case of the Tertiary Review, the expert panel received some 370 responses which were summarised in a 60-page document produced by consultants (Pye Tait Consulting 2019). It is acknowledged in official guidance that consultation exercises can be burdensome: "We will also reduce the risk of 'consultation fatigue' by making sure we consult only on issues that are genuinely undecided" (Cabinet Office 2018). The burden rests on the part of the respondents, the 370 individuals and organisations which chose to compile their responses, each up to 4,000 words in length (Department for Education 2018b, 7), as well as on those running the exercise. Mansfield described what happened to responses received thus:

Ultimately, civil servants take consultations extremely seriously. For a typical consultation in the higher education area, every consultation response will be read by someone, and most by more than one person, while summaries and analyses of the responses will be shared and assessed by many. This is complemented by a wide range of additional activities, including both internal analysis and external dialogue, including one on one meetings and much broader listening events. (Mansfield 2019)

However, he also suggested caution about consultees seeing the process as one which could change policymakers' minds on a topic:

It's important to remember that a consultation isn't a plebiscite. Civil servants and ministers aren't just trying to find out what's popular; they're trying to find out how to fulfil their objectives. And receiving good, detailed responses, from a wide range of stakeholders, are [sic] essential to them doing so. (Mansfield 2019)

Consultations are a large and expensive exercise, and while they are not necessarily designed to "find out what's popular", they are potentially impactful elements of the policymaking process. As exercises in the exchange of texts, they are also a natural site for the exploration of dialogic engagement and of a site of meaning-making in the policy development process.

A respondent to a policy consultation may recognise that their individual response is unlikely to shape the policy direction, but – particularly if the written consultation is their only opportunity to engage with the policymaking process – it can be important for them to develop their response to the request for submissions. Policymaking processes, of which the Tertiary Review is a useful example, are high-stakes exercises: the findings and recommendations could have large and long-term impacts on the regulation of a sector, on how it is funded and on what is deemed important for those in authority. This significance exists for both those on the inside of the policymaking process – their work is subject to

public and professional scrutiny – and for the outsiders whose employers and individual jobs may be affected by the outcomes. While both insiders and outsiders may care about, and be influenced by, the outcomes of a policy process, it does not mean that they enter into the process on the same level: there is an asymmetry of information between the groups, with the insiders – who control the process – having much more information about what is sought, how it is sought, what will be valued and how the results of a consultation process will be analysed and disseminated (Gunn 2015). However dispassionately a policymaking insider might approach the exercise, there will inevitably be a process of selection which will be informed by political emphasis, personal biases, and the quality and accessibility of responses among myriad other conscious and unconscious factors. While one might want to interrogate these factors in detail, there is only limited evidence to consider and significant silence over time: in the case of the Tertiary Review, the *Call for Evidence* was issued in March 2018 and nothing publicly made available until the response was issued in May 2019 (Department for Education 2018b; Pye Tait Consulting 2019).

This thesis covers the Tertiary Review which spans the sectors of further and higher education. The primary focus within this broad landscape is higher education and more specifically universities, with a focus on the practitioners within them who engage with external policymaking processes. The literature most relevant to the inquiry can be seen in four broad categories across a matrix of macro/micro and quant/qual; this disaggregation presents the broad landscape of the available literature and identifies the aim of this inquiry's contribution to span the macro (top-down) policy analysis and micro (institutionally focused) qualitative literature. Outside the specific domain of higher education literature, there is intersection with concepts of dialogic engagement and citizen-democratic policymaking from other fields of study but this does not provide sufficient illumination of the practitioner perspective to contribute substantively to the focus of this inquiry. While higher education research is an inherently conflicted field, there is significant potential value in applying the tools of self-interrogation by which universities can be learning organisations for their own ongoing improvement. Practitioners in universities can benefit from an improved understanding of policy consultations which are both routine and important: this thesis aims to support that improved understanding.

Chapter 1B: Approach

This chapter applies key concepts from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to the policymaking process. The chapter explores the concept of dialogue in order to present the policy consultation as a speech genre: the policy consultation is a speech genre because it is the product of histories, norms and conventions. The adoption of this conceptual approach enriches the thesis by applying concepts in ways which aim to elevate the understanding of policymaking and thereby increase the value generated from the critical policy analysis.

Bakhtin and dialogue

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) was a Russian philosopher and literary critic whose works became available in English in the latter part of the twentieth century. As he conducted his work in the USSR, publication was tightly controlled and there is debate as to the impact that political control had on his work (Bagshaw, H. 2013; Aggarwal 2015). There is not, appropriately for a literary scholar who asserted the evolving reinterpretation of texts, a single way of interpreting and applying Bakhtin's works to any given research problem. To explore the potential for his work, I have drawn on examples of others' use of Bakhtinian concepts. Some authors have applied elements of Bakhtin's literary theory to the social sciences (Torgerson 2007; Koczanowicz 2011; Hackley et al. 2013). Bakhtin's dialogic has pervaded the public relations literature too (Hamilton and Wills-Toker 2006; Macnamara 2016), although references to Bakhtin are absent from the work of Kent and Taylor, whose concept of dialogue in public relations appears dominant in that field (Kent and Taylor 2002; Taylor and Kent 2014; Kent and Taylor 2016). Torgerson (2007) makes a case for the use of Bakhtin as part of a critical approach to policy analysis, first through an appraisal of policy texts: "Technocratic policy discourse, taken at face value, seems to pose no interpretive difficulties so long as apparently clear, unambiguous statements are linked in apparently coherent, logical patterns" (4). If this were the case, we would have no need for detailed consideration of policy texts. However, Torgerson states:

Bakhtin stresses that no word is fixed with stable meaning, but is an ambivalent crossing point where meanings are created with other words, other texts, other contexts. Texts intersect with one another and are connected with an historically emergent cultural context. Dialogue becomes apparent not mainly in an encounter of two different speakers, then, but in a multiplicity of interweaving voices, of discursive practices that are irreducible to a single order. (2007, 6)

This demonstrates the philosophical starting point: that words do not convey fixed meaning, and that understanding dialogue – for example, a policymaking dialogue, comprising the “interanimation” of many texts (utterances) – can be attempted through unpicking the relationship of the many utterances. Interanimation is the connection of utterances such that meaning is derived through the interactive process and not based on the intention of the author or responder (Wegerif 2008, 349). In this respect I return to the idea raised in the introduction of seeking the “why?” of a policy or policymaking issue: the application of Bakhtin can help the practitioner to derive meaning and go further than that which is presented to them, in order to attain a higher level of understanding.

The choice to adopt a conceptual approach is based on a belief that the application within an inquiry will increase the sum of meaning: the result – specific conclusions or generalisations – will be of greater value to the practitioner. The application of the approach is an attempt to increase the total sum of understanding. In the case of the Tertiary Review, there are many choices I could have made as to which approach to adopt. Closely aligning to Bakhtin’s concepts, I could have chosen to focus on Foucault’s discourses which similarly identify the meaning-making capacity of the intersection of texts (Foucault 2002). Bakhtin, however, provides valuable insights into dialogic meaning-making, in the creation of meaning through texts in combination. This is a useful concept when considering the policymaking process and consultations in particular. This elevates the level of understanding and builds on Pechey’s observation that “language for [Bakhtin] takes place not in the neutral space of ‘communication’ but in a charged and irreducibly socio-political space of its own endless making and remaking” (2007, 13–14).

Problematizing language use – through the application of Bakhtinian theory to specific texts – will be deployed to analyse critically the Tertiary Review texts, with the aim of developing novel understanding. There is, however, a major challenge for the application of Bakhtinian concepts, which is the multiple potential meanings of key terms, including presumptions about the meaning of terms in common usage. In his discussion of the position of the “reader”, for example, Shepherd refers to Bakhtin’s “characteristic terminological largesse” to highlight an interchangeability of terms used (2001, 137). It is essential, therefore, to present definitions for how these key terms will be used within this inquiry. In *The dialogic imagination*, Bakhtin situates utterances within a dialogic context:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (1981, 276–277)

The interanimation of the utterance with others could be considered a universal truism but, to apply it specifically to this inquiry, it is possible to see even more clearly the interanimation of the consultation response within the “dialogic threads” of the policymakers’ utterances. In this “social dialogue” there is an originator of the consultation question, or call for evidence, a written utterance itself “woven by socio-ideological consciousness” of the norms of format, policy context, political situation and myriad other factors. The utterance that is the consultation response is similarly the product of its organisational, institutional, origin. It may further be constrained – or liberated – by macro and micro political pressures.

To exemplify the definitional challenge of the terms relating to language in use, I turn to the distinction between “dialogue” as the point of meaning-making and “discourse” as the top-level categorisation of language use, following Gee’s description of *critical* discourse analysis (2014, 8–10). I choose to single out dialogue as the unit of analysis in a conscious rejection of discourse as the lens through which to analyse the Tertiary Review. I have taken the term “discourse” to operate in a different way to that of “dialogue”, sharing Bacchi and Bonham’s interpretation of the system-level position of discourse:

Discourse is a “regulated” practice in the sense that it is both regular and “rule like” through its routinization. Discursive practice/s are the rules or, more precisely, the routinized sets of heterogeneous relations among bodies, things, actions, concepts and so on, at work in the formation and operation of discourse, understood as knowledge. (2014, 183)

Breaking down the overall discourse into its components is how the interanimating texts generate meaning. These utterances take the form of individual text and form genres:

discourse implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures, whereas a *text* is a specific and unique realisation of a discourse. These belong to *genres* ... The full sense of a text only becomes accessible when its manifest and latent meanings (*inter alia* implicature, presupposition, allusion) are made sense of in relation to one’s wider knowledge of the world. (Wodak 2009, 39, original emphasis)

While the texts, in their genres, form the discourses, the aim of my inquiry is to increase understanding through the application of the dialogic lens to the texts of the Tertiary Review. It is that process which generates understanding of the texts' and the authors' relationship to the wider discourse:

To understand the multiple voices as "dialogic" is to acknowledge the complexity of the texts and the history of their reception, and dialogue is a metaphor for the author's or authors' representation of the discourse. (Bagshaw, H. 2013, 114)

In this respect, the approach is one which could have applied other ways of deriving meaning from discourse. For example, Ball invokes Foucault:

we examine how it was possible to think and speak about education and what kinds of practices were involved in the constitution of education as a process of teaching and learning. This draws more generally upon Foucault's interest in how culture, subjectivity and objects of knowledge are constituted, organised and transformed through the dynamic and contingent interplay between discourse and material practices. (2015, 307)

Where my analysis finds more value in Bakhtin than in Foucault is that application of the latter has concentrated more on the individual human subject as the unit of analysis in the assessment of power. Where I choose to focus on dialogue, it is in part to encompass the corporate or institutional authorial voice as the site of analysis rather than the individual author, the practitioner or policymaker. While it may be that a text is the product of a practitioner author, by definition that is constructed within the institutional context and to represent the corporate voice. I believe that Bakhtin's dialogic is therefore of greater use in this specific instance for enhancing understanding of the policymaking process and its institutional actors.

Bakhtin's work is a product of its own time and place. One dimension – which can be categorised as a spectrum between anarchy and autocracy – explored in the Bakhtinian literature is the extent of political critique in his work (Shepherd 2001; Haskins and Zappen 2010; Koczanowicz 2011). Eagleton (2007) writes, "[t]he enemy is what Bakhtin dubs 'monologism', meaning the kind of meta-language which seeks to subdue this irrepressible heterogeneity. At times in his work, it is a polite word for Stalinism." Extending this concept, if at the one unreachable end of a spectrum one can find texts as the product of the purity of a single voice – the monologic author – and at the other end of that spectrum a cacophony of voices representing a chaotic jumble of utterances, then that same spectrum can be applied to policymaking processes. On the one hand, the monologic policy author is an autocrat:

policy is the product of assertion from the single voice. At the other extreme, there is anarchy in the absence of a curated set of ideas. There are unreachable extremes as there is neither the true single *ex nihilo* voice, nor the complete chaos of all voices. In *Speech genres*, Bakhtin reflects on the impact of the forms of utterance and the conventions in which they are produced:

However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition. The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific and artistic – is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well. (1986, 92)

For the purposes of this inquiry, a key question for the meaning-making between texts comes from how far the policymaking process is *actively* dialogic between policymaking insiders and the recipients of policy outside the making process. While, following Bakhtin, I accept that all discourses are dialogic, and all texts dialogic products, there is value in extending the idea to policymaking specifically to ask the extent to which texts' authors seek out actively the dialogic development of policy ideas.

While recognising that the spectrum extremes are unachievable (Crowley 2001), it remains possible to ask how far a dialogic exercise tends toward one or the other. If we apply the autocracy/anarchy spectrum to policymaking, the monologic version could be considered to take the form of a central diktat, the assertion and enactment of a policy position. To give an example from the genre of this inquiry, the May government – through an announcement made by Theresa May at her political party's annual conference – announced that it would change the repayment terms of English students' loans (May 2017). At the other end of this spectrum – where examples are not readily apparent in tertiary policy settings – are the citizen-democracy approaches which aim to resolve policy challenges through widespread consultation and structured agreement-formation (Bevir 2009; Michels and De Graaf 2010). Neither the monologic policy announcement nor the citizen democracy example align with the Tertiary Review: the design of the review process sits between these two extremes. The dialogic interanimation which is the subject of this inquiry operates primarily at institutional level – albeit represented through practitioner actions – rather than the

human/citizen as the individual impacted by a policy, and, as will be explored in this thesis, the review process offered various opportunities for those practitioner actors to engage with the policymaking process.

The value of dialogic concepts for this inquiry

The consultation process is *by definition* a dialogic one, but to consider this a simple two-way dialogic transaction would be to lose the richness of the context. While two formal utterances – the *Call for Evidence* and any given consultation response – may be fixed, written and published, they are the product of their own dialogic processes: they are situated within their own contexts of interanimation and also interanimate through the consultation exercise. Furthermore, it is certain that there will be, again as an essential component, a multiplicity of opinions and options for the production of both utterances. The diverse voices in these conditions show us two dialogic systems connecting at the point of the exchange of formal written utterances. In practice, these two systems are not hermetically sealed from one another: there will be a leakage of other connections, for example formally through events such as those held by the organisers of consultations. There may be news reports, expert commentary or one-to-one discussions which exchange information across the boundary between the party calling for evidence and the ones responding. There is also a shared history and context. For the purposes of this inquiry, given the significance of the formal consultation response to the work of those constructing the response utterance, it is this element to which close attention is applied.

Consultation on policy development is a normal part of the process, one which is promoted by national and supra-national entities as described earlier in chapter 1A. We should also be aware of the inherent power imbalance between the policymaking insider who designs, issues and controls the consultation exercise and the outsider responding to the call for submissions. Wodak also considers the role which power plays in discourse which is particularly useful for this inquiry:

Language is not powerful on its own; it gains power by the use powerful people make of it. This explains why CDA [critical discourse analysis] is particularly interested in analysing processes of inclusion and exclusion, of access to relevant domains in our societies. Texts are often seen as sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourse and ideologies (“voices” in the Bakhtian [sic] sense; Bakhtin, 1981 [*The Dialogic Imagination*]) contending and struggling for dominance. (Wodak 2009, 35)

If we take it then that the consultation process is a contested dialogic space in which power and struggle are found, it is reasonable that the consultation is a site for exploration of the dialogic nature of any given policymaking process (Fairclough 2001; Crowley 2001). The aim of this interrogation is first to provide a deeper understanding of the genre of the consultation response, and secondly to use that as a basis for practical action – particularly for the practitioner respondents – to maximise the value, the “return on investment” of time and energy in the construction of a response.

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue – and the associated other terms of utterances, genre and interanimation – are valued by a scholarly community for their application to a range of public policy topics, although not yet extensively invoked in higher education literature. In general, the idea of generating meaning from analysing dialogue helps this inquiry to focus on developing understanding – the “why?” of policymaking – for the practitioner audience. Used in a more targeted way, the concept of dialogic consultation provides us with a frame to test the position of the Tertiary Review consultation process on a spectrum between autocratic and anarchic policymaking. The purpose of this application is to generate a novel analysis, and also to support practitioners by problematising something which has not hitherto been conceived in this way, thereby supporting reflexive engagement with professional practice.

Chapter 1C: Method

This chapter outlines the method of analysis to be used for the inquiry. It explores why Hyatt's framework for critical higher education policy analysis is relevant to this study and shows how the conceptual approach outlined in the previous chapter enriches the Hyatt framework (2013a). Exploration of the method provides the rigorous frame for the critical policy analysis and thereby aims to demonstrate that the conclusions of the thesis should be taken as the product of internal consistency. This chapter also provides boundaries for the later chapters to constrain analysis to that which is of greatest relevance to the inquiry.

Application of the critical policy analysis framework

The choice of an analytical framework to provide the basis for the method of inquiry is a necessary condition for rigorous analysis: an absence of method would provide a reader with insufficient confidence that any conclusions drawn were based on sound reasoning. Structure within methods aims to enable presentation of the reasoning within the analysis and to provides the basis on which the reader might understand and interpret the findings. The adoption of a method is not, however, a sufficient condition for the successful execution – or presentation – of a research inquiry. First, the method chosen must be appropriate to the task at hand. Second, there should be critical engagement with the method to demonstrate its appropriateness and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985), and adaptations made as necessary. Third, the conduct of the inquiry must be undertaken according to the method proposed. Documenting these three elements provides the reader with the information from which to make an informed judgement about the rigour of the process. In this thesis, the first two elements are outlined in this chapter, and the third is left for the reader to judge from the content of later chapters, although here I outline my intentions.

In this inquiry I use Hyatt's (2013a) critical higher education policy framework to structure the thesis and present the analysis. As Hyatt (2013b) notes, this framework was developed to provide tools for students of education doctorates: it is, therefore, particularly appropriate for my purpose. At the heart of the Hyatt (2013a) framework is Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Wodak 2001; Reisigl and Wodak 2009). DHA integrates the analysis of text in a "*discourse immanent critique*" with a "*socio-diagnostic critique*" where the researcher uses "contextual knowledge and ... social theories and other

theoretical models from various disciplines to interpret the discursive events”; this is combined with a “*prospective critique* [which] seeks to contribute to the improvement of communication” (Wodak 2009, 35 original emphasis). As noted in the introduction, this inquiry is a documentary study: DHA is therefore highly appropriate. DHA is a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which uses explicitly interdisciplinary approaches to explore discourses, recognising that “there is no one way to ‘do’ critical discourse analysis” (Hyatt 2013a, 42; see also Wodak 2009, 34). This flexibility provides both a wide range of examples from which to draw, and also the room in which to make – and to be explicit about making – choices in the topic, approach and form of analysis. Consistent with Wodak’s view that “DHA should make the object under investigation and the analyst’s own position transparent to justify why certain interpretations and readings of discursive events seem more valid than others” (2009, 35), I have outlined my own position in the introduction above and will continue to reflect on the decisions which place more emphasis on some points than others.

In this thesis, I have made a number of adaptations to the framework to suit the question at hand and as invited by Hyatt: the framework “is designed with the intention that users could supplement these criteria according to their contexts and the context of the text(s) considered” (2013a, 46). Below I explain how I have adapted the proposed structure to meet my overarching aim of exploring the Tertiary Review to make contributions to knowledge and practice. The flexibility also allows for the incorporation, or rejection, of a range of conceptual approaches. As outlined above, I have chosen to overlay on this inquiry concepts drawn from Bakhtin, with the aim of enriching the analysis through the application of a dialogic lens. In this manner, this thesis is in a dialogic relationship with the Hyatt framework: that framework has been read and interpreted, and by return I offer my own view on its application. In choosing to apply the dialogic lens, there is an implicit invitation to others to consider the same, or a parallel, augmentation of the framework in their own inquiries.

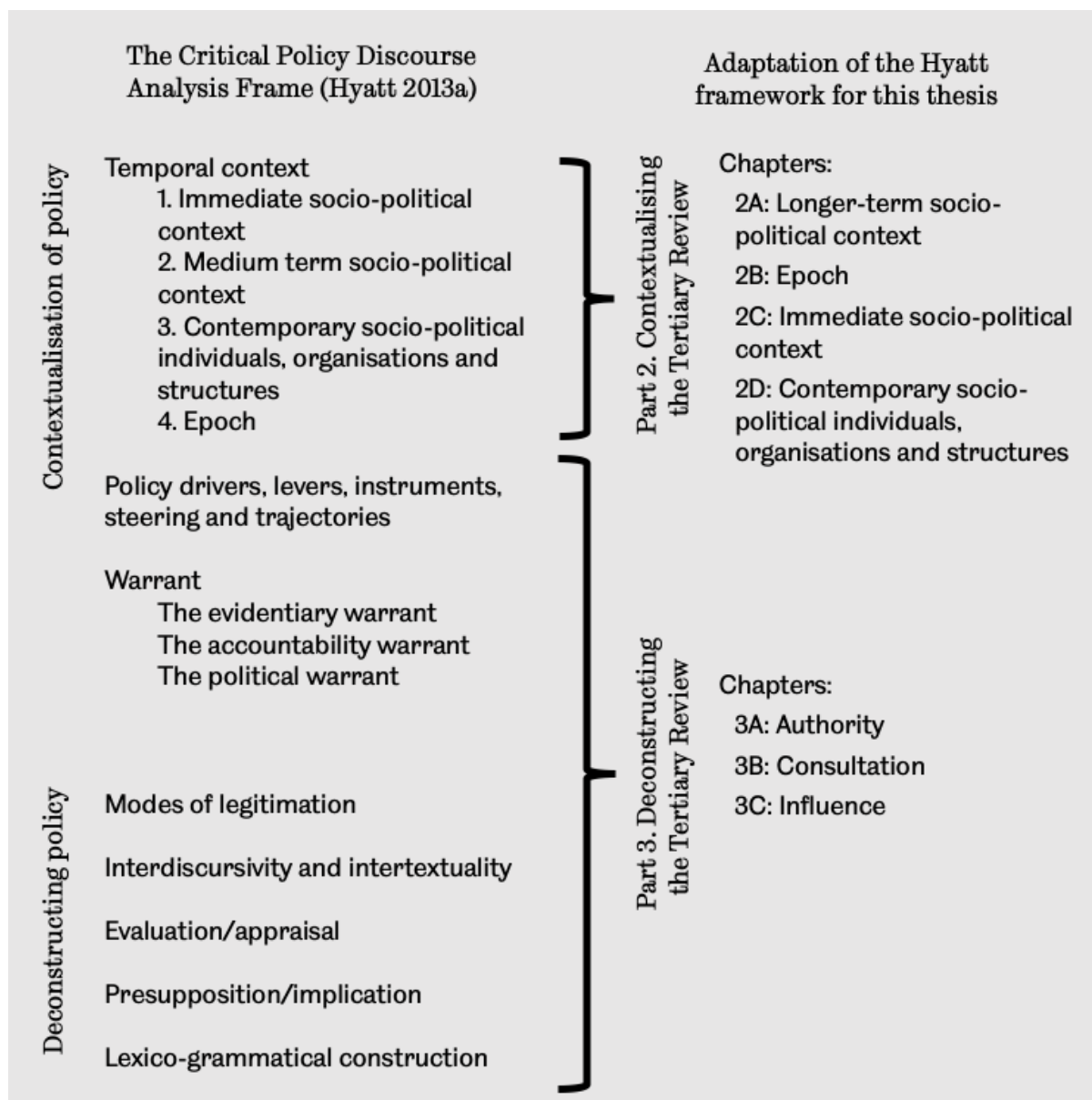


Figure 5 | Adaptations to the Hyatt framework

In addition to the augmentation through the dialogic conceptual approach, I have made adaptations to the Hyatt (2013a) framework in the structure of this thesis, as shown in Figure 5. In the second part, the four chapters reflect the temporal context as outlined by Hyatt as the “contextualisation of policy” (46–48) which builds on Wodak and others. I have, however, reordered them so that the first two chapters reflect a “funnel-shaped” view of our inquiry, the longer-term context in 2A (which Hyatt calls “medium term”) and “epoch” in 2B. This decision was made to guide the reader by starting with the biggest themes of the inquiry before narrowing down to consider the detail in closest proximity to the specifics of the inquiry. This close-in view is explored through chapters 2C and 2D which cover, respectively,

“Contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures” and “Immediate socio-political context” (Hyatt 2013a, 47). Taken together, these four chapters provide a rich contextual exploration of the context to show “the way in which the temporal context of a policy operates through a number of interdependent levels and helps to construct the way that policy is conceived and read by various parties” (46).

In part three of the thesis, I have chosen to place alongside each other Hyatt’s deconstruction of policy with his sections on “policy drivers, levers, instruments, steering and trajectories” and “warrant” (2013a, 48–57). The elements proposed by Hyatt are explored across the chapters in part three to provide a deep and critical analysis of the policy through three dimensions – authority, consultation and influence – in chapters 3A, 3B and 3C respectively. I have chosen to consider how the tools and structures of policy can be explored within the text of the policy artefacts. In this way, part two is led by contextual information supplemented by reference to the policy texts while part three is focused on the policy texts supplemented by further context as necessary. This takes the same broad approach as Hyatt proposed but moves the boundary which divides the contextualising and the deconstructing parts as shown in Figure 5 (Hyatt 2013a, 43).

To achieve the deconstruction, I have applied others’ tools including – in chapter 3A – Bacchi’s (2012) “What’s the Problem represented to be” and the tripartite warrants framework (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001) as well as relating authority to power, drawing on Reisigl and Wodak (2009). In chapter 3B, I identify key elements of the texts to explore in detail, first through searching for indicators of the appetite for outsider views, second at the implications from arising from the questions in the *Call for Evidence* and finally exploring a sample of how respondents approached consultation. This sampling approach is in contrast to the production of detailed case studies proposed for DHA (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 96) but is appropriate for this inquiry because of the focused attention on that which provides the greatest benefit for the practitioner. In chapter 3C, this focused approach is further used to explore evidence of the impact that outsiders’ voices had on the Tertiary Review considering what was valued by policymakers. In making selections of how to approach the texts, I necessarily exclude both other tools and other parts of the texts. Where I make these selections I aim to show why the choice has been made, and to identify what has not been chosen, to ensure that the analysis is credible and trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). I acknowledge that “micro-level lexico-grammatical analysis can help to demonstrate how some of the more macro features of policy discourse” (Hyatt 2013a, 56–57), and I use

commentary of the features of language used in the texts. However, I do not separate out this approach from the other tools explicitly, nor focus on the applications of lexico-grammatical terms or techniques in the deconstruction as I judged this an unnecessary step for establishing a sufficient understanding within this policy analysis.

As outlined above, the thesis is broadly structured to the framework provided by Hyatt (2013a) with some adaptation to suit this inquiry. Overall, the thesis chapters are designed to work together to form a coherent and nuanced set of arguments which provide the reader with confidence in the rigour of the analysis and the soundness of conclusions. This first part has provided the context about the thesis itself, and situated the topic within the literature: this provides the basis on which the conclusions can be shown to complement and enhance knowledge available on higher education policymaking, and the practice of engaging in policy consultations. The way in which the structure works to support the conclusions can be seen most readily in part three where I have deviated furthest from the Hyatt framework, albeit aiming to incorporate each of the specific elements he proposes. In adopting the three dimensions – authority, consultation and influence – for the part deconstructing policy, I have chosen to use perspectives of analysis which are rooted in the tools offered by Hyatt but which lend themselves to potential application which will I expand upon in the concluding part of the thesis.

In chapter 4A I synthesise the critical policy analysis to identify the ways in which it contributes to the available literature on higher education policymaking. This reflects on the application of the Hyatt framework and Bakhtinian concepts to show where and how these tools enrich understanding of policymaking. In chapter 4B I take the specific example of the Tertiary Review and what can be learned about it as a policymaking process to draw conclusions for practitioners. This chapter includes a proposed framework for dialogic policymaking which can be applied to policy consultation processes. In this contribution to practice, I aim to enrich professional understanding of a key area of activity and through that promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of those responding to consultations. In chapter 4C I reflect on the process and its limitations, and offer suggestions for further inquiry.

The Hyatt (2013a) critical higher education policy framework provides the structural basis for this thesis. The elements proposed by Hyatt have been incorporated into the structure, but have been rearranged to suit this inquiry with the most substantial change seen in part three where deconstruction of policy is expanded and seen through the three

dimensions of authority, consultation and influence. The structure of the thesis is designed to build an argument in layers, critically analysing the Tertiary Review in a systematic and rigorous way to build towards two contributions, one to knowledge and one to practice.

Part 2. Contextualising the Tertiary Review

This part provides the contextual baseline for the critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review. It draws on four elements of the Hyatt (2013a) framework, as outlined in chapter 1C to explore key elements of the context of the Tertiary Review. The first two chapters take a broad view, the first considering the longer-term socio-political context and the second epoch which considers key debates in tertiary funding and policy, focusing on the economic discourse and the role of markets. The third chapter considers the near-term political and social context while the fourth chapter looks at the key individuals and organisations most relevant to the review. The chapters in this part constitute a foundation upon which to build the deconstruction of the texts and subsequent conclusions.

The exploration of the context in these chapters demonstrates both the opportunities and the limitations arising from a documentary study for developing the level of understanding of policy that a practitioner might want to enable them to understand fully the “why?” of a particular policy. The advantage of the method used here is the application of multiple lenses through which to explore the policy in its context, each of which offers intersecting threads of information to connect, but also has silences and omissions which prevent a full picture emerging. As Hyatt notes: “All policy emerges, is constructed and is understood, within a temporal context, and, without a clear understanding of the impact and nuances of the context, any reading of a policy text can only be partial” (Hyatt 2013a, 46). It is the combination of these elements, following Wodak’s (2001) DHA that provides the foundation for the later linguistically-focused analysis which comes in part three.

Chapter 2A: Medium-term socio-political context

This chapter provides context for the Tertiary Review analysis by examining the nature of tertiary education and the processes which led to current funding arrangements for higher education as the focus of this inquiry. This chapter aims to illuminate elements of the “why?” of the Tertiary Review by applying an element from the critical policy analysis framework to explore the tertiary education landscape through an historical lens. This supports the development of understanding through reflection on the impact of this history on the policymaking conditions in which the Tertiary Review was produced. For the practitioner, building an understanding of the medium-term context is valuable for understanding the broader policy landscape and the themes, trends and current issues which influence the socio-political environment in which a given policy is made.

For this assessment of the medium-term socio-political context for the Tertiary Review, the focus is on developments in the period from 1997 to 2019. This is not an arbitrary selection of time period but one which reflects a meaningful preamble to the analysis of the Tertiary Review. Devolution referenda in 1997 precipitated increasing divergence of the education systems of the UK’s nations (MacKinnon 2013), and therefore mark a point of divergence for English tertiary education. The year 1997 also saw the publication of the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997) from which followed the introduction of tuition fees and the associated loan programmes by which domestic undergraduates would contribute to the costs of their education. That same year also marked a major political change in the UK with the election in May of that year of Tony Blair’s “New Labour” administration following 18 years of Conservative Party governments under Margaret Thatcher and then John Major. These factors make 1997 a reasonable starting point for this foundational chapter, noting that a longer sweep of history could have been chosen, and that chapter 2C in particular focuses on the nearer-term time period. The remainder of this chapter first considers the state of contemporary tertiary education before considering some of the changes which took place after 1997.

Current issues in tertiary education funding

Higher and further education are separated by the academic levels of education as defined in England by nine qualification levels from “entry level” and continuing one to eight (HM Government 2020d). Higher education is defined as levels four to eight, as described by the

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (Quality Assurance Agency 2014); as I noted above in chapter 1A, accepting this cliff-edge division is at odds with the Augar Report, which chooses to focus more on the types of provider in which education is delivered. Many further education colleges provide “HE in FE” covering level four and five education – often Higher National Certificates (level four) or Diplomas (level five) or Foundation Degrees (level five), and some also offer Bachelor’s (level six) degrees or Master’s (level seven). While funding and policy changes have impacted on the proportion of higher education delivered in colleges, there were around 150,000 students studying HE in FE in 2017 (Widdowson and King 2018, 15), reducing to 137,000 in 2019 (Association of Colleges 2019). The trend towards consideration of tertiary education, rather than identifying the two sectors as separate, in part reflects the fact that the organisations which might historically have aligned to one of the sectors in reality deliver education across the qualification levels. As the *Terms of Reference* for the Tertiary Review state, “[t]he Government is committed to conducting a major review across post-18 education and funding to ensure a joined-up system that works for everyone” (Department for Education 2018a, 1). The pursuit of a “joined-up system” is demonstration that seeing the higher and further education systems as separate is a thing of the past.

The sector has grown considerably in recent years – at least for full-time students. The proportion of English young people entering HE has risen from below 20 per cent in 1990 to almost 50 per cent today. Apart from a dip in 2012 when £9,000 fees were introduced, the number of domestic full-time entrants to HE has grown steadily over the last ten years, despite a decline in the English 18 year-old population. Altogether 1.44 million undergraduates are studying at English HEIs – including 210,000 EU and international students – of which 1.24 million are full-time. (Augar 2019, 63)

This theme of the emphasising tertiary over separate sectors is explored further in chapter 2C.

A further example of a significant policy area which has operated across tertiary education is apprenticeships. In 2015 the UK government introduced new apprenticeships in England, and the “apprenticeship levy”, a payroll-based contribution – of 0.5 per cent of salary payments for employers with an annual pay bill over £3m – which employers must spend on designated apprenticeships came into force in May 2017 (Higher Education Commission 2019; Powell 2019). These programmes can be run at various education levels: “higher apprenticeships” are equivalent to degree-level awards, at levels six or seven. The stimulus for apprenticeship provision intended by the levy has encouraged universities to

develop and promote provision in this area, something which would have traditionally been in the purview of further education providers owing to the employer-led vocational focus. In 2017/18 there were 815,000 people participating in an apprenticeship in England (Powell 2019).

The further education student population is different from that in higher education: colleges tend to cater to older learners while universities have a majority of “standard age”, school-leaver undergraduates (Hupkau and Ventura 2017). The majority mode in higher education is full-time, and undergraduate programmes typically last three years in England and Wales, and four years in Scotland. The UK’s four higher education systems each have a different approach to undergraduate funding, with the largest system, in England, passing on a greater proportion of costs to the individual student through an income-contingent loan system. Barr et al. argue that “a well-designed loan can protect low-earning graduates from defaulting or experiencing financial distress, while simultaneously ensuring that taxpayer subsidies are kept low” (2017, 29), and there are other advocates for this funding system which is used across the UK’s nations and in other jurisdictions (Willetts 2015). Wales similarly has a loan-based system but with a higher level of grant funding to support students while they study (Diamond 2016; Student Finance Wales 2020). Scotland’s domestic undergraduate tuition is free to resident students who are under the age of 25 and who choose to study in Scotland (Student Awards Agency Scotland 2020). Residents of Northern Ireland pay tuition fees via a loan scheme but at lower levels if studying in the region compared to the fees charged to students resident in England and Wales; in 2019 this amounted to less than half of the maximum allowable fee (NI Direct 2020).

The growth in participation in higher education makes it an area of significant public policy interest, as does the decline in further education participation (Smith et al. 2019). The government’s Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) (2018) has noted the significance of student loans within the national accounts, and that “even small changes to information about student numbers can have a significant impact on our public sector net debt forecast.” The OBR further stated:

Student loans have become an increasingly important part of our fiscal forecasts, with gross outlays reaching £18.1 billion (0.8 per cent of GDP) in 2018–19 and forecast to reach £22.6 billion (0.9 per cent) in 2023–24. Flows of this size would make student loans an important source of medium-term risk at any time, but prospective changes to their treatment in the National Accounts and potential future policy changes provide additional sources of risk. (Office for Budget Responsibility 2019)

In addition to the cost of the overall outlay, there has been debate over the private sale of student loan debt (McGettigan 2019). While this is not central to this inquiry, it is worth noting first, the significance of the overall level of public spending; and second, that the mechanism of funding via loans – in terms of the aggregate funding of the system – is the subject of controversy. The government estimated in 2019 that some 45 per cent of the initial loan outlay is expected not to be repaid by graduates given the income-contingent nature of the loan system and that debts are written off 30 years after the loans are made (HM Government 2019). In 2020, the government's statistics show that, for undergraduates who study full-time, the cost of the government's contribution could be as high as 54 per cent, and 47 per cent for part-time undergraduates (HM Government 2020c).

In addition to undergraduate education, universities also obtain tuition fee income from unregulated fees, that is, those from overseas students and students on postgraduate programmes. In parallel to the loan funding scheme for undergraduates, England introduced a public loan funding system for postgraduate degrees for the 2016–2017 academic year: for Master's degree programmes, up to £10,000, rising to £11,222 for 2020 entry; and for doctorates up to £25,000, rising to £26,445 for 2020 entry (Hubble et al. 2019; HM Government 2020a; HM Government 2020b). In addition to tuition income, universities make trading surpluses on accommodation and other facilities and receive research income from Quality-Related (QR) allocations and specific grants through the “dual funding” system. They also receive philanthropic income and business contracts, and spin-out companies and exploitation of intellectual property can generate income. While there is a wide range of incomes sources for universities, the tuition fee income from UK-domiciled full-time undergraduates is the largest (Universities UK 2016). Therefore, while this represents only part of higher education revenue, any change to the funding arrangements arising from the Tertiary Review, particularly the unit of resource – the amount received by a provider of higher education for it to spend – would be of major significance.

Higher education funding 1997 to 2017

There have been many changes to the tertiary education landscape in England since 1997. The period saw a significant expansion in participation in higher education: in 1997, some 336,000 students were accepted into university via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service across the UK, the primary route for undergraduate entry (Bolton 2012, 3); by 2017 this had grown to 534,000 (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service 2017, 3). This

represents growth of 59 per cent while the overall population of the country grew only 13 per cent (Office for National Statistics 2020). From 2012, tuition fees for domestic undergraduates were increased with the introduction of the “£9k fee” following the Browne Report (Browne 2010). As the Augar Report noted, during the Tertiary Review the total number of students in further education was approximately 2.2 million and in higher education 1.2 million (2019, 18). Higher education has become an increasingly important public policy area as there has been a significant growth in participation, that is, of the proportion of the population educated to degree level. The growth is particularly marked from 1992, the point at which polytechnic institutions became universities, the “post-92s”. The growth in higher level education is a worldwide phenomenon (Greatbatch and Tate 2019), and one which consequently raises the costs of the system. Consideration of the debates on how tertiary education should be funded is expanded in chapter 2B.

Drawing attention to the longer-term policy changes in higher education provides an opportunity to see the historical development and the social, political and economic context in which the Tertiary Review took place. There is also scope to consider the development over time of the process of conducting policy reviews in higher education with direct relevance to funding, particularly the reviews led by Ron Dearing and John Browne in 1994 and 2010 respectively. For example, the Tertiary Review has a very narrow focus while that for Dearing was much broader: “The Committee also sought to understand the purposes of higher education using a definition of higher, rather than tertiary, education which created a boundary for the work” (Birch 2017, 190). There is also evidence that Dearing drew on the longer history of reviews, looking back itself to the inquiry led by Lord Robbins published which reported in 1963: “At its first meeting ... the Committee received a background paper drafted by the secretariat which outlined the work of the Robbins Inquiry and key facts on how the Robbins Committee undertook its work” (Birch 2017, 194–195). Birch’s analysis of Dearing provides a particularly interesting counterpoint to the Tertiary Review, including the way she considers the perception of the review as a narrow one when, she asserts:

Much of the commentary endorses the view that the Inquiry was established in response to a specific set of circumstances, the most pressing of which was to find a solution to the funding crisis. However, this traditional interpretation of the rationale for the Dearing Inquiry leaves some significant questions unaddressed. It assumes that a national inquiry was initiated simply as a delaying tactic to address a single specific issue and fails to consider the wider evidence to the contrary. A solution to the funding crisis could have been addressed through a single-issue review initiated as a Government taskforce asked to report after the General

Election ... While a departmental committee or taskforce could have built on the work undertaken in November 1994 to review higher education and been used as a delaying tactic, it would not have been a palatable solution for the higher education community. (Birch 2017, 218)

The Browne Review, which followed Dearing, and which introduced a tripling of the fee cap from 2012, was:

intended to meet three main objectives: to (almost entirely) transfer the cost of teaching at English universities from the public purse to the students who would benefit from it, and therefore contribute to reduction of the budget deficit and national debt; to increase universities' incomes; and to ensure a fair and progressive system by which students would pay for their education. (Johnston 2013, 208)

The contrast between Dearing and Browne is significant: Browne appears to have been a much narrower and tactically focused review designed to deliver against a specific political outcome while Dearing had a more expansive remit. This positions Browne as closer in design to the Tertiary Review.

As noted above, the funding scheme for English undergraduate education is the income-contingent loan, brought in following the Dearing review and extended following the fee increase after the Browne review. These sorts of loan schemes sit in contrast to tuition which is free to the student, funded by general taxation, and systems of placing additional taxation on graduates. In the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, the Labour Party (alongside other parties) offered a headline-grabbing proposition to the electorate of "free tuition", a return to the policy which prevailed before the introduction of student fees in 1997 (Bagshaw, A. 2017c; Bagshaw, A. 2019). Income-contingent loans have been described by Crawford et al. as follows:

The basic idea is that students pay no fees at the point of entry to university, that their repayment of the loan only starts—and only continues—when they have sufficient income to make a re-payment, and that the debt cannot forever hang over someone's head. It is sometimes emphasized that it is *graduates* who therefore pay for their higher education and not *students*, and this rightly highlights the key notion that the system ensures that students do not have to produce tuition fees up-front. (2016, 31 original emphasis)

While this description is straightforward, it is elsewhere claimed that the English undergraduate fee and loan system is poorly understood and is described as the most expensive in the world, which neglects to take into account that half of the cost is covered via government subsidy through general taxation (Kentish 2017; Lewis 2018; Looney et al. 2019).

However, Crawford et al. (2016) argue that the fact participation has increased in spite of the increase in headline fees demonstrates that students do in fact understand the income-contingent loan system as different from other kinds of debt (142). While the system of higher education funding has its detractors, it also has vocal proponents:

The current structure for funding higher education has increased cash for university teaching, whilst clearly saving public money. It has ensured that graduates who have benefited from higher education pay back, but no upfront payment is expected from students for tuition. It has made it possible for the government to remove the cap on student numbers – a great social reform. There has also been a surge in applications for university, especially from young people from lower income households. (Willets 2015, 43)

David Willets who, as the minister responsible for higher education, oversaw the post-Browne reforms, reiterated his defence of the system in *A university education* (2017). That this defence of the system was deemed necessary reflects the fact that the Tertiary Review was instituted at a time when the policy was not settled, as demonstrated both by the calls for “free tuition” and the variability in the systems across the UK’s nations.

The tertiary education system in England represents a significant element of public policy which touches millions of lives through education and training each year. Participation in higher education has grown significantly over time, and through formal reviews – notably Dearing and Browne – has increasingly passed the cost of domestic undergraduates’ education on to the individual through income-contingent loan systems. Given the history of funding reviews, the Tertiary Review of 2017–2019 had historical precedent to serve as a reference point for its conduct, make-up and outcomes. For the analysis of this policy context, recognising the significance of higher education funding in the public finances, and the roles played by past reviews provides an important component to understanding the overall shape of the Tertiary Review.

Chapter 2B: Epoch

In his explanation of the role that epoch plays in contextualisation of the policy subject to analysis, Hyatt (2013a, 48) draws on “Foucault’s notion of the episteme (Foucault [2002]), or what counts as knowledge/truth in a particular era”. He goes on to note: “for others (Fairclough [2001]) the discourse of an epoch is determined by its powerful voices and given consensual power rather than coerced power through the notion of hegemony, through discourses of appropriacy and common sense” (Hyatt 2013a, 48). I have interpreted the role of this chapter as addressing key debates on the funding of English higher education from the point of dominant discourses and concepts. While this would likely have been the conclusion without further direction from Hyatt’s framework, it also happens to follow the example that is given:

one might consider the way in which the dominant discourse of new public management (Hood 1991) has transformed the relationships between government, services and those accessing services, including higher education (Deem and Brehony 2005), and has displaced other discourses that do not prioritise the viewing of such relationships in terms of the market, privatisation and competition. (Hyatt 2013a, 48)

This chapter contributes to the contextualisation of the Tertiary Review first by considering the funding of education at sector level in macroeconomic terms. I then consider in more detail the role of market ideologies in education funding. This builds on the work of the previous chapter by enriching understanding through exploration of the ideological underpinning of funding systems, which complements the description of the policy processes by which those ideologies are brought into operation. The selection of these elements of the analysis has been driven by the premise that where and how funds are allocated in public policy contexts reflects the value placed on any given area collectively by society, as moderated through political and policy structures. This supports the goal stated in the introduction about the pursuit of understanding for the practitioner and illuminating the “why?” of a policy agenda.

The links between economic growth, productivity and skills

There is an underlying assumption in the narrative on skills and productivity that economic growth is a good thing; economic prosperity is good; prosperity comes through growth; growth must come from productivity, which requires investment in human capital for skills development. This thread runs through the Tertiary Review and is consistent with the dominant narrative for tertiary education and its economic outcomes (Tomlinson 2018). It is explicit within the Augar Report that one area of focus for the review was to address “extremely poor growth in productivity since the 2008 financial crisis, both in absolute terms and in comparison with many other developed countries” (2019, 25). The skills development agenda and pursuit of productivity are persistent themes within contemporary government policy, as expressed in the Industrial Strategy (HM Government 2017). In one important element of the tertiary education landscape, it is possible to see particular emphasis on developing skills to support economic returns. The identified gap, the “missing middle” (Field 2018), is at levels four and five, considered “higher technical education”, a point emphasised by Augar (2019). Prominent in the skills reform debate – which advocates a rebalancing away from higher education participation into further education, particularly higher technical education – is Alison Wolf, about whom more will be said in chapter 2D in the context of her role as a member of Augar’s expert panel (see Wolf, A. et al. 2016).

The macroeconomic assessment of the need for skills development for economic growth, while a dominant narrative, fails to take full account of the rich interplay of factors, though Augar notes that skill development is a necessary, but not sufficient, factor (2019). The evidence shows that there are very significant differences in economic outcome based on students’ backgrounds and characteristics. The choice of institution of education appears to matter to employment outcomes, acting as a proxy for quality. Differential outcomes by institution type are confirmed by multiple studies (Belfield et al. 2018a; Espinoza and Speckesser 2019) and can be summarised as: “even once students have completed their higher education, those from less privileged backgrounds continue to do less well in the labour market” (Crawford et al. 2016, 151). In the Tertiary Review, and more widely in the tertiary education discourse, notions of skill development leading to increased productivity and then to growth are commonplace. This linear narrative does not hold, however, for all groups or any given individual because of myriad other factors – including individual social position – that operate simultaneously.

The role of the market in tertiary education

Regulated market ideology is the dominant paradigm for the organisation of tertiary education, built on neoliberal concepts (Peck and Tickell 2002) but subject to extensive critique to unpack why higher education does not function as other markets do (Brown and Carasso 2013; Williams 2014). The Augar Report itself provides a pithy description of the market in higher education, noting:

The continuous expansion of HE has been the explicit aim of successive governments. The introduction of £1,000 fees in 1998 and their increase to £3,000 in 2006, accompanied by the availability of income-contingent tuition fee loans, created a demand-led system in which students are lent the money to make a choice between universities (or whether or not to go to university) and universities compete to recruit them. The intention was to create a market and the principle was taken a stage further in 2012, when fee caps were trebled to £9,000, and in 2015 when student number caps were lifted. This was intended to encourage universities to expand and increase student choice. Undergraduate teaching after 2012 became a profitable activity and the sector responded as it was meant to by recruiting more students, improving student support and developing facilities. (Augar 2019, 63)

It further describes the regulation of the market:

the OfS has powers to intervene on a risk-based basis with *the objective of promoting competition and choice* and looking after the student interest ... [W]e believe it offers *great potential to ensure that the market works in the interests of all stakeholders*. (Augar 2019, 63, emphasis added)

However, Augar notes deficiencies in the higher education market:

Conclusion: Market competition exists but not on the terms intended. The removal of number controls combined with a high fee cap created the conditions for a very competitive market. This has taken the form of extremely limited competition on price but intense competition for students through quality of offer, extensive marketing, and other inducements. (Augar 2019, 80)

The fundamental framework for the Tertiary Review – the norms in the social and political discourse – is the commitment to the pursuit of a market within higher education.

It has become axiomatic in policymaking that the market can and will drive quality, in spite of the dearth of evidence supporting this position. Tomlinson (2017) argues that marketisation has a damaging influence on consumerist conceptions of students' actual experiences. Shattock asserts that "a policy of 'competition and choice' based on Lord Browne's Review of higher education in 2010, and which has become the government's

mantra, does not result in more innovative and better quality products at least not in higher education” (2019, 5). Others express concern that market ideologies and neoliberal approaches to education have a negative impact on academics (Ball 2012; Sutton 2017), though Calhoun (2006) points out that there can be a significant gulf between what academics believe universities should exist for and the notions of those who pay. Hazelkorn and Gibson, based on their analysis from the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands, propose that there is room for a more nuanced understanding of the role of the market: “The importance of responding to labour market needs is not simply acquiescing to the market, but responding to the needs of students for employment” (2017, 16). Ultimately, Augar concludes that:

Post-18 education cannot be left entirely to market forces. The idea of a market in tertiary education has been a defining characteristic of English policy since 1998. We believe that competition between providers has an important role to play in creating choice for students but that on its own it cannot deliver a full spectrum of social, economic and cultural benefits. With no steer from government, the outcome is likely to be haphazard. (Augar 2019, 8)

While the concept of the market dominates the discourse on the regulation and funding of higher education, it is widely accepted that market dynamics alone are insufficient to achieve quality and equity. Furthermore, there are many critics, particularly from within academia, who argue strongly that market ideologies are actively damaging for education.

The balance of public and private benefit

Education is deemed to benefit both the individual and wider society (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014; Crawford et al. 2016; Williams 2016); in economic terms, it is therefore regarded as both a private and a public good, with public benefits including the positive impacts on productivity and growth noted above, though there is also scope for broader interpretations of the multifaceted public roles played by institutions (Marginson 2017; Collini 2017). Accepting the premise of *both* public *and* private good coming from education, there is a reasonable case to make that the share of “who pays?” should fall in such a way as to balance these benefits: broadly, if it is recognised that there is benefit to education which goes beyond the individual, it is reasonable to pay some of the costs from general taxation. This is a highly loaded debate, one which pits ideological positions against each other and is not easy to resolve:

Public and private goods are heterogeneous in use values, yet can be combined within one system of monetary value. Together, the economic and political modes constitute a more explanatory and more instrumental framework for operationalising the public/private distinction in higher education, than either the economic or political mode can provide alone. (Marginson 2016, 17)

While it may not be straightforward to distinguish what the “right” balance between public and private benefit should be, it is possible to see how this balance has changed over time. Increasingly, the shift to “who pays?” has been toward the individual and away from the general taxpayer, in parallel with a diminution of the welfare state (Callender 2014; Hillman 2013).

The public contribution to tertiary education funding is the subject of debate, and so is the assessment of the private benefit from which is derived notions of the proportion of the cost that should be passed on to the student. In addition to the points noted above in this chapter about the differential outcomes for student groups, research further shows that the costs of participating in higher education are borne by families and not just the individuals themselves (West et al. 2015). De Gayardon et al.’s literature review shows further the impact of a student’s indebtedness on life events and concludes that, “signs point to an almost universal negative relationship between student loan debt and physical and mental health” (2018, 42). It is therefore not a simple calculation of benefit on either the public or the private side of the equation; the question of balancing these interests remains in tension within the overall funding and regulatory system for tertiary education.

The discourse of value for money

The notion of “value for money” brings together the themes outlined in this chapter to explore what it means for the public and private beneficiaries of education to have received the value for their investment. Referring to the government’s 2016 White Paper, Tomlinson explores the concept:

One of the key features of the recent English White Paper is the equation of value to economically based outcomes, including students’ employability and the relative market value of degrees – hence the foregrounding of value for money. Value for money is referenced against what students formally acquire from higher education and in turn are able to exchange for potential economic return. The task is making sure that both the immediate and future value of their experience is enhanced and higher education’s formal operations are geared towards this goal. (2018, 715)

The language of value for money is not confined to governments: it has also been adopted by education providers, as shown by a report from Universities UK (2015) called *Efficiency, effectiveness and value for money*. Across the timeline of the Tertiary Review, three ministers for higher education each made speeches to the sector which focused on the concept of “value for money” and “delivering” that value for “students and taxpayers” (Johnson 2017; Gyimah 2018; Skidmore 2019). While the term “value for money” might be used widely, in political speeches and other genres, it is not clearly understood to respond to a common definition. Gratricks (2020) notes that perceptions of value for money are what is measured, but that the perceptions of students are based – in part at least – on how institutions manage those expectations by communicating with students about what will be provided.

I have outlined the dominant narrative of instrumental economic outcomes from tertiary education, focusing on higher education. The discourse manifests in economic languages, of productivity, benefits and value. The economic emphasis has been widely challenged, as has its underlying principles of marketisation and neoliberalism. For the practitioner, the goal – which builds to understanding the “why?” of the Tertiary Review – is to recognise this language in use and to reflect on the consequences and nuances within the debate. While there may be a dominant paradigm, the evidence shows that this is not “settled”, in that it has evolved over time, flexing within wider trends in the balance of spending between the general taxpayer and the individual. This must also be overlaid with the mechanisms for “who pays?” outlined in chapter 2B as those mechanisms guide the operation of the market. The policy tool of the income-contingent loan scheme for higher education is essential to understanding the specific context of English tertiary education.

This chapter has explored four related discourses which together form an assessment of the ideological underpinning of higher education funding policy in the period running up to, and through, the Tertiary Review. First, tertiary education should deliver productivity and economic growth; second, the way to achieve that goal is through market mechanisms; third, the cost of delivering the benefits should be shared between the individual and the state; fourth, the expression of benefits is described as “value for money”. For each discourse, there is justified criticism of the underpinning ideology and its operation. For the practitioner, this contextual information provides the information to support understanding of the terms of the debate as presented, and also offers the individual – or

their group or organisation – the chance to decide whether to conform to the narrative or seek to confound or subvert it.

Chapter 2C: Immediate socio-political context

This chapter contributes to the contextualisation of the Tertiary Review by looking at adjacent policy agendas to draw insight from them relevant to the specific question of tertiary funding across the period 2017 to 2019 in England. I first consider the UK's exit from the European Union as the dominant political narrative, before turning to other issues in tertiary education, keeping a focus on higher education, but not directly relating to funding debates. As with the other chapters in this part, selections have been made on what to represent, taking the viewpoint of the practitioner with the aim of enriching their understanding of the context in which the policy – in this case the Tertiary Review – is produced. I have chosen to reject exploration of other discourses, such as those relating to other aspects of public policy, or taking a broader geographic reach beyond England. Therefore this chapter represents a context proximate to the Tertiary Review without straying too far: this deliberate choice is made to focus the effort on that which is closest to the review and therefore most directly relevant to the practitioner's interest. Exploring the immediate socio-political context as part of this temporal analysis helps to understand the “why?” of the policy at hand by situating it alongside other policy agendas. This further applies Bakhtinian concepts of meaning-making through an attempt to enrich understanding of the social construction of texts.

Brexit and policy inaction

The period 2017–2019 will be remembered in England as one dominated by political machinations over the UK's exit from its membership of the European Union (EU). Following the membership referendum of June 2016, the UK's Prime Minister Theresa May, who succeeded David Cameron after he stepped aside following defeat in the referendum, sought to navigate a “deal” with the EU on the UK's withdrawal after activating Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on 29 March 2017 (BBC 2017). May held a General Election in June 2017 but failed to achieve a working majority, and her administration was subsequently supported by an agreement with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (Hunt 2017). After several failed attempts to pass her deal, and the moving deadline for “no deal” (BBC 2019a), May was replaced as Prime Minister by her sometime Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. Johnson held a General Election in late 2019 with the promise to “get Brexit done” and won a large majority (BBC 2019b). As noted in chapter 1A, the two General Elections provide the bookends for this

policy analysis, as the Tertiary Review was initiated after the 2017 election and, while it had not formally been concluded by the time of the 2019 election, the new government forms a natural end point for the period of analysis.

The period of political instability, dominance of political debate by “Brexit” and the absence of a functioning majority government absorbed the oxygen of policymaking. The weak and short-lived premiership of Theresa May produced comparatively little legislation (Institute for Government 2020) and a number of policies failed to live up to their ambitions, including the much-vaunted Industrial Strategy (Strauss 2020). Given the higher education ministerial brief, Jo Johnson had been able to see through the passage of major reform legislation in the period 2015–2017 (Westwood 2018a), but following the General Election in 2017 it became all but impossible for the May government to pursue a policy agenda. The change of Prime Minister to Boris Johnson in July 2019 also resulted in a series of changes to the policy platform, thus diminishing the possibility of continuity in any domain, and the Tertiary Review, having been closely associated with May, was judged by commentators to be of only minor importance in the Johnson administration (Simons 2019; Woodhead 2019).

Tertiary education policy

While the period of the review was marked by inaction across various areas of public policy, there was still a stated government agenda within tertiary education. This was articulated at the time of the Tertiary Review’s launch which referred to two key policy areas, T levels and apprenticeships:

The UK already has a globally recognised higher education system, with record rates of young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, going to university. Work is also underway to transform technical education post-16 by introducing new *T levels* – *providing high quality technical qualifications* to rival traditional academic options – and overhauling *apprenticeships to help provide the skills our economy needs* for the future. (Prime Minister’s Office 2018, emphasis added)

The launch further referenced reforms within higher education, noting the HERA reforms and creation of OfS, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), access and widening participation, as well as a change to the tuition fee repayment threshold:

The government's reforms to the higher education system, implemented through the new Office for Students, are going further than ever before to deliver for young people. This includes holding universities to account for the teaching and outcomes [TEF] they deliver and shining a light on institutions that need to do more to widen access from disadvantaged groups. In October last year, the Prime Minister announced that the government would freeze tuition fees for 2018/19 and increase the amount graduates can earn to £25,000 before they start repaying their fees, putting money back into the pockets of graduates. (Prime Minister's Office 2018, emphasis added)

The presentation from the government at the launch of the review was to link together the post-18 education system. The tertiary discourse was made explicit in the Prime Minister's speech at the launch: "This is a review which, for the first time, looks at the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, so we can create a system which is truly joined-up" (May 2018).

The position of universities

The period 2017–2019 was one of multiple challenges for English universities. For their core activity of recruiting students, they were challenged through a downturn in the number of domestic 18-year-olds (Westwood 2017). While the rate of higher education participation continued to increase (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service 2019), the reduction in supply of standard-age students caused recruitment problems for many institutions (Corver 2019). The competitive environment was such that a growth in unconditional offers became rampant, and was considered by the Universities Minister and others to be a significant problem of universities' making (Fazackerley 2019; Weale 2019). In parallel, pressure to perform well in league tables – a driver of students' attraction to apply to particular institutions – resulted in widespread grade inflation, with the proportion of first class degrees doubling over the ten-year period 2008–2018 (Richmond 2018). The rise in unconditional offer-making and grade inflation were trends which started before the period of the Tertiary Review but both came to widespread public attention during it. Extensive industrial action also took place across dozens of university campuses following proposed reforms to one of the sector's main pension funds, the Universities Superannuation Scheme (Kernohan and Bagshaw 2018).

On the research and academic recruitment fronts, the consequences of the vote to leave the EU appeared to arise before the legal departure date, in that many universities reported issues accessing European research funding and attracting researchers (Weale and

O’Carroll 2017). The UK had been successful in attracting research funding through the EU’s Framework Programmes but the result of the referendum had diminished the attractiveness of partnering with UK institutions (Felix 2019). Uncertainty about other European funding schemes such as loans from the European Investment Bank or Structural Funds was also a source of anxiety, as was the potential for the continuation of participation in the staff and student mobility scheme ERASMUS+ (Bagshaw, A. 2016; Frostick 2017; Ali 2019). It has been estimated that university staff had voted 9:1 in favour of the UK remaining a member of the EU, and level of education was a major factor in voting behaviour, with more highly educated groups voting overwhelmingly to remain (Morgan 2016; *Times Higher Education* 2016). In combination, these factors placed many universities under financial strain as well as engendering reputational challenges.

I noted in chapter 1A that the creation of OfS under HERA in 2017 fundamentally changed the relationship of English universities and the state. In the past, they had had a “buffer-body” in the form of a funding council, which was deemed by some to have been the protector of institutions over students and taxpayers (Melville 2018). Marking the switch to a more combative regulatory stance is that some of the most prestigious universities, which had been allowed greater autonomy under the previous regime, were to be the subjects regulatory sanction (Havergal 2018). There was political dissatisfaction with universities as a whole, and a number of formal reports were published during the period that were critical of the functioning of the higher education sector and of universities within it. Table 2 provides a summary of a selection of significant reports and key findings.

Table 2 | Formal reports (selection) on higher education 2017–2019

| Report | Key findings (emphasis added) |
|--|--|
| National Audit Office <i>The higher education market</i> December 2017 | “The Department [for Education] increasingly relies on market mechanisms to deliver higher education, with 85% of the £9 billion annual funding now directly following students. Some aspects of market delivery have brought benefits: there is more choice for more capable candidates, and a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are entering higher education. However, <i>only 32% of students consider their course offers value for money, and competition between providers to drive improvements on price and quality has yet to prove effective.</i> ” (National Audit Office 2017, 10) |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee</p> <p><i>Treating students fairly: The economics of post-school education</i></p> <p>June 2018</p> | <p>“one form of higher education has become dominant: the growth in higher education during the 21st century has been almost entirely as a result of ever-increasing numbers of young people going to university to study for full-time undergraduate degrees. By contrast, the number of students graduating with other higher education qualifications (Levels 4 and 5) have [sic] declined in recent years and there were over 200,000 fewer part-time students in higher education in 2016 than 2010 ... Many graduates appear to be in jobs which do not require a degree-level education and at the same time, many businesses are reporting skills shortages, particularly at technician level. This suggests that in terms of labour market outcomes at least, <i>some graduates may have been better off considering other higher education qualifications that were cheaper, shorter and more relevant to the workplace</i> ... Our system of post-school education is not a system. It is unbalanced in favour of one route, and as a result offers <i>poor value for money to some individuals, taxpayers and the economy</i>. It requires immediate reform.” (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee 2018, 5–6)</p> |
| <p>House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts</p> <p><i>The higher education market</i></p> <p>June 2018</p> | <p>“The Government has recently introduced changes to the regulation of higher education to address concerns that students were not always getting a good service. <i>The original aim of introducing a market into higher education was that student choice and competition between providers would improve quality and value for money. In reality the planned for competition did not emerge.</i> Most students are teenagers when they apply and are too often not getting the right advice and support they need ... Shorter degree courses and part-time courses have also not emerged. A number of Government policies are aimed at widening participation in higher education and this has to be a focus <i>if the Government is serious about delivering its social mobility agenda. Experience shows that it cannot rely on the sector alone to deliver.</i>” (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 2018, 3)</p> |
| <p>House of Commons Education Committee</p> <p><i>Value for money in higher education</i></p> <p>October 2018</p> | <p>“higher education is still not as accessible as it should be, and <i>some institutions are failing in their efforts to admit a more diverse range of students.</i> We encourage universities to be more transparent about their contextualised admissions processes and invest their widening participation budgets in programmes which will lead to real change. The Government must urgently address the decline in part-time and mature students and re-introduce a system of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged students ... The <i>excessive salaries of Vice-Chancellors are disconnected from a value for money offer for students</i> ... We are pleased that there has been an increase in graduate employability data, but we are concerned about relying too heavily on the information to hold institutions to account. Alongside offering degree apprenticeships, <i>universities must move away from a linear approach and embrace more flexible types of learning.</i> Accelerated degrees should be made an option for more learners, alongside credit transfer, work placements and the ability to pause studying for periods of time. Only through a step away from the rigid, traditional three-year undergraduate study approach can universities ensure they are open to students from all backgrounds.” (House of Commons Education Committee 2018, 3)</p> |

Even at this summary level it is possible to see themes emerging in the political discourse around higher education of market failure, including institutions' inability to meet labour market needs and social mobility expectations, and poor value for money. These themes are essential contextual information for the Tertiary Review and, as I will show in part three on deconstruction, are expressed with significant commonality in the content of the Augar Report. It should also be noted that alongside these assessments of the market and value for money, a set of reports investigated the student loan system, raising the issue of the significance of the student loan system within the national accounts (National Audit Office 2018; House of Commons Treasury Committee 2018; Office for National Statistics 2018; Ebdon and Waite 2018). When these reports into student loan funding are added to the commentary on the failure of the tertiary education system – and particularly universities within that – there appears to have been critical mass of political interest for major reform through the Tertiary Review.

In the period 2017–2019, the policy discourse had significant elements of negativity about the higher education sector, the functioning of the market and the role and behaviour of universities in particular. This was strongly seen in formal reports, but also by others in the policy landscape including think-tanks, journalists and social commentators (see Wolf, A. 2017; Richmond 2018; Sodha 2018). Separately, universities were under pressure through challenging domestic student recruitment, industrial action and the impact of the EU membership referendum as noted above. University staff felt under attack (Middlehurst 2018), though there was evidence that the general public at large felt more positively about their role (Britain Thinks 2018). These factors conspired to place universities as weak actors, relative to a former higher status, in the political discourse (Shattock 2012). However, there were bigger forces at work in English politics which made the period one of policy inaction. With the government's ongoing challenge of EU exit and the absence of a working majority government, the period was one with a very low likelihood of change, even in an area such as tertiary education where the discourse demonstrated appetite for reform.

For the practitioner engaging with policy debates, there is significant value to be derived from looking at the immediate socio-political context. In this chapter, I outlined the significance of the government's lack of a majority in parliament and the pressure of trying to effect the UK's departure from the EU for diminishing the likelihood of significant change in public policy generally. That drag on change was countered by significant political enthusiasm

for reform as expressed particularly through reports from parliamentary bodies and government agencies which chose to expend their time and effort on questions of tertiary education reform. The enthusiasm for technical and vocational education, taken together with the range of issues identified for universities, suggested that major reform would be possible and therefore that practitioners should view the Tertiary Review as a serious and substantial exercise with the potential to effect change.

Chapter 2D: Contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures

This chapter explores the contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures relevant to our enquiry. It first considers the actors on the policymaking side of the review, with a particular focus on three individuals and three groups most relevant to the Tertiary Review. The role that this chapter plays is in the illumination of histories, connections and relationships which will be of use as we move to the analysis of the review texts. The texts are the product of individuals' and groups' work: it is therefore one valuable component of the contextualisation of the texts under scrutiny to consider how the positions, histories and viewpoints of those actors may have influenced the texts. This follows the Hyatt framework, which introduced the consideration of individuals and groups alongside the other contextual factors:

They will provide contextualising detail on the influence of actors and agents on the representation of the text, and the impact of these individuals on the discourse ... this section can help to elucidate the relationship between individuals and institutions, addressing the interrelationship between agency and structure, acknowledging the dialectical nature of the relationship between the individual and society, and informing how structural and institutional properties of society play a part in the constantly dynamic transformation of the (self)-construction of individuals. (Hyatt 2013a, 48)

As with the other chapters in this part, there has been deliberate selection of the scope of the exploration of the key individuals and groups. In the absence of interviews or other means of accessing information about those who influenced the review, it has been necessary to select those who appear explicitly linked to the texts and others adjacent to the texts. This chapter therefore reflects a selection of those identified as most significant to the thesis, taking proportionate care to explore the most significant characters without extending too far into investigation of any one individual. However, in spite of this necessary selective approach, it is possible to infer networks of influence over the review's activity and outcomes by drawing on published sources. In considering the dialogic dimensions of the Tertiary Review, this element provides illumination as to which actors are key active participants in the dialogue. Figure 6 shows the actors and stakeholders who will be considered in this chapter: the primary focus is on the three most significant actors and the three groups identified within the Tertiary Review itself.

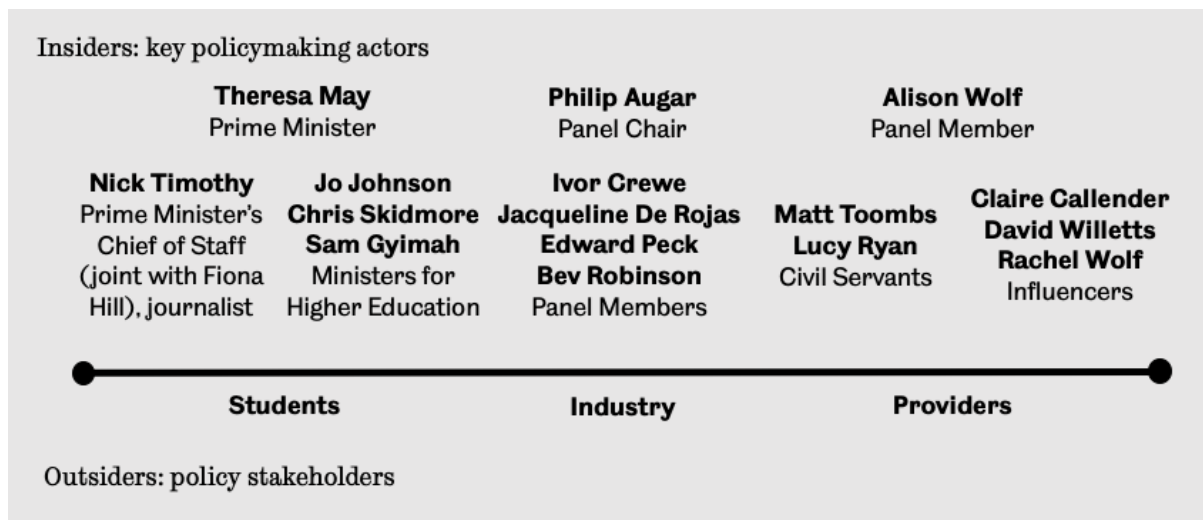


Figure 6 | Tertiary Review actors and stakeholders

Insiders: key policymaking actors

The three individuals of greatest significance to the Tertiary Review are Theresa May, Philip Augar and Alison Wolf, each of whom will be considered in turn alongside other relevant actors, as identified on Figure 6. The most significant of these individuals is Theresa May: the Tertiary Review was commissioned by her as the then Prime Minister. The perception of May's legacy as the UK's Prime Minister from July 2016 to July 2019 will most likely be characterised by the debates in that period on the country's exit from the European Union: as discussed above in chapter 2C, the period of the Tertiary Review coincided with political and policy inaction on a range of domestic policy issues. This was not, as can be seen in the existence of the Tertiary Review itself, to indicate a lack of will on the part of the Prime Minister or her government. To identify a prominent thread in her ideology, and one which links to a key plank of the review's mandate, it is possible to show in her inaugural speech as Prime Minister that she wished to emphasise tackling endemic inequality within her premiership:

fighting against the burning injustice that, if you're born poor, you will die on average 9 years earlier than others. If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white, working-class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately. If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand. If you're young, you'll find it harder than ever before to own your own home. But the mission to make Britain a country that works for everyone means more than fighting these injustices. (May 2016)

May repeated her motif of “the country working for everyone” in her final speech as Prime Minister: “I will continue to do all I can to serve the national interest. And play my part in making our United Kingdom – a great country with a great future – a country that truly works for everyone” (May 2019b). This focus is reflected in the Tertiary Review’s *Terms of Reference* which include the mandate for the review to ensure that the tertiary education provides “[a] system that is accessible to all” (Department for Education 2018a, 2).

The Tertiary Review was established to report to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond and the Secretary of State for Education. As a sign of her prominent role in the process, May spoke at the launch of the Tertiary Review and at the publication of the Augar Report (May 2018; May 2019a). The choice not to delegate this responsibility to a subordinate minister marks her strong interest in the agenda. At the launch event, the public contribution from the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, was confined to a quotation in the official press release (Prime Minister’s Office 2018). I have chosen not to focus on understanding the influence of Hammond or Hinds because it appears from the available literature that May chose to make the Tertiary Review a personal priority, so while there are other named parties, the focus of attention for the political leadership of the review should fall on May. The other people around the Prime Minister who should be taken into account are her special advisers and the Ministers of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, shown in Table 3. As with Hammond and Hinds, while the minister responsible for the higher education portfolio is an obviously significant individual in this context, the expression of the Tertiary Review was one led by May and as such she remains the most significant of the actors. It is also noteworthy, as Table 3 shows, that there was significant turnover in the ministerial brief covering higher education during the period covered by this inquiry.

Table 3 | Ministers of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation 2015–2020

| Dates | Holder |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| May 2015 – January 2018 | Jo Johnson |
| January 2018 – November 2018 | Sam Gyimah |
| December 2018 – July 2019 | Chris Skidmore |
| July 2019 – September 2019 | Jo Johnson |
| September 2019 – February 2020 | Chris Skidmore |

I have also chosen not to focus attention on other ministries including Further Education and Skills. The weight of the documentary evidence – that which represents the core texts of the Tertiary Review – leaves silent the role for these other potentially influential actors.

When considering May's premiership, significant emphasis has been placed on the role that key advisers played in shaping her ideological position (Kidd 2020). The most prominent of these advisers for the purposes of an analysis of the Tertiary Review is Nick Timothy. Timothy worked for the Prime Minister as a joint chief of staff in her office from her appointment to the post until shortly after the 2017 General Election; he was considered highly influential alongside Fiona Hill (Jarvis 2016; Asthana 2017). Timothy had been the author of – and took responsibility for the content of – the Conservative Party's General Election manifesto in 2017 which initiated the Tertiary Review (Asthana 2017). Timothy's views on education have been widely shared in the press, including highly critical views of universities and their funding: "We have created an unsustainable and ultimately pointless Ponzi scheme, and young people know it" (Timothy 2017).

Exploring May's position is an important component of the Tertiary Review because she made it a significant plank of her agenda. It is also therefore wrapped up in her failure to pursue a significant agenda because of the dominant role that exit from the EU played in her period in office. Furthermore, as Timothy left his position in May's office after the General Election in 2017 in which the Conservative Party performed less well than expected, his influence can be seen within the framing of the review, if less during its conduct. It is valuable for the analysis of the review to explore what the actors have said about it: the emphasis May placed on "working for everyone" is a core part of the review and therefore of the instruction provided to those charged with undertaking it.

The structure of the Tertiary Review included an expert panel from which the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Secretary of State for Education expected to receive "independent advice" (Prime Ministers' Office 2018). Exploring the membership of this group is essential to building the context for the review process and for identifying the influences and influencers within the policymaking system. Philip Augar chaired the panel and the output of its efforts are the Augar Report. In his introduction at the launch event, a fuller biography was published than for the other members:

Financial services expert and author. Had twenty-year career in the City as an equities broker (1970s-2000): led NatWest's global equity and fixed income division and was most recently Group Managing Director at Schroders with responsibility for the securities business. He was a non-executive board member at the Department for Education from 2004–2010 and at the Home Office from 2010–2014, where he was also Chairman of UK Border Agency in the months leading to its break up in 2013. He was a member of the cross-party Future of Banking Commission chaired by David Davis MP in 2010 and the same year advised the Scottish Parliament's inquiry into the banking crisis. He was an independent non-executive at KPMG and was a board member of the retail bank TSB plc. He holds a doctorate in History and is a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research. (Prime Minister's Office 2018)

This introduction contains many allusions to his expertise, not least the explicit description as an "expert". The biographical details outline his main full-time roles as well as his non-executive positions. The naming of several well-known businesses – NatWest, Schroders, KPMG and TSB – and references to public service contributions – Home Office, Future of Banking Commission – combine to project that Augar's experience spans government and finance. Given the funding review had, by definition, many financial dimensions these references serve to make a strong case that Augar is qualified by his experience to lead the expert panel. The inclusion of reference to his doctorate and fellowship adds an element of academic credentials, balancing the biography by providing reference to a different sort of experience but also implying that he is qualified to speak to matters of tertiary education, particularly academia.

It was unclear at the start of the panel's work how significant it would be within the review itself. However, as chair of that panel, Augar himself is an important figure. Not previously considered active within tertiary education policy, though clearly from his biography having had engagement with adjacent fields, he was a more unknown quantity – to the tertiary education policy sphere – than other members of his panel. One commentator put it that "Augar would never claim to be an [sic] household name or a [sic] education heavyweight" (Kernohan 2017). With little published regarding Augar's views on education or funding, while he is a significant figure, there is no additional commentary that can be added which might assist the practitioner to determine how his personal views or history might influence the progress of the panel.

The introduction of the panel members, as with Augar's introduction, further reinforced academic and public service credentials:

Jacqueline De Rojas – President of techUK and the chair of the Digital Leaders board. She also serves on the government's Digital Economy Council and was awarded a CBE for Services to International Trade in Technology in the Queen's New Year Honours list 2018.

Sir Ivor Martin Crewe – Master of University College, Oxford and President of the Academy of Social Sciences. He is the former Chair of the 1994 Group and President of Universities UK.

Edward Peck – Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University since August 2014. Previously, Professor Peck worked at the University of Birmingham as Director of the Health Services Management Centre and subsequently became Head of the School of Public Policy in 2006.

Bev Robinson – Principal of Blackpool and The Fylde College. She has over 20 years' experience in Further and Higher education colleges in England and has been awarded an OBE for her services to FE. (Prime Minister's Office 2018)

For the practitioner, the four panel members listed reflect the spread of sectoral interests that the panel was designed to cover, but there was little in the descriptions which suggested any specific policy inclination. However, among the panel was also Alison Wolf who had published extensively her views on how tertiary education should be organised, and had been a key contributor to major debates on the funding of education, expressing views which challenged the current policy paradigm (Willets 2017). Her introduction to the panel said:

Alison Wolf – (Baroness Wolf of Dulwich) a cross-bench peer in the House of Lords, and author of the influential Wolf Review of Vocational Education, published in 2011. She has advised the House of Commons select committee on education and skills as well as the OECD, the Ministries of Education of New Zealand, France and South Africa, and the European Commission among others. (Prime Minister's Office 2018)

Wolf's report for the Education Policy Institute (EPI) in 2016 is a precursor to many of the themes raised in the parliamentary reports noted in chapter 2C. Her report noted (emphasis added):

England's tertiary education system is larger than ever before. It is also, in its current form, extremely expensive, and set to become ever more so. Students are incurring large debts, but so is the taxpayer. *The large majority of students will not, on current trends, repay their loans in full, and the burden on the Exchequer is set to be several billion pounds for each and every annual cohort* of students entering university ...

Government education policy is predicated on the argument that economic growth is higher the larger the number of people holding university degrees, and that this relationship justifies further university expansion. However, *labour*

market data show that many graduates are working in non-graduate jobs, and that for many people, a degree is not associated with earnings that are well above the non-graduate average. Average future earnings vary enormously by type of degree, but also by institution. In some English universities, all degrees appear to have “zero returns” compared to the average for non-graduates ...

evidence from the period when such awards were common in England, and contemporary evidence from OECD countries where this is still the case, confirm that *sub-degree tertiary awards can have high labour market value ...*

The current system strongly encourages all higher education institutions to charge the maximum fee. In the university sector, price signals quality, so charging a lower fee than the prescribed maximum sends a negative signal. It also means fewer resources with which to supply a good education. For students, the current loan system means that a somewhat lower fee makes very little difference to how much they will repay and when, so it is rational to select by content and quality, not price. (Wolf, A. et al. 2016)

Wolf had set out a policy position so closely aligned to the *Terms of Reference* of the Tertiary Review, that it was reasonably expected at the time of her appointment to the panel that she would have a significant influence on the conduct of the panel's work and outcomes in the report. Wolf's critique of the university system was one repeated in different fora:

For England's highly-paid Vice-Chancellors, high fees and world-class research are the core of success. They behave like the CEOs the government urged them to be, rewarding themselves like business leaders, and focusing, business-like, on maximising revenue and reputation. (Wolf, A. 2017)

For the policy observer she is therefore the most significant of the panel members and interrogation of her published work was one way to develop an understanding of potential themes in the Tertiary Review. As if to confirm her influence on government policy, some time after the panel's conclusion, Wolf was appointed to advise the Johnson government on skills (Linford 2020). Wolf's political connections can also be seen through her family: her daughter Rachel Wolf – who had been a government adviser under David Cameron – co-wrote the Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2019 election (Wolf, R. 2019).

Completing the landscape of the actors of policymaking “insiders” are the civil servants who supported the expert panel, referenced in the Augar Report: “our hard working secretariat at the Department for Education led by Matt Toombs and Lucy Ryan” (Augar 2019, 6). Information about the secretariat was not available at the time of the launch of the Tertiary Review, nor information that other parties – including consultancy KPMG – would be contributing to the evidence-gathering for the Augar Report. For the practitioner, then, the significant available information related to Theresa May's stated views on tertiary education

within her broader equality agenda, and Alison Wolf's public position on the challenges facing tertiary education. Taken together with information available in the other chapters of this part, the practitioner could have reasonably concluded that significant policy reform would be the likely result of the Tertiary Review, including a rebalancing of emphasis from higher to further education.

Outsiders: policy stakeholders

While the key policymaking actors represented so far are individuals, there is also value in considering those impacted by the scope of the Tertiary Review, the policy stakeholders. These are groups rather than individuals, and in categorising them at this level there is an inevitable hiding of the diversity within each group. The choice of students, industry and providers reflects the groups identified at the outset of the review as those with whom Augar would consult, though I have chosen a more encompassing "industry" term to include what is otherwise referred to as "business" or "employer" (Prime Minister's Office 2018).

Students

The student interest was deemed important at the outset of the review: the interest of students, in economic terms, was referred to in the *Terms of reference*, with the point reiterated about the need to balance students' payments against taxpayers' interests (Department for Education 2018a). In contrast to the Browne Review, however, there was no student member of the expert panel (Browne 2010). The *Call for Evidence*, however, noted that the panel sought views from students as well as their representative organisations, a reference to providers' students' unions and the National Union of Students.

Industry

The industry interest is strong within the tertiary review, situated alongside students and providers, reflects the economic interest in the output of tertiary education as represented by labour market outcomes as discussed in chapter 2B. In the review's launch press release, a quotation from the Confederation of British Industry, an employer membership group, was included: "Businesses will be looking to the review to build on the strengths of our world-leading university sector and on the role further education plays in supporting the industrial strategy" (Prime Minister's Office 2018).

Providers

The expert panel contained representatives from providers, as noted above in this chapter, and the press release quoted the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (Prime Minister's Office 2018). It was notable that higher education providers did not have similar representation at the time.

In the case of students and industry, these groups would be privileged above providers, particularly universities as noted in chapter 2C, but their viewpoints would be judged in economic terms. The parameters for engagement were set by the review's terms as focusing on "value for money" for these stakeholders and not, for example, on non-financial outcomes such as quality of life measures of satisfaction with their experiences. The assumption, based on the contextual understanding, is that providers' viewpoints would not be given prominence in the review's conduct, a theme explored in the next part.

For the practitioner considering a policy process, exploring the personalities and groups involved is a useful exercise for better understanding the "why?" of a policy. As shown in this case, that exercise – when based on documentary sources – is simpler when the actors involved have published and are the subject of commentary. When it comes to the stakeholder groups, the analysis becomes more broad-brush, using assumptions and contextual details to provide the relative positioning of groups at a high level but without the specificity that can come from the interrogation of the work of individuals. It is useful, therefore, for the practitioner to reflect on how far this exercise can illuminate the understanding of a policy context: it is not in itself a complete analysis but needs to be situated alongside other information sources – such as those explored in the other chapters of this part – to develop a rich understanding.

Developing a fuller understanding of the positions of actors and stakeholders can be enhanced through media representations within both mainstream press and specialist media. In the case of the Tertiary Review, which attracted mainstream attention as seen from references above, the commentary of trade publications like *Times Higher Education* and *Wonkhe* also provides more detail for the practitioner. Many think-tanks, including those already referred to above – IFS and EPI – plus the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), publish extensively, demonstrating some of the connections and intersections between individuals and policy agendas (Beech 2020). The case of the Tertiary Review demonstrates

the value in looking to the primary sources for evidence of individuals' words, but also of considering influential texts and the role of news and commentary. This approach has its limitations, however, as the absence of direct engagement with actors and stakeholders' representatives leaves significant gaps in the level of detail available with which to build a rich understanding. This will always be a risk for the practitioner relying on evaluation of the extant texts.

This chapter has explored contemporary individuals and groups, first looking to the policymaking actors and then to outsider policy stakeholders. In moving between these two, there has been a transition from the specific consideration of individuals, personal agendas and policy positions, to a general assessment of large heterogenous groups. While it is useful – for the purposes of this analysis, considering the policy practitioner's viewpoint – to note the groups, there is much more useful detail to be gleaned from the specific agendas of the policymaking insiders, in this case particularly Theresa May and Alison Wolf. In the outsider groups, the review set out a hierarchy in which students and industry interests ranked above those of providers of education. For the provider-based practitioner this is a useful general piece of information which would support how they consider the relative impact that working with others might have in terms of influencing the review. As is the case across this thesis, the analysis has been built upon the Bakhtinian principle of meaning-making through dialogic interanimation: therefore the individual people as authors of texts provide an important dimension alongside structures and groups. This chapter concludes the temporal contextualisation and, when read alongside the other chapters in this part, provides a solid grounding of understanding from which to proceed to the deconstruction of texts from the Tertiary Review.

Part 3. Deconstructing the Tertiary Review

This part provides the detailed analysis of the Tertiary Review in England, drawing on the Hyatt framework (2013a) as described in chapter 1C. Returning to the overarching aim of this thesis, this part provides the essential bridge from the overarching “why?”, as explored in the previous part on the context, to the specifics of the Tertiary Review. To achieve this, I aim to conduct a focused policy deconstruction which targets those elements of the Tertiary Review of greatest use to the higher education practitioner. First, I consider *authority*, drawing on Bacchi’s “What is the problem represented to be?” framework (2012), policy drivers (Steer et al. 2007) and the concept of warrant (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001). The understanding developed in the chapter on authority provides the foundational basis for the next lens, of *consultation*. The consultation exercise, the Tertiary Review’s *Call for Evidence*, is the interface between the practitioner, as outsider, and the policymaking insiders. In this part I explore first what indicators there were in the language of the review about the desire to hear from outsiders. I then consider the implications in the questions posed to respondents before identifying from a selection of published responses the types of response made by outsiders. The final lens in this part considers *influence*: if the goal of responding to a consultation exercise is to shape the outcome, it is important to explore the role of the outsiders’ influence on the insider.

I noted in chapter 1C that I chose to relocate elements of the Hyatt (2013a) framework from his contextualisation of policy to deconstruction: I judged that the exploration of warrant in particular would fit better in this part on deconstruction, focusing attention in my contextualisation on the four temporal elements. I also note an active choice to diverge from the framework in choosing not to give attention to the concepts of policy steering or trajectories (Steer et al. 2007; Ball 2013). Instruments (Hood and Margetts 2007) are considered through the *Call for Evidence* in particular, but less attention is paid than might be for another policy inquiry. As I noted in chapter 1A, the Tertiary Review did not reach a formal conclusion: while there is the Augar Report, this is not the end point of the review. The absence of policy implementation in this instance necessitates the focus on some areas over others.

The aim of these three chapters of deconstruction is to focus effort, through a close reading of relevant texts and structured interrogation of the content, on that which the practitioner would want to know about a policy process in order most effectively to engage with it. Behind this aim is the principle – drawing on Bakhtin – that meaning is derived from

dialogic interanimation. With this in mind, the policy process is not a static one in which fixed terms are established by policymakers in authority, but the process of policy development is a contested one. As well as Bakhtin, I have had followed the Hyatt framework's recommendation:

Language, in this systemic-functional sense, is an interconnected series of systems which offer finite sets of choices in particular sets of circumstances to particular participants to make particular meanings. Any analysis of meaning in language, therefore, needs to consider both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. (2013a, 52)

I have therefore tried to flex within this part between exploration of the language in use and the surrounding extra-linguistic elements. Closely interrogating the texts in this way – exploring sequentially the set-up through authority, interaction through consultation and what can be seen of influence – aims to support the practitioner through rigorous and precise textual deconstruction.

Chapter 3A: Authority

This first chapter of deconstruction focuses on the policy drivers – the “why?” of the policy as expressed through representation of authority. I use Bacchi’s (2012) “What’s the problem represented to be” approach before turning to the role of the various intersecting warrants evident in the texts following (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001). The underlying assumption is that the texts express authority: the texts do not in themselves hold authority but reflect sources of power elsewhere (Reisigl and Wodak 2009). Using this definition of authority as invoking power, it is important to reflect on the relationship between the two concepts, noting that power is commonly used within discourse analysis to explore the relationships between actors (Wodak 2009, 35). Foucault draws the distinction between power and communication:

As far as this power is concerned, it is first necessary to distinguish that which is exerted over things and gives the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them – a power which stems from aptitudes directly inherent in the body or relayed by external instruments ... It is necessary also to distinguish power relations from relationships of communication which transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium. No doubt communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons. But the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former. Whether or not they pass through systems of communication, power relations have a specific nature. Power relations, relationships of communication, and objective capacities should not therefore be confused. (Foucault 1974, 786)

Ball provides a guide for what to look for in seeking evidence of power: “Policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things” (1993, 13). If one takes power in Foucault’s sense as “the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy”, or Ball’s “restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations”, then authority should be seen as the *invocation* of these ultimate powers but not the direct exercise of power. Authority in this reading is therefore the threat or implication of power.

In seeking the “why?” of the Tertiary Review, the exploration of authority – and its link to power – is a vital component because the power is so significant in its ability to change conditions, i.e. to force things to be different for universities or for students or for society at large. With understanding derived from this exploration of authority comes the ability to act

in ways which recognise that power, and through that to challenge it – subversively or overtly – or to embrace it. The implication is that the response, even if outwardly passive, reflects a deliberate choice in recognition of the power involved. The importance of representations of authority is why this is the starting point for the deconstruction of the texts in this policy analysis.

What problem is the Tertiary Review aiming to solve?

The starting point for the exploration of authority considers the expressed policy drivers of the Tertiary Review. Steer et al. provide a useful definition: “Policy drivers, whether expressed through official policy documents, ministerial exhortation or statements of government priorities in the mass media, may be taken as cues to action by those who manage and deliver public services” (2007, 177). To explore the drivers – the cues to action – I will use Bacchi’s (2012) “What’s the problem represented to be” approach, as described in chapter 1C, which uses seven prompt questions to unpack policies. The questions are reproduced below with commentary reflecting the texts of the Tertiary Review.

1. What’s the problem represented to be?

At the outset of the Tertiary Review process, the press release accompanying the launch laid out four problems that the process would look at (Prime Minister’s Office 2018):

Choice: identifying ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures. This could include more information about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, as well as ensuring they have access to a genuine range of high quality academic, technical or vocational routes.

Value for money: looking at how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies, to ensure funding arrangements across post-18 education in the future are transparent and do not stop people from accessing higher education or training.

Access: enabling people from all backgrounds to progress and succeed in post-18 education, while also examining how disadvantaged students receive additional financial support from the government, universities and colleges.

Skills provision: future-proofing the economy by making sure we have a post-18 education system that is providing the skills that employers need. This is crucial in boosting the UK economy and delivering on the government’s Industrial Strategy.

The framing of these points focused on what could be conceived as the “opportunity” side of the policy problem: the review offers “more”, “enabling”, “additional” and “boosting” opportunities in terms of outcomes. For process, the review offers “choices”, “routes” and “transparency”; the *Terms of Reference* declare that the review will “ensure a joined-up system that works for everyone” (Department for Education 2018a, 1), a high and all-encompassing ambition and one which resonated with the Prime Minister’s other speeches, as noted in chapter 2D. The terms are examples of evoked evaluation which link to the authors’, and their imagined readers’, ideological positions: “These evoked evaluations in themselves do not denote the text producers’ attitude to the content overtly, but leave the value judgement to the reader/listener” (Hyatt 2013a, 55). The choice of these positive terms is an active rejection of the negative; the stated aim of the review is not to “solve a problem” but to “seize an opportunity”. However, the framing of the problem is not *uniformly* positive across the texts.

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the “problem”?

The strongest underpinning assumption is the economic lens – the pursuit of “value for money” – adopted for the framing of the problem: the assumption is that tertiary education should be funded to achieve instrumental economic outcomes aligned to government policy, as seen in the reference to “Industrial Strategy” (HM Government 2017). The opportunities therefore are economic ones – consistent with the dominant conceptions of education outlined above in part two. This economic emphasis is tempered, however, by an angle of fairness through the “access” agenda of the review: this too is framed positively, around “progress” and individual success, which is consistent with the general approach of the review but which is an adjustment to the otherwise wholly economic presentation. This inclusion should not have been a surprise: as noted earlier in chapter 2D, the Prime Minister who commissioned the review had stated publicly her commitment to systems which “work for everyone” (May 2019b).

3. How has this representation of the “problem” come about?

These terms frame the problem as a positive and ambitious agenda, but, in contrast, the Tertiary Review’s *Terms of Reference* lay out the deficit which is perceived:

This review will look further at how we can ensure our post-18 education system is joined up and supported by a funding system that works for students and taxpayers. For example, in recent years the system has encouraged growth in three-year degrees for 18 year-olds, but does not offer a comprehensive range of high quality alternative routes for the many young people who pursue a technical or vocational path at this age. The majority of universities charge the maximum possible fees for at least some of their courses and three-year courses remain the norm. Average levels of graduate debt have increased, but this has not always led to higher wage returns for all graduates. And the system does not comprehensively deliver the advanced technical skills that our economy needs. (Department for Education 2018a, 1)

This is presented as a damning set of charges, particularly against universities as expensive and inefficient. References to skills typically align to FE, vocational education: across the whole tertiary spectrum, the provision of education – to meet the country’s “economic needs” – has been found wanting. The first line of the passage above is particularly instructive in this regard: the “system” will work “for students and taxpayers”. This assertion that there are two groups who should benefit reinforces the economic conception of the problem and, crucially, that the system need not be found to “work” for providers of education.

Thus the problem articulated in the Tertiary Review is that the systems and structures across further and higher education in England do not achieve the government’s economic ends, represented through the deficit in – and perceived opportunity to improve – the four dimensions of “choice”, “value for money”, “access” and “skills provision”.

4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

There is an implicit culpability on the part of providers for the creation, or perpetuation, of the problem which is not interrogated. Where the *Terms of Reference* refer to universities’ behaviour in the provision of courses, for example, as in the excerpt under question 3 above, there is no critical questioning of the extent to which this represents a full “truth” or why providers do this: they work within a policy framework and have made decisions in that context. Similarly, that courses of study have not led to higher salaries could arguably – in some cases at least – be a consequence of labour market forces as much as, or more than, the impact of qualifications (Belfield et al. 2018a). As will be explored later in this chapter, the manifestation of authority within the Tertiary Review

process as diminishing the role of universities in particular is a thread that will recur in the analysis.

There is a deliberate silence in the Tertiary Review about the mechanism of funding education. The *Terms of Reference* state that: “The review will not make recommendations related to the terms of pre-2012 loans or to taxation, and its recommendations must be consistent with the Government’s fiscal policies to reduce the deficit and have debt falling as a percentage of GDP” (Department for Education 2018a, 3). This limits what is otherwise described as a “wide-ranging” process (Prime Minister’s Office 2018). The deliberate exclusion of part of the full range of the areas plausibly available to review indicates that the problem has been identified and ringfenced rather than conceived of as open-ended. The economic lens used for framing the review also leaves silences for other benefits which might accrue through tertiary education such as social or cultural impacts.

5. Can the “problem” be thought about differently?

As noted in this chapter above, the Tertiary Review could have taken a broader lens than the economic: it could have looked at the education system in different ways, for example with a greater focus on equity of provision; it could have looked at further and higher education separately, or alongside other areas of education or of public policy. Defining the review as a tertiary one is consistent with the policy agenda, as discussed above in chapter 2C, but is an unusual choice given that previous reviews which have resulted in changes to higher education funding have been confined to that sector, as discussed in chapter 2A.

The Tertiary Review was initiated at the time of the 2017 General Election; this election saw a number of parties, notably the official opposition Labour Party, proposing to end students’ tuition fees entirely, an obviously attractive policy for many prospective students and their families, though one with significant cost to the general taxpayer (Labour Party 2017). There has been much debate as to whether establishing the review was an attempt to counteract this challenge, and therefore a highly politically focused review process (Wolf, A. 2017; Morgan 2020). The representation of the problem is consistent with the Conservative government’s agenda, as can be seen from the broader reforms to tertiary education outlined in chapter 2C above. Therefore, while it could be seen as reflecting a “political problem” posed as a reaction to another party’s political

stance, the weight of evidence is that the problem perceived was of greater significance for the government's public policy agenda.

6. What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

It could be argued that the way in which the problem was framed, combined with the history of parallel review processes resulting in increases to undergraduate tuition fee levels, led inevitably to a focus on the higher education side of the debate, to the neglect of further education. I believe that the framing did just this, and therefore that the following statement, made by the Prime Minister at the point of the Augar Report's launch, neglects to recognise – or conveniently forgets – the emphasis the government put on universities in its own description of the problem:

I found it rather telling that, despite the wide-ranging remit of the panel, in the year since the review was launched the debate has concentrated almost exclusively on what it will mean for universities. As the panel argues, this focus on academic routes at the expense of all others has left further education overlooked, undervalued and underfunded. (May 2019a)

The disappointment expressed in the 2019 speech also ignores the context for the announcement of the review at the Conservative Party's conference in 2017, which was explicitly about the higher education element:

it has been Conservative Education Secretaries who have driven the reforms that have widened access and raised standards. And it's why we want everyone to have the opportunity to benefit from studying more after they leave school. Because it's good for them and good for the country too. But today, young people take on a huge amount of debt to do so. And if we're honest, some don't know what they get from it in return. We have listened and we have learned. So *we will undertake a major review of university funding and student financing*. We will scrap the increase in fees that was due next year, and freeze the maximum rate while the review takes place. And we will increase the amount graduates can earn before they start repaying their fees to £25,000 – putting money back into the pockets of graduates with high levels of debt. (May 2017, emphasis added)

In advance of the review's launch on Monday 19 February 2018, indications of what would be announced appeared in the preceding Sunday's newspapers; these reports focused on students' fees and their content demonstrates – through the similarity across outlets and the accuracy of the details to be announced – that the stories were the result of a pre-briefing exercise:

- *Daily Mail online*: “Ministers slammed for plotting tuition fee reform that ‘flies in the face of what the economy needs’ by making arts degrees cheaper than engineering and science” (Sculthorpe 2018)
- *Financial Times*: “Theresa May seeks shift to vocational study in tuition fees review” (Wright, R. 2018)
- *Independent on Sunday*: “Student finance isn’t working, Theresa May admits as she launches major review” (Cowburn 2018)
- *The Sunday Times*: “Education secretary Damian Hinds: students to get cheaper places at university” (Shipman and Griffiths 2018)

That journalists appear to have been briefed in this way, and that they concluded that the focus of the review was on university tuition fees, strongly implies that the government’s representation of the problem was that it was seeking to solve the funding of universities, rather than emphasising the full suite of formal elements of the review, including the need for it to look across both further and higher education.

7. How/where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

In part two, I showed that dominant political discourses in tertiary education included the role of the market, and the role of tertiary education in supporting labour market productivity. Within this context, the review perpetuates an ongoing policy narrative of the problem of economic outcomes from education. Challenges to this conception therefore come from arguments for the wider social and cultural impacts of education and the notion of the broad public good rather than the focus on the individual’s instrumental outcomes. Many arguments have been raised against the neoliberal concept of higher education (see Ball 2012; Lynch 2015; Ball 2016; Sutton 2017; Dougherty and Natow 2019; Tight 2019) and in favour of a more socially focused view on the system of higher education (see Collini 2013; Collini 2017; Wolf, A. 2017). The dominant political discourses have been questioned extensively, although the ability for those analysts, researchers and commentators to disrupt this narrative appears to be limited in effect.

Using a narrower interpretation, the focus within the review itself on higher education – and universities in particular – as a key part of the problem was undermined, or confounded, by the Augar Report which focused on the changes required across

further education. The Report takes on board the full scope of tertiary education and does not default to questions solely of students' fees.

In the framing of the problem, it is possible to see the display of authority from the government reflecting its power over the organisations it controls through their regulatory architecture and direct and indirect funding. The cues given by the government through the Tertiary Review, seen through official documents and the Prime Minister's statements, were designed to assert the importance of the economic arguments for tertiary education, and to diminish the power of the providers of education – particularly universities – in line with market ideologies for neoliberal government. It has been argued that the review was established as a counterpoint to Labour's "free tuition" and while this may have been part of the purpose, I consider this motive to be subordinate to a wider agenda of the policy attention moving to a tertiary discourse and the strongly stated, and reiterated, charges laid against universities in particular for failing to deliver sufficient value for money in the purest of economic terms. While there is extensive published critique of the government's overarching market narrative, and of its narrow conception of the value of education for economic impact, the problem as represented is one which fits with the dominant narrative identified above across part two.

Warrant in the Tertiary Review

Following Hyatt (2013a, 50), I have chosen to explore the warrants which underpin the Tertiary Review using the tripartite disaggregation offered by Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001). The political, accountability and evidentiary warrants, which are all present in some form within the review process, provide insight into the source of power within the review: exploring the warrants as expressions of the authority of the review provides a route to understanding how its activities and outputs can have their power legitimated. For the outsider, exploring the different warrants illuminates how the policymaking insiders see and articulate their authority for the policy. A close interrogation of these therefore builds understanding of the role of that authority and its relationship to power, the ability to effect change through the policy process and outcomes.

The political warrant

The political warrant “refers to the way in which a policy is justified in terms of the public/national interest ... [and] is usually couched in more general, evocative and positively evaluated terms, such as freedom, social justice, inclusion, social cohesion or family values” (Hyatt 2013a, 51). I noted above in this chapter the positive framing of the problem which expresses the “good” in the policy area. In this part I explore how that policy area was situated against the government’s authority and therefore the basis on which it might exercise power for change through the Tertiary Review.

I noted in chapter 1A that the origin of the Tertiary Review sits within the Conservative Party’s manifesto for the 2017 General Election (Conservative and Unionist Party 2017, 53). The party was returned as the largest in parliament with a total of 318 out of 650 available seats. This left the party short of an overall majority, but it governed with the support of the Democratic Unionist party’s ten members of parliament. While the Conservative Party was not returned with a majority, it was clearly the largest party – Labour came second with 262 seats – and it had received 42.4 per cent of the vote against Labour’s 40.0 per cent. The General Election is the most significant democratic event within UK politics and therefore the agenda, as set out in the manifesto, of the winning party sets the programme for the forthcoming parliamentary term. Within the UK’s constitution, the Queen as sovereign sets out her government’s agenda through a speech at the opening of parliament. The speech following the 2017 General Election did not specify the terms of the

tertiary funding review but spoke in more general terms of the government's agenda: "My ministers will work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education" (United Kingdom 2017). The term "technical education" is not a complete synonym for tertiary education, but when adjacent to "skills ... for ... jobs" is sufficiently close to the review's intentions as to be seen as a relevant reference. The statement of intent to hold a review within the manifesto of the winning party, and incorporation of the intention to seek reform in technical education within the Queen's speech, represent a strong and public political warrant for the establishment of the Tertiary Review.

In the General Election of 2019, the Conservative Party reiterated the political warrant for what it called "The Augar Review" and stated that, if the government were to win, then it would "consider [the recommendations] carefully" (Conservative and Unionist Party 2019, 37). The Conservative Party won 365 of 650 seats, giving it a comfortable majority against Labour's second place of 203. The Conservatives won 43.6 per cent of votes to Labour's 32.2 per cent. This increased mandate for the Johnson government provides significant scope for a range of responses to the Tertiary Review process and Augar Report; in this respect, the political warrant was renewed and – particularly given the size of the government's parliamentary majority – the authority conveyed by this status is highly significant and unlikely to be challenged successfully by any countervailing force.

In the case of the Tertiary Review, the political warrant is articulated through the importance of achieving positive change in education for the "better" achievement of primarily economic goals, with some consideration of social effects and fairness. This was enabled through "hard" political authority derived from the endorsement of Conservative governments' policy through the General Elections of 2017 and 2019.

The accountability warrant

Related to the political warrant is the role of accountability for the delivery of public services as "the grounds for action based on results or outcomes" (Hyatt 2013a, 51). In the discussion on the role of OfS and the relationship of the Tertiary Review to the broader reform agenda for higher education, there were references to the perceived need for universities to improve their performance on fair access and value for money. In these respects – demonstrated as definitional to the problem identified as the rationale for the review – it is possible to see an amassing of the case for an "accountability warrant". To extend the earlier

discussion, and again to focus specifically on the higher education dimensions of the review process, it is possible to identify disparities in how accountability is expected for different parts of the sector. In her speech at the launch of the Augar Report, the Prime Minister positioned universities as having the greatest value when they are “world-leading”:

prospective students in this country are blessed with many of the best universities in the world – four of the top 10 and almost a fifth of the top 100, according to the latest rankings. (May 2019a)

This statement echoed one in the speech May gave at the launch of the Tertiary Review: “Our universities are world-leaders and jewels in Britain’s crown. 16 British universities are in the world’s top 100, and four are in the top ten” (May 2018). In identifying the “world-leading” universities in this way, the implication – made without a level of critical assessment of the validity of such rankings, which have been challenged (Lim 2018) – is that these universities are performing well, and therefore others are not. This identified hierarchy is also evident elsewhere in the launch speech in this vignette describing a hypothetical student:

She is a girl from a middle class background, who is privately educated. Her dream is to be a software developer, and she wishes she could go straight into the industry. But she faces another set of pressures, which tell her that studying academic A-levels and making a UCAS application to a Russell group university is what the world expects of her. (May 2018)

Asserting in this case that the goal for this student ought to be to attend a “Russell group university” betrays the arbitrary (Bagshaw, A. 2017b) and unjustified (Boliver 2015) hierarchies which exist in common conceptions of the UK’s universities.

On the one hand, May had asserted that some universities are worthwhile, but also identifies that there are problem cases: “while the majority provide good outcomes for students, we know that is no longer true across the board” (May 2019a). This statement, of knowing which programmes provide “good outcomes”, implies a reference to the DfE-commissioned research into different graduate outcomes (Belfield et al. 2018a). The accountability warrant is thereby established: the government asserts that some universities perform well and others poorly, and therefore – on the terms of economic return from investment in higher education, dominant in the discourse and the centre of the review – the poor performers must be held to account. In part this argument is anchored in the data on differential returns, but this data-led accountability is clouded by perceptions of prestige which pervade common notions of excellence in higher education. Following the contextualisation, this articulation of accountability appears consistent with the discourse in

terms of marketisation and the trend of higher education regulation to focus on the delivery of “good” outcomes from the market.

The evidentiary warrant

The final element of the expression of warrant in the Tertiary Review explores the use of “evidence” as justification for the policy: “The evidentiary warrant is ... based on the establishment of the credibility and trustworthiness of the evidence. It claims its justification is based on empirical evidence (facts) and so is constructed as undisputable” (Hyatt 2013a, 51). This should be seen not as separate from the first two warrants but interconnected with them: the three operate together so as to be mutually-reinforcing.

I will explore in more detail across the following two chapters the role of evidence within the review process, how it was gathered and the influence it can be seen to have had on the process. There is a strong thread of the evidentiary warrant within the Tertiary Review: the establishment of the expert panel – including its very description as expert and the carefully-chosen panel membership discussed in chapter 2D – demonstrates the interest in establishing an evidential basis for the outcomes of the review process via the Augar Report and the conflation of expertise with evidential indisputability. The Prime Minister said that the “report is a ground-breaking piece of work, because it is one that sets out in compelling detail the challenges confronting all of us who care about post-18 education in all its forms” (May 2019a). The term “compelling detail” conveys a significant emphasis on the role of evidence within the reporting process and projects a wholesale acceptance of the basis on which the report was produced. The Augar Report’s production was supplemented by additional research to expand the evidentiary base for its findings. The Department for Education published reports including two on attitudes to the student finance system (Looney et al. 2019; Brown 2019) and one on international tertiary education systems around the world (Greatbatch and Tate 2019). This commissioned research supplemented that which was received via the *Call for Evidence* and the panel’s other consultative activities. The investment in this commissioned research demonstrates a strong interest in the evidentiary warrant for the outcomes and recommendations of the Augar Report. From the outset and through the conduct of the Tertiary Review, particularly via the expert panel, there were multiple threads of narrative supporting the proposition that the process had a strong evidential basis.

I have identified the operation of the three warrants which work in combination to convey the authority behind the Tertiary Review. The “hard” political warrant is the most explicit in following a pattern from manifesto to election to enacted policy. There is also a strong thread of accountability and the perceived problems with universities, although the case is clouded by references to factors which are unrelated to the accountability which the review’s supporters claim is being sought. The evidentiary warrant is a strong theme within the review process, which is explored further below: the significance to the government of this element is signalled through the establishment of the expert panel and its activities, including commissioned research. These design features have the potential to represent a significant level of authority for the review process which provided it with a basis from which its conclusions or outcomes could be substantiated.

Authority and power in the Tertiary Review

The Tertiary Review – in its description of the problem and through its conduct – reinforced evolving power dynamics in higher education. It has already been noted how the regulatory changes for English higher education through HERA changed the relationship between institutions and the state. The Tertiary Review reinforced these changes to the system which can be seen through explicit reference to the overall policy agenda. The case for the creation of OfS stated that the aim was for:

A new body that has from the outset a focus on the student interest and introduction of new systems and priorities will be fundamental in driving forward effectively the proposed reforms and efficiencies. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016a, 7)

The agenda for OfS was deliberately one which set itself aside from providers (i.e. universities):

The OfS and its staff will interact with all the diverse aspects of the higher education sector, always acting in the student interest. The OfS will be self-aware and, drawing from behavioural science, protect itself against the risk of internal biases and the resulting provider capture that can ensue. (Department for Education 2017, 39)

At the outset of the Tertiary Review, OfS was invoked as a key tool of government for holding institutions to account:

The government's reforms to the higher education system, implemented through the new Office for Students, are going further than ever before to deliver for young people. This includes holding universities to account for the teaching and outcomes they deliver and shining a light on institutions that need to do more to widen access from disadvantaged groups. (Prime Minister's Office 2018)

At the point the Augar Report was published, OfS – and its powers as a regulator – was again invoked as the tool for controlling the behaviour of providers:

the [Augar] report rightly calls for further action to drive out the minority of degrees that are of poor quality – and I hope to see the Office for Students using the powers we have given it to do just that. (May 2019a)

The problem of universities not meeting the government's expectations for the quality of provision was a thread which ran through policy agendas from at least as early as 2015 into the Tertiary Review process. The review was therefore not a novel expression of the problem but a continuation of an agenda. The creation of the regulator in OfS, coupled with a major review of the funding of the sector, represents a significant exercise of power on the part of government over a key element of public policy. For the practitioner, it is important therefore to see the expression of authority – and invocation of power – within the specific policy of the Tertiary Review but also to relate that to wider changes in the exercise of power over the sector.

This chapter has explored the concept of authority within the Tertiary Review by considering the representation of the problem which the review aimed to solve and the types of warrant which underpinned the authority of the review. The Tertiary Review reflects and reinforces the evolving power dynamic between universities and government in England, and proposes the further transfer of power – through market levers – to the hands of students, enforced by the sector regulator. The review process also leveraged the government's power to place economic interests, expressed through the needs of businesses, at the centre of the policymaking process. This application of power to control universities is consistent with the government's broader policy agenda, particularly the establishment and operation of OfS. For the practitioner, understanding this dynamic is essential: these are innate features of the policy debate and must therefore be taken into account – and critically interrogated – when considering how best to respond to the policy agenda as presented.

Chapter 3B: Consultation

This chapter explores how consultation is represented within the Tertiary Review policymaking process. It builds on the description of policy consultations outlined in chapter 1A and explores the imbalance of information between policymakers as insiders and those responding to consultations as outsiders. The aim in this chapter is to apply analytical tools to support the outsider practitioner's engagement with policymaking; this chapter adds to the overall analysis by seeking to understand the "why?" of the policy within the "how?" of the consultation process. The aim is to build the practitioner's level of understanding which would allow them to optimise their consultation response. This exploration is situated within the Bakhtinian approach, using the premise that meaning-making is achieved through the interanimation of texts: the policymaking consultation process is a transactional interanimation, formalised in its conduct. Exploring the dimensions of this process – through the texts of the Tertiary Review – builds the case study within this thesis from which general conclusions can be extrapolated.

For the analysis in this chapter, I apply a close reading of relevant texts, drawing on the deconstruction principles outlined in the Hyatt (2013a) framework, to three elements of the consultation process. The first seeks signs of policymakers' appetite for active engagement with outsiders. The second looks at a selection of the questions in the *Call for Evidence* to identify themes and patterns. In the third part of this chapter I discuss a selection of published responses to the *Call for Evidence* to learn how respondents to the consultation interpreted the exercise and the form of their responses. My selection approach is consistent with the literature on higher education stakeholder policy analysis in choosing to evaluate the published material from representative organisations. Organisations' submissions are "relatively easy to access and collect, and suitable for various approaches to analysis, leading to better understanding of higher education governance" (Vukasovic 2019, 2).

The three elements of analysis in this chapter provide a rich understanding, rooted in relevant texts, which support the synthesis in chapter 4A and provide a foundation for the practitioner framework in 4B. The analysis also provides a basis for the following chapter which explores, within the overall review, and therefore including the consultation process, the degree to which different parties were likely to be influential, and the extent of that influence.

What indicates insiders' appetite for outsiders' responses to the Tertiary Review?

It was apparent from the launch of the Tertiary Review that Philip Augar would conduct a consultation, and that this approach would be contained within his panel's work, explicitly nested within this element of the overall review process. The asymmetry of information between policymaking insiders and stakeholder outsiders is evident in the Tertiary Review: while there is reference to the exercise to be undertaken, there is absent any explicit qualifying statement about how significant that element is expected to be. For the outsider, it is only at the end of the policymaking process that it is possible to see – and then, only obliquely – the impact of that consultation exercise on the policymaking process as a whole. While it is not possible to understand, even in that imperfect way, the nature of consultation until the end through a retrospective analysis, I believe that there is value in aiming to identify what could have been seen of the intentions for consultation in the early stages of the process, specifically in advance of any outsider preparing their written response. This analysis is useful in supporting the practitioner viewpoint: I seek out that which was available to the practitioner as the outsider to identify what might have been reasonable for them to know at the outset of the consultation exercise.

I adopted a systematic approach to look for signs in the language used across the published documents identifying instances of specific language use. The aim is to seek out within the texts signifiers of the policymakers' appetite for *active* participation with outsiders, indicating a desire for engagement and therefore potential willingness to be influenced in the development of policy. To achieve this first-level analysis I identified a list of key words which evoke that activity: seven verbs (consult, discuss, engage, hear, involve, listen, receive) and four nouns (dialogue, evidence, stakeholder, view). This list was derived from a combination of reading the texts and considering from first principles the words which might indicate consultation. Three words (contribution, partner and participation) were considered and rejected from the analysis because they appeared extensively within the text but were used only in regard to the policy itself – e.g. participation in higher education – and therefore were found to be unhelpful to this specific question. To find the words I used the computer program search function, and the count of words also includes variants – i.e. consult, consults, consultation, consulted – to ensure that all the uses were captured. While this approach provides useful *indications* of the expressed appetite, I note

that it should not be seen as revealing a definitive stance on the part of the policymakers as it is not possible to know whether their inclusion or omission of words is accidental or deliberate. Note too that the count is absolute and that the frequency is not relative to document length, and that frequency does not equate to significance. For this starting-point analysis, however, the approach was sufficient to identify the most relevant passages of text and reflects the premise of seeking that which would have been available to the practitioner at the time of the review.

Table 4 shows the results of this frequency count relating to consultation across the texts available in advance of the formal consultation exercise. As can be seen, the emphasis on “evidence” is strongest, though many of these instances reflect the choice to name the document *Call for Evidence*, itself a very significant point of emphasis on that which was sought out, and valued, by the panel.

Table 4 | Indicators of consultation (1 of 2)

| Word* | PM launch speech (May 2018) | Launch press release (Prime Minister’s Office 2018) | Terms of Reference (Department for Education 2018a) | Call for Evidence (Department for Education 2018b) |
|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Consult | - | - | 1 | 8 |
| Dialogue | - | - | - | - |
| Discuss | - | - | - | 1 |
| Engage | - | 1 | - | 3 |
| Evidence | - | 1 | - | 17 |
| Hear | - | 1 | - | - |
| Involve | - | - | - | - |
| Listen | - | - | - | - |
| Receive | - | - | - | - |
| Stakeholder | - | 1 | - | - |
| View | 1 | - | - | 1 |

* Includes variants

In the press release for the launch of the review, all four of the references noted in Table 4 come from the quotation attributed to Philip Augar. His quotation said:

I look forward to engaging widely with students, business, and providers across the post-18 education landscape. This is a wide open and far reaching review. We begin with no preconceptions and our first priority will be a serious examination of the evidence and hearing from a broad range of stakeholders who like us are committed to ensuring the system works for everyone. (Philip Augar, in: Prime Minister's Office 2018, emphasis added)

The inclusion of the consultation references within Augar's quotation – and the fact that they were confined to this reference – firmly places consultation exclusively within the remit of the expert panel. The invitation is an expansive one, and the terms “widely”, “wide open”, “far reaching” and “broad range” give a sense of the large scale of the inquiry Augar's panel would lead. While that is open, it is not consultation without constraint: in the first part of his quotation – the passage below comes before that reproduced above – he reinforces the government's message of the problem which needs to be solved:

I am delighted to chair this crucial review and to work alongside an excellent panel experienced in many different parts of the tertiary education sector. A world class post-18 education system has never been more important to business, society and the economy. We will be focused on ensuring that the system meets those needs by driving up access, quality, choice and value for money for students of all kinds and taxpayers. (Philip Augar, in: Prime Minister's Office 2018, emphasis added)

In this respect, it is reasonable to conclude that while the consultation would be expansive, there was still at the outset the expectation of an exercise which would not – contrary to Augar's own claim – have “no preconceptions”, but in fact had a clear statement of problem and mandate to use the process to achieve “value for money”. This is consistent with the description of the problem explored in chapter 3A, above. Augar in this quotation declared the bounds within which the consultation would be “open”. Table 4 also demonstrates the extensive silences where any other indication of appetite for active engagement might sit. The absence of words such as listen (and its variants) across the texts indicate a low appetite for outsiders' engagement with the policy process.

As I noted in the previous chapter, public information about the written consultation exercise was more extensive than the information available about the other forms of engagement the panel had with stakeholders. While there is a higher level of openness than for those other activities, there is still an absence of clarity about what influenced the panel and where that is reflected in the report. In Table 5, below, I repeat the exercise shown in Table 4 with the indications of consultation within the key texts related to the Augar Report.

Table 5 | Indicators of consultation (2 of 2)

| Word* | PM report speech (May 2019a) | Augar Report (Augar 2019) | Evidence summary (Pye Tait Consulting 2019) | Evidence approach (Department for Education 2019) |
|-------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Consult | - | - | 5 | - |
| Dialogue | - | - | - | - |
| Discuss | - | 2 | 10 | 1 |
| Engage | - | 1 | - | 5 |
| Evidence | 1 | 103 | 30 | 10 |
| Hear | 2 | 17 | - | 1 |
| Involve | - | - | - | - |
| Listen | - | - | - | - |
| Receive | - | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Stakeholder | - | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| View | 1 | 21 | 99 | 1 |

* Includes variants

In this assessment, it is clear that the term “evidence” has primacy within the hierarchy of the process. Many of the instances (n = 26) refer to the term “call for evidence”, though it is most striking how often the term is invoked within the Augar Report. This assertion of “evidence” is made without the possibility of an external observer confirming the veracity or simply checking the source: referencing within the Augar Report is incomplete for the purposes of verification. I believe that the term “evidence” in this format is used to convey authority – reflecting the evidentiary warrant as discussed in chapter 3A – but without the tools that an external observer would want to use in order to confirm whether the “evidence” represents an observable or verifiable truth. As with the earlier set of documents, the silences created by the other words which could have conveyed appetite for active engagement are significant for developing an understanding of the nature of consultation in this process.

Evidence can be disputed: as the approach to evidence gathering states, the *Call for Evidence* elicited “views and evidence” (Department for Education 2019, 2), and variants of the word view appear extensively (n = 99) in the summary of the *Call for Evidence* (Pye Tait Consulting 2019). This both demonstrates an understanding that evidence is contestable and serves to diminish the status of that which was received through the consultation exercise by reducing it to the personal rather than the objective. The description of the role of views

within the consultation response summary illustrates the authors' position on the status of respondents' views:

Where a commonly-held *view* is expressed in the report, this does not mean all other respondents said something different, rather that they may have a *view* but chose not to raise it overtly ... the main focus is on exploring the qualitative *views* submitted by respondents. However, in considering the findings of the analysis, it is important to bear in mind that *views* gathered through an open consultation exercise cannot be regarded as representative of the *views* of the population as a whole. Rather, they are the *views* of those who have chosen to respond. (Pye Tait Consulting 2019, 11, emphasis added)

This personalisation of attribution is reinforced in the document's disclaimer: "The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education" (Pye Tait Consulting 2019, 60). The use of "view" to personalise is also present in the Augar Report when ten instances of the use are in the form "our view", for example: "*Our view* is that whilst overall funding should be more differentiated between subjects, fees for the student should not. The panel noted that the vast majority of commentators and call for evidence respondents were also of the view that fees should not be differentiated" (Augar 2019, 104, emphasis added). This approach is also present in the Prime Minister's speech: "But *my view* is very clear: removing maintenance grants from the least well-off students has not worked, and *I believe* it is time to bring them back" (May 2019a, emphasis added). "View", and its variants, are used to do two distinct tasks in the texts of the Tertiary Review: first, to subordinate consultation responses below evidence; second, to personalise the statements and reinforce specific attribution. These uses are consistent but are different in application: the first use is akin to "belief", and therefore can be dismissed as unevicenced, and the second projects "considered judgement", having weighed the evidence and drawn a conclusion.

The expert panel received a large number of submissions, and therefore had a significant task to evaluate and sort its evidence to come to its conclusions:

We have been helped by constructive engagement with students – particularly through our student reference group – employers and further and higher education institutions and their representative bodies. Our work has been informed by almost 400 respondents to our call for evidence, by discussions with academic and other experts and by visits to a great many educational institutions. (Augar 2019, 6)

This passage reflects the sole instance of the word "engagement" (or variants) within the Augar Report: this could be interpreted as a rejection of engagement processes in

policymaking which are designed with a higher order of participation from identified stakeholders. In this instance, “engagement” is a term reserved for students to the exclusion of others, including providers. I believe that the selection of language around the consultation process – to diminish the interactive in favour of evidence acquisition by the panel – was deliberate, in part because there is an example of the recognition of the value of consultation contained within the Augar Report in reference to the recommendations: “Implementation must be planned carefully with adequate consultation and transition time” (Augar 2019, 205).

The Tertiary Review used carefully controlled consultation, and limited the influence through containment within the work of the expert panel. Consultation focused on the acquisition of evidence in such a way as to leave the panel with the responsibility of evaluating that evidence on its own terms and using it for its own ends. The panel commissioned additional reports to add to this evidence base. It is not possible to make an external judgement as to how far the conclusions of the Augar Report are justified by the evidence because it is inadequately referenced for this purpose. For example, the following passage states that “repeated evidence” was received but does not provide the reader with the ability to make their own judgement on the quality of that evidence:

Skills shortages are certainly to be expected in a buoyant economy with full employment but when they persist over a long period in particular occupations, they indicate failings in the education and training system. *The panel heard repeated evidence of such long-standing problems.* These systemic failures are of particular concern in a fast-changing labour market characterised by shortening job cycles in which the nature of work can change every decade, the steady advance of automation and artificial intelligence, and fierce global competition. (Augar 2019, 25, emphasis added)

Similarly, the use of “anecdotal evidence” is used in the report, again without reference which would enable a judgement to be made as to whether that was a significant finding: “We found some anecdotal evidence that initiatives such as TEF have driven HEIs to renew their focus on teaching and learning practices” (Augar 2019, 75). While, alongside the publication of the main report, there were additional texts providing a summary of the consultation responses, and a summary of the approach of the panel to evidence acquisition, these too provide insufficient information from which to determine how and where the written consultation had influence within the activities of the panel. The diminution of the responses to the *Call for Evidence* as “views” subordinates the input, leaving the panel to judge what it constituted to be “evidence”. These factors lead to the conclusion that the appetite for active engagement with outsiders’ responses was limited in this instance.

What do the *Call for Evidence* questions imply about the consultation?

The *Call for Evidence* offers respondents 16 questions unevenly distributed across the four core areas of the Tertiary Review, including a first question which invites comment on respondents' overall priorities. The questions selected and the language used in their formulation provides a route to understand the values of the authors. In Table 6, I have considered excerpts from the list questions, choosing to focus on those which – in their structure and content – raise issues of pertinence to this analysis. In doing so, I actively exclude some of the questions though the list has been reproduced in full in Appendix A. Through this approach, I identified the implications arising from the choice of language and their inclusion within the list of questions.

Table 6 | Implications in the Tertiary Review Call for Evidence questions

| Text (excerpt) | Implication(s) |
|--|--|
| Q2 [H]ow do [people] choose one route over another: for instance, between academic, technical and vocational routes? | That there is a clearly understood, or understandable, distinction between three separate routes: 1, academic; 2, technical; 3, vocational. |
| Q4 In recent years we have seen continued growth in three-year degrees for 18 year-olds. Does the system offer a comprehensive range of high quality alternative routes for young people who wish to pursue a different path at this age? | That the growth in three-year degrees for 18 year-olds is not wholly positive That not all provision is of high quality. |
| Q5 The majority of universities charge the maximum possible fees for most of their courses and three-year courses remain the norm. How can Government create a more dynamic market in price and provision between universities and across the post-18 education landscape? | That there is a problem inherent in universities charging the maximum possible fee. That it would be better for a “more dynamic market” to be in place, and that the differentiator in the market would be the financial price as opposed to a proxy, for example, entry standards. |
| Q6 What barriers do current and new education and training providers face in developing innovative or diversified provision? | That barriers exists for new providers. That new providers, if barriers were removed, would create innovative provision. |

| | | |
|-----|--|---|
| Q7 | How can Government further encourage high-quality further education and higher education provision that is more flexible? | That flexibility in provision is inherently good. |
| Q10 | How should students and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds best receive maintenance support, both from Government and from universities and colleges? | That some students should receive maintenance support (financial support for the costs of living). That that support should be provided jointly by government and providers. |
| Q12 | How can Government ensure there is world-class provision of technical education across the country? | That there is an objective measure of “world-class”. That high quality provision must be geographically distributed. |
| Q15 | What are the best examples of education and training providers ensuring efficiency in the method of course provision while maintaining quality? | That it is possible to maintain quality while also pursuing financial efficiency in provision. |
| Q16 | What are the ways that Government can increase the value for money of post-18 education? | That “value for money” is an important and objective goal, and that it can be increased. |

The questions above and the implications outlined reinforce the economic and financial value placed by the policymakers in their construction of the Tertiary Review. They also betray some of the assumptions held about the problem that the review process is meant to solve, many of which revolve around the functioning of the market and the actors' roles in the idealised education market. For the policymakers, the Tertiary Review aims to create a market in which the products and services are high quality and low price, providing value for the recipient and for any government subsidy. Students are able to make informed choices through the information available, but also able to have confidence in the overall quality of the system. Employers are able to have confidence in provision and a supply of the skilled workers they need. The implications arising from the questions serve to confirm the outsider's understanding, derived from the contextual information available about the review, and about policymaking in tertiary education at the time, that the narrow economic focus was the priority and that that would be the focus of the appetite for active stakeholder engagement from the panel.

How did respondents shape their responses to the *Call for Evidence*?

As noted in the Augar Report, the *Call for Evidence* received around 400 submissions and these were summarised in a publication alongside the main report (Augar 2019; Pye Tait Consulting 2019). It is not possible for a researcher to analyse all of the responses to prepare their own report and compare it against the official publication: not all of the submissions are available in the public domain. The goal of exploring submissions is not then to seek a complete assessment of that which was received by the panel but to consider ways in which different organisational responses are presented, in order to make observations on any apparent themes or patterns. Noting this limited goal, I have selected 14 publicly available reports from a range of organisations, identified as those operating in tertiary education, to explore how key practitioners, listed in Table 7, chose to respond to the *Call for Evidence*. The selection follows Vukasovic (2019) in focusing on those organisations for which the information is most readily available, and further encompassing the breadth of tertiary education and a range of perspectives.

Table 7 | Call for evidence submissions

| Name | Type of organisation | Reference |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| British Academy | Learned society, for the humanities and social sciences | Wright, A. 2018 |
| Gatsby Charitable Foundation | Charity, focus on technical education among other priorities | Sainsbury 2018 |
| GuildHE | Higher education provider membership organisation (representative body) | GuildHE 2018 |
| HEPI | Think-tank | Hillman 2018 |
| IFS | Think-tank | Belfield et al. 2018b |
| Independent Higher Education | Higher education provider membership organisation (mission group) | Independent Higher Education 2018 |
| Million+ | Higher education provider membership organisation (mission group) | Palmer 2018 |
| National Union of Students | Federation of students' unions, for students in FE and HE | National Union of Students 2018 |
| Royal Society | Learned society, for science | Royal Society 2018 |
| Russell Group | Higher education provider membership organisation (mission group) | Russell Group 2018 |
| Sutton Trust | Charity, focus on social mobility | Sutton Trust 2018 |
| University Alliance | Higher education provider membership organisation (mission group) | University Alliance 2018 |
| University and College Union | Trade union, for staff in FE and HE | University and College Union 2018 |
| Universities UK | Higher education provider membership organisation (representative body) | Universities UK 2018 |

It is notable that only about half of those in the sample chose to shape their responses directly around the format of the questions in the *Call for Evidence* (GuildHE 2018; Independent Higher Education 2018; National Union of Students 2018; Palmer 2018; Sutton Trust 2018; University Alliance 2018). Others chose to marshal their arguments in other ways, usually beginning with a statement of principles or primary arguments before extending an argument and elaborating the points in turn (Russell Group 2018; Sainsbury 2018; Universities UK 2018). The response from the University and College Union followed a hybrid model, with a general introduction and then responses by groups of questions rather than individually (University and College Union 2018). Some of the responses which did not follow the question format made extensive reference to other publications from the same organisation, notably the think-tanks IFS (Belfield et al. 2018b) and Higher Education Policy Institute (Hillman 2018), and learned societies the British Academy and the Royal Society (Wright, A. 2018; Royal Society 2018). Responses from the Russell Group (2018) and

University Alliance (2018) referred extensively to the work of named member institutions, in contrast to the other membership organisations which focused their responses at the sector level.

While the responses mostly provided a positive interpretation of the questions, explicitly welcoming the review and framing the response in an enthusiastic manner, there were some direct challenges to the questions. The National Union of Students, in response to question 5 on university fees, started its response: “NUS rejects much of the premise of this question. We oppose the marketisation of FE and HE, and have discussed at length the problems with markets in our Roadmap to Free Education” (National Union of Students 2018, 3). Similarly, the University and College Union, in its response to questions on “value for money” stated:

Education is a public good and the return on public investment in education is high. The success of business is also dependent on having a skilled workforce. It is therefore UCU's belief that employers and the state, rather than individual students, should be the primary funders of post-18 education. (University and College Union 2018, 8)

Of those in the sample, the narrowest response was from Gatsby, the foundation of former science minister and philanthropist David Sainsbury, which focused exclusively “on a vital but frequently overlooked aspect of the HE system: higher technical education at Levels 4 and 5” (Sainsbury 2018, 2).

The public availability of the responses discussed in this sample shows a willingness on the part of these organisations to communicate their response to the *Call for Evidence* to audiences beyond the review panel. Many of the responses considered briefly here could be considered “campaigning”, unsurprising for those mission-based member organisations seeking to advance the interests of a group of institutions through the provider representative bodies; of staff or students via their respective unions; or of disciplinary interests, in the case of the learned societies. For Gatsby (Sainsbury 2018) and the Sutton Trust (2018) the focus is on their topical campaigns, respectively technical education and social mobility. The think-tank responses appear to focus on directing the panel to their ability to supply evidence: as will be seen in the next chapter, both IFS and HEPI had some success in this regard, through reference in the panel’s report. In terms of language, the practitioner should take note of the variety of responses, and the willingness of several organisations to reject the question format presented to them in favour of their own, though

there is insufficient evidence to know whether this was a more or less successful way of engaging with the consultation exercise.

It was apparent at the time of the Tertiary Review's initiation that active consultation would be confined to the operation of the expert panel, and indications are that appetite for engagement overall was limited in both volume of activity and scope. The questions in the *Call for Evidence* set out the constraints of that scope, though that did not deter respondents from shaping their responses in an attempt to confound or extend it.

Consultation within the policymaking process is the crucial interface between the policymaking insiders – those who control the process – and the outsider, or policy stakeholder. This exchange of texts – the consultation document and its responses – is a moment of interanimation within the dialogic system of policy creation. In the case of the Tertiary Review, the policymakers placed heavy emphasis on “evidence”, articulated as opposed to “views”. The questions in the *Call for Evidence* reinforced the policymakers' emphasis on the economic aspects of their ambition: evidence was directed to the quantifiable economic benefits. Some respondents reflected in their choice of language the role of “evidence” and linked other sources and texts to build their cases, and the marshalling of sources reflected the interests of those respondent parties. While consultation may be a normal part of the policymaking process, this analysis of the consultation element in the Tertiary Review reinforces the concept of an information asymmetry between the insider and outsider: even when there appears to be transparency, such as through the published summary of responses, a host of silences makes it impossible to understand fully the impact of any given written submission, in-person event, or other representation. For the practitioner, this close reading could be dispiriting in that it does not offer a simple formula for securing influence: it suggests, however, that realising the full value of the effort put into any individual consultation response may lie not in the impact that it has on the process but in the marshalling and communication of argument and ideas for a range of audiences including those beyond the policy process.

Chapter 3C: Influence

In the first chapter in the part I explored how authority was conveyed in the Tertiary Review. This was followed by a focused assessment of the role of consultation. In this chapter, I conclude my deconstruction of the review through three questions which explore what can be seen of how the policymaking process was influenced. The approach used in this chapter focuses on intertextuality (Hyatt 2013a, 53) to identify in the texts the dialogic interanimation consistent with the application of Bakhtin outlined in chapter 1B. While the focus of the previous two chapters was on the establishment and conduct of the review, this chapter seeks to understand what influenced the outcomes of the expert panel. For the practitioner, a key goal is to seek to influence policy in ways which advance the outsider's agenda, such as policy settings which enable their institution to achieve greater success. In this respect, influence is distinct from authority, the lens through which I looked at the policymakers' basis for their process, but like authority it has a relationship to power; as with authority, influence implies a tangential relationship to power and does not represent in pure terms the power itself. In pursuing evidence of influence, this analysis therefore aims to identify what can constitute success for the practitioner engaging with a policy process to expand understanding and to seek out any general implications from this specific case which can then be applied in other contexts.

In the policymaking process, there is an imbalance in the information available to each side: it is not possible to grasp in full, from the outsider view of the policymaking process, the extent to which those on the inside seek authentic engagement with outsiders. To return to the idea of a policy spectrum between autocracy and anarchy, it would be possible for more a directed autocratic policy process to be presented as one which invited engagement from outsiders. Under these conditions, it is valuable for the outsider to consider three interrelated questions to develop the maximum understanding of the policymaking insiders' views. I have identified these, building on the theme within this thesis of focusing on the practitioner and what would be useful to them in the conduct of their work.

The first of these questions relates to value: *What do the policymakers value?* If this were a known quantity, it would be possible for the practitioner to target interaction with the policymakers and their process in ways which deliberately either reinforce or contradict those values. The obverse is that without an understanding of these values, it would be possible to make mistakes which could diminish the potential impact of any engagement, or

misdirect effort in areas which are antithetical to the insiders' viewpoint. The second question asks, *How do policymakers see "us" [the outsider group]?* Beyond a general assessment of values, this goes deeper to ask what is known about attitudes: if values are the general, related to the topic of any engagement, then how the outsider group is seen is the application of those values to any given stakeholder group. I have framed this question as the role of "voice" which reflects the emphasis on the "speaking" outsider in contrast the "value" from the insider. For analysis of these questions, I return to texts from the initiation of a policymaking process: for the Tertiary Review these are the *Terms of Reference*, *Call for Evidence* and associated launch materials. For the third element, the Augar Report and its associated texts are considered through the lens of impact, *What influences most?* This is a retrospective query which aims to triangulate the information available: it tests whether the points about what it values, and which voices, as seen in the textual analysis at the outset, could be deemed representative of the subsequent activity.

The three questions – exploring value, voice and impact – provide the basis for what the outsider would want to know for their engagement in a policymaking process. If it were possible to answer each of these questions in full, an interested outsider could develop a plan of engagement with the process which maximised the opportunity across these dimensions. Take, for example, a case in which my view, as an outsider, is not highly valued but I understand that another's viewpoint is valued: I might respond by seeking to influence that higher valued third party to shape the policymaking insiders' agenda. In the case of the Tertiary Review, that could mean working with an employer or student group to advance a particular policy position.

So far, I have outlined a thought experiment on the nature of policy influence and an idealised sense of the questions to be answered and possible responses. The reality of policymaking, not least its *ad hocery* (Ball 1993), means that this idealised view is not practicable. It is through the textual analysis that I will try to develop an understanding of how far it is possible to unpick each of the three questions from the Tertiary Review's texts. This will take into account language used, the presence of evaluation and appraisal, and the relationship to other texts, drawing, as noted in chapter 1C, on elements of the Hyatt framework (2013a).

What did the Tertiary Review policymaking insiders value most?

The Tertiary Review is not an *ex nihilo* policy but one which sits alongside a reform programme for both further and higher education. The *Terms of Reference* are an essential demonstration of the values held by the policymakers behind the review. The short document begins with a one-page introduction setting the scene for the following two pages. The document outlines, first, the four questions of the Tertiary Review and under each gives a set of points expanding on the headline, and then presents a set of constraints before concluding with the form of the process itself. In the introduction, the first-person is used to refer to the government, which presents a direct tone akin to a political speech. The passage starts in the third-person: “The Government is committed to conducting a major review across post-18 education and funding”, and continues with the first-person plural which perpetuates a speech-like tone, for example “Our system of post-18 education and training has many strengths: we have a world-class higher education system”. This device is used to go on to describe a series of policies – presented in this form as connected to each other and the Tertiary Review – relating to higher education, including HERA, the creation of OfS and TEF. This is mirrored with policies relating to further education, again starting with legislation, the Technical and Further Education Act 2017. It goes on to note apprenticeship policy, Institutes of Technology and a separate review of technical education and levels 4 and 5. In a speech-like single-line separate paragraph, it then states: “These important achievements must be built on” (Department for Education 2018a, 1).

The *Terms of Reference* set out how the policymaking authors value this process as part of a programme of connected policy agendas. Most evidently, these refer to the policies already enacted or in progress in the domains of tertiary education. The document also points to other areas of government policy which are valued by the review process: the Industrial Strategy is mentioned in the *Terms of Reference* twice, the first in relation to “[d]elivering the skills our country needs” (Department for Education 2018a, 2) and the second among a list of policy areas which are marked as having a higher-order status than the Tertiary Review:

Many elements of our current post-18 education system work well and there are some important principles that the Government believes should remain in future. Therefore, the recommendations of the review will be guided by the need to:

- Maintain the principle that students should contribute to the cost of their studies while ensuring that payments are progressive and income contingent;
- Continue with the reforms in train to build a strong technical and further education sector that encourages the skills that we need as a country;
- Place no cap on the number of students who can benefit from post-18 education; and
- Support the role of universities and colleges in delivering the Government's objectives for science, R&D and the Industrial Strategy. (Department for Education 2018a, 3)

This list is presented in a way which reveals a hierarchy of policy areas: these are above the Tertiary Review in the ranking of what is valued. The list is followed by an even stronger statement which implies that this final prohibition is of higher value yet to the authors:

The review will not make recommendations related to the terms of pre-2012 loans or to taxation, and its recommendations must be consistent with the Government's fiscal policies to reduce the deficit and have debt falling as a percentage of GDP. (Department for Education 2018a, 3)

The *Terms of Reference* set clear constraints for the Tertiary Review and they shaped another important text, the *Call for Evidence*, which expands on the four areas of the inquiry with additional questions.

The Tertiary Review was commissioned explicitly to review the funding of the sectors. It is not a surprise, then, to find the weight of its value placed on economic matters. The extensive use of explicit market language – “choice and competition”, “dynamic market”, “the market provides choice” – is a clear indication that this is the paradigm which is valued by policymakers, and is consistent with the discourses explored in chapter 2B. The explicit assumption is that the market is “good” and will stay, if reformed in ways to make it operate more effectively, according to the policymakers’ preferences. The contribution to general prosperity is explicit too, reinforcing the warrants as discussed in chapter 3A: “contributing to a strong economy and delivering the skills our country needs” and “value for money for students and taxpayers”. In contrast, one of the four areas of the Tertiary Review does not offer an explicitly financial or economic interpretation of the education system. The *Terms of Reference* include:

2. A system that is accessible to all:

- How we can ensure that people from disadvantaged backgrounds have equal opportunities to progress to and succeed in all forms of post-18 education and training.
- How disadvantaged students and learners receive maintenance support, both from Government and from universities and colleges.

This is the one area of the Tertiary Review where the financial lens is downplayed in favour of a narrative of fairness and social outcomes. This element might be seen in potential contradiction to the other areas of the review: it could be possible that system accessibility is at odds with optimised country-level outcomes (Department for Education 2018a, 2).

In chapter 3B I considered a selection of the questions from the *Call for Evidence* in order to identify, in the content of the questions themselves, what the text revealed of the assumptions made by policymakers. To supplement that analysis, and to narrow down the perceptions of value, I have identified three of the questions (from the full list reproduced in Appendix A) which take a different form from the others. These three questions each start with a statement before moving to the question for respondents to answer:

Q1: This review will look at how Government can ensure that the post-18 education system is joined up and supported by a funding system that works for students and taxpayers. The panel would like to understand your priorities. What, if any, are your principal concerns with the current post-18 education and funding system

Q4: In recent years we have seen continued growth in three-year degrees for 18 year-olds. Does the system offer a comprehensive range of high quality alternative routes for young people who wish to pursue a different path at this age? How can Government encourage provision across a wider range of high quality pathways to advanced academic, technical and vocational qualifications?

Q5: The majority of universities charge the maximum possible fees for most of their courses and three-year courses remain the norm. How can Government create a more dynamic market in price and provision between universities and across the post-18 education landscape? (Department for Education 2018b, 5, emphasis added)

This format of the question, starting with a problem statement, provides a useful insight into the particular emphasis that the policymakers wished to place on these questions. In the opening question 1, which provides respondents with scope to respond to the review as a whole, there is a strong steer to the parameters of the question through the phrase “a funding system that works for students and taxpayers”: this excludes both industry perspectives and providers by reinforcing the emphasis on students’ outcomes. There is also a leading phrase in question 1 which asks for respondents’ “principal concerns”, a choice to

avoid a positive formulation such as any evidence or observation about what respondents consider to be working well within the system. In the case of questions 4 and 5, attention is drawn through the problem statements preceding the questions to the “growth in three-year degrees” and “universities charge the maximum possible fees”, both statements focusing on the proposition that higher education providers have behaved in ways counter to the best interests of the tertiary education system. These implications reinforce the themes already identified: policymakers value economic perspectives above others; and, concerning stakeholder interests, policymakers tend to diminish the role that universities’ responses might play in the review process.

Analysis of the text, focusing on the *Terms of Reference* and the *Call for Evidence*, provides the policymaking outsider with a strong indication of what is important to the policymakers. There is some opportunity – albeit limited in scope – for consideration of non-economic value of education, through the fairness angle, but this is overwhelmed by the desire for the policymakers to use the Tertiary Review to refine the market for higher and further education. There are implications within the text that key parties – particularly universities – are not fulfilling policymakers’ ambitions and that the review is designed as a corrective to this identified problem. To add to this analysis of what is valued by policymakers, I will consider which – if any – outsider voices are valued by the Tertiary Review, before considering the impact of external influence on the policymaking process.

Which outsider voices would matter most in the Tertiary Review?

Having seen, through the *Terms of Reference* and *Call for Evidence* and in political speeches, the threads indicating the perception of universities as problematic within the context of the Tertiary Review, it is important to consider their role and that of other actors in the process. As in the first part of this chapter, here I look from the point of view of the texts – particularly those initiating the review – aiming to see what would have been available to the outsider which would support their understanding of the dynamics of influence in the policymaking process.

In the launch texts there are clear clues to those voices which are seen as important to the Tertiary Review: the press release includes two quotations from parties external to the review, the first from a business lobbying organisation – Neil Carberry, Managing Director for People and Infrastructure at the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) – and the other from the representative organisation for further education colleges – David

Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC) (Prime Minister's Office 2018). The inclusion of a further education representative, but absence of the equivalent voice for higher education, is notable. In the *Call for Evidence*, there is a description of the activities which the panel would undertake to gather a wide range of views:

Alongside this call for evidence, the independent panel will consult in a number of ways with a wide range of interested parties including people currently or recently participating in post-18 education. To ensure the fullest possible engagement with those affected by the issues covered by this review:

- The panel will establish three reference groups to engage with students, providers and employers. These reference groups will invite key parties to meet with them and provide evidence directly as well as through written submission to the call for evidence.
- The panel will use a range of different online and social media forums to broaden its engagement especially with students, as well as focus groups, and will provide further details on this shortly.
- A number of public events will be held for those interested to attend and discuss the issues covered by the review. (Department for Education 2018a, 3)

In this passage, the primacy of the students and recent graduates is set out by those groups being first in the description, and reinforced through the second point on taking active steps to include the views of more students. Providers get a single mention, in the list alongside employers. Overall, providers are downplayed, and students in particular singled out for attention, a theme consistent with the market and consumerist discourses, where the “end user” or “consumer” is empowered to make choices within the system. I noted in chapter 2D that all three of the groupings are heterogenous and therefore it should not be presumed that these groups would offer unified responses to the panel's inquiry. Within higher education research this points reflects a wider discourse on the problematic use of “student voice”, and the role of students in policymaking (Wright and Raaper 2018).

The expert panel membership, discussed above in chapter 2D, included significant representation from the higher education sector, and one member each explicitly representing further education and business interests. It could not, therefore, be said that there was no representation of university interests in the construction of the Tertiary Review. However, from the combination of textual analysis, and the membership of the panel, it is reasonable to conclude that provider interests were of less importance to policymakers than the opinions of students and employers/industry. It is also possible to see a further downplaying of any type of provider in the language used to describe the review as a whole:

This is a review which, for the first time, looks at the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, so we can create a system which is truly joined-up. Universities – many of which provide technical as well as academic courses – will be considered alongside colleges, Institutes of Technology and apprenticeship providers. There are huge success stories to be found right across the sector, at every level, and by taking a broad view, Philip and his expert panel will be able to make recommendations which help the sector to be even better in the future. (May 2018)

This statement from the Prime Minister at the initiation of the review asserts that there is a single, unified, “post-18 education sector”. This usage of the term “sector” is at odds with the normal usage – which I have adopted in this thesis – of the existence of two education sectors within the post-18 landscape, one further and one higher. The statement is explicit in claiming that the common separation is based on “false boundaries”. Features of sector separation include different governing legislation, representative organisations, regulatory architecture and funding arrangements. To elide the two sectors is not a neutral act. But given the explanation within the speech, it is no accident: the usage implies a deliberate and considered statement that the government would wish not to evaluate the sectors as separate but to see all “providers”, from whichever part, alongside each other. From the perspective of higher education, traditionally the sector of higher prestige, this could be seen as a diminution of influence and status in relative terms.

At the outset of the review, there were significant indications that the policymakers had a hierarchy of the voices they would consider most important in their engagement, however limited that would be, as discussed in chapter 3B. The review documents consistently downplay the role of universities through the deliberate elision of higher and further education into a single sector and through the repeated emphasis on students and industry as the voices most actively sought out. This is consistent with the discussion of value for money and reinforces the hypothesis that the economic and market lens is the one of greatest significance to the policymakers in this instance: students represent the consumers to be supported by the market towards their optimised economic outcomes into employment. In this context, the provider voice is diminished, but that approach falls unevenly by showing less interest in higher education providers than in further education.

What can be seen to have had impact on the Tertiary Review?

The third question seeks to further triangulate the question of influence on the Tertiary Review by seeking to confirm – or disprove – the proposition raised through analysis of value and voice, that economic and market interests were those which policymakers valued most, and that they were more interested in the views of students and industry. The analysis of this proposition was approached through close reading of the Augar Report, in particular chapter 3 on higher education (Augar 2019), to identify from within the text and its references evidence of what had impact on the text's construction.

The panel's interpretation of evidence-gathering was broad, and throughout the documents there is an assertion that their activities represented acquisition of objective, verifiable, evidence, as discussed in chapter 3B. In the discussion across this thesis, I have identified in the texts what I consider to represent the political agenda behind the review, including the expert panel through its composition and mandate. Representations of political steering were evident at the outset of the review but the panel was at pains to present its inquiry as a disinterested one:

The panel approached this review with no preconceptions and many questions; ensuring that its findings and recommendations are underpinned by a robust and comprehensive evidence base has been of utmost importance throughout. With this in mind, the panel undertook and commissioned an extensive programme of evidence collection and analysis as their first priority. (Department for Education 2019, 2)

The extent of the expert panel's consultation was documented in an annex to the Augar Report: the panel held 330 "individual meetings with a wide spectrum of experts, leaders and senior figures in fields relevant to the remit of the review" (Department for Education 2019, 2). The expert panel used a range of targeted interactions, its own selection of "experts" and stakeholder representatives to supplement the written consultation, as described in the previous chapter. The approach used aligns with the view of policymaker Iain Mansfield who describes the role that more interactive forms of engagement play:

Stakeholder conversations, on the other hand, provide the vital context to the dry words of the responses. They provide an opportunity for civil servants to ask questions, clarify misunderstandings and, with trusted stakeholders, to explore ideas, compromises or potential solutions. Perhaps equally importantly, they allow officials to get a sense of what really matters to a stakeholder. (Mansfield 2019)

The implication is that the Augar Report confirms the general notion that it was the engagement beyond the formal consultation which had a more significant impact on outcomes.

To interrogate the question of influence on the Augar Report, I chose to focus on a key section with great significance for higher education in particular. Chapter 3 of the report is entitled “Higher education”, though other areas of the report also have significant impact for that part of the tertiary section, notably chapter 6: “Student contribution system”. The text of chapter 3 provides a number of useful insights into the report’s relationship to evidence, the selection and curation of the information supporting its conclusions and, by implication, those factors which influenced its outcomes. To conduct this analysis I closely read the text of the chapter and categorised its footnotes – taking them as the stated evidential basis provided in the report – to interrogate the sources of information used to draw conclusions. The points raised below are presented as individual reflections on the chapter, which I then draw together to present some conclusions about the impact of different viewpoints on the report.

- **The Institute for Fiscal Studies is used extensively.**

Within Chapter 3 there are 15 charts illustrating various elements of higher education institutional finance, fee levels and students’ outcomes from education. The sources for these charts are mostly official data sources including the Higher Education Statistics Agency and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. More charts reference IFS data than any other source, seven in total. The number of charts is one indicator of significance, and it is also noteworthy that IFS work is used across sections of the report – including institutional funding, spending by subject and post-graduation incomes – signifying the high regard for the organisation’s analysis. The use of IFS confirms its position as a recognised authority in these areas and reflects the point noted in chapter 1A about the significance of this think-tank within the literature of system-wide (macro) quantitative analyses.

- **Two organisations’ *Call for Evidence* submissions are referenced.**

The submissions to the *Call for Evidence* from Universities UK and the Russell Group of universities are referenced in the chapter, both in relation to the different costs of provision by subject (Augar 2019, 71). This represents a very targeted quoting of

responses received, and elsewhere across the chapter there is no indication of the impact that any other direct submission had on the report's analysis or recommendations. As I noted in chapter 3B, many university representative organisations submitted responses to the *Call for Evidence* so the inclusion of just two within this section reflects targeted use by the panel. While two organisations' submissions were included, they are used to supplement a minor point in the context of the whole chapter and therefore do not represent a high level of impact.

- **The HEPI-HEA Student Experience Survey is given prominence over the National Student Survey.**

The panel report chose to present data from the whole-sector National Student Survey (NSS) alongside the much more limited study from the HEPI-HEA Student Experience Survey:

the National Student Survey, managed by the OfS, has reported continuing high levels of satisfaction over the past decade. The overall satisfaction level of students in England, as measured by the NSS, was 82 per cent in 2008, rose slightly to a peak of 86 per cent in 2015, before falling back slightly to 83 per cent in 2018.

But students are much less positive when asked about value for money. A Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) survey in 2018 reported that only 38 per cent of students felt they had received "good or very good" value from their course, whereas 32 per cent felt they had received "poor or very poor" value – a slight improvement on the previous year but still worryingly high. (Augar 2019, 86)

The HEPI-HEA survey has been used controversially by policymakers who have chosen to deploy the headline statistics about value for money as representing an absolute truth about the sector (Morris 2016; Morris 2017). An example of the survey's influence is its extensive use by the National Audit Office in its assessment of the higher education market (National Audit Office 2016). HEPI's submission to the Augar Report did not emphasise the statistic on students' perceptions of value for money, but did raise evidence of sixth-form students' "poor understanding" of universities (Hillman 2018, 11). In the quote above, the Augar Report describes the idea that while over 80 per cent of final-year undergraduates are satisfied with their experience, as judged by NSS, it is also "worryingly high" that a less comprehensive survey identifies an issue with perceptions of value. In presenting the evidence in this way in the report, the expert panel fails to engage with the issue of whether the question is meaningful, or whether the evidence gathering

underpinning the statistics is effective. This approach is in common with other uses of the HEPI-HEA survey where its conclusions are presented as a basis for sector reform (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016b).

- **There is a strong intertextual relationship with a parliamentary inquiry**

I noted earlier, in chapter 2C, the parliamentary reports published around the time of the Tertiary Review. One of these is singled out for inclusion in the Augar Report:

The Education Select Committee Chair Robert Halfon MP said in November 2018, on publishing that Committee's inquiry into value for money in higher education: *"The blunt reality is that too many universities are not providing value for money and that students are not getting good outcomes from the degrees for which so many of them rack up debt. Too many institutions are neither meeting our skills needs or providing the means for the disadvantaged to climb the ladder of opportunity."* (Augar 2019, 86, original emphasis)

In addition to the quotation, there are several similarities in content which, as noted earlier in chapter 2C, reflect issues current in much analysis of the higher education sector at the time but demonstrate in this case a grouping of ideas around value for money. Both the parliamentary report (House of Commons Education Committee 2018) and the Augar Report speak to the following in their critique of the sector: vice-chancellors' pay, the measures used in TEF, access for disadvantaged groups, and unconditional offers. Other than the quotation from Halfon, there is no indication that the Education Committee's report was the source of inclusion in the Augar Report of that same set of issues – there is only one reference to the parliamentary report, for the quotation above – but it is notable how the same collection of issues exists across the two reports.

- **Reference to a lecture by Martin Wolf is a curious addition.**

One of the footnotes in the chapter on higher education is unique across the Augar Report in referencing Martin Wolf, journalist and husband of panellist Alison Wolf. The reference is to a speech he gave to a campaigning organisation, the Council for the Defence of British Universities, "a group of concerned individuals, both inside and outside universities, who are worried about the long-term direction of higher education policy in this country. We believe that it will do permanent and irreversible damage to an outstanding university system" (Council for the Defence of British Universities 2020). The

reference to Martin Wolf is in relation to the panel's operation: "Our seventh principle as set out at the beginning of this report is that 'post-18 education cannot be left entirely to market forces'" (Augar 2019, 78). The embedded quotation in that sentence, to which the Martin Wolf footnote is added, is not a quote from Wolf (Wolf, M. 2017); it is a quote from elsewhere in the Augar Report where it appears without further attribution (Augar 2019, 8 and 122). There is no attribution – to Martin Wolf or another source – in the cases where the reference to the seventh principle appears in the other parts of the Augar Report. It is curious to the reader to find this important principle of the report's operation buried within a footnote on the second of three uses of the phrase, and reflecting a journalist's analysis to a university lobby group rather than to a more established authority on the matter. In the CDBU speech Martin Wolf recognises in his conclusion that Alison Wolf has proposed reform of the whole tertiary sector (Wolf, M. 2017, 12). It appears likely that the reference in this instance is either a mistake or a way for Alison Wolf's approach to the tertiary education sector to be incorporated into the report via an indirect route

These points relate back to points raised earlier in this thesis, including the influential role of the think-tank IFS, the familial connections of the expert panel, and the diminution of higher education sector representations made through the *Call for Evidence*. It appears that the greatest impact on the panel – for its section on higher education, at least – was more weighted toward its curation of data sources than towards the product of representations made through the panel's consultation exercise. This selective curation of "evidence" can be seen more clearly in the uncritical use of the HEPI-HEA survey, particularly given its absence from the HEPI *Call for Evidence* submission.

I have considered the role of influence within the Tertiary Review from three angles: value, voice and impact. This approach facilitated close analysis of key texts in the review process for the exploration of language used, and including relationships to other texts. The Tertiary Review has a strong economic lens with limited opportunity for engagement on the topic of fairness in education. Universities' potential for influence was structurally minimised in favour of students and businesses. The implications for the higher education practitioner are that the consultation exercise, as explored in chapter 3B, was not likely to have been a successful route to influence the Augar Report and therefore the outcomes of the

policymaking process. Processes extrinsic to the *Call for Evidence* – the panel's commissioned research, private meetings and the emphasis placed on key reports – appear to have been more influential on shaping the panel report, and are therefore likely to have had greater impact on the overall Tertiary Review.

Part 4. Conclusions

In this final part, I build on the analysis in the previous chapters to draw conclusions. The first chapter in this part focuses on articulating the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis: it does this by synthesising my critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review. In the second chapter, the concept of the dialogic consultation is extended through development of a practitioner framework for policy consultations. The framework responds to the gap identified in the introduction to the thesis: significant effort is expended in consultation responses but these have not yet been problematised. Problematising consultation responses facilitates the application of a dialogic lens to create a practitioner-facing framework. In the final chapter, I: offer reflections on the process of researching and writing the thesis; identify other avenues for further research; and propose the testing, evaluation and refinement of the dialogic consultation framework.

Chapter 4A: Critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review

This chapter summarises the discussion in the previous chapters – building on both the contextualisation and deconstruction parts – to draw conclusions about the policymaking process as it relates to the Tertiary Review. In this concluding element, I return to the perspective of the practitioner to consider how the individual might learn from this critical policy analysis, and to broader questions of dialogic meaning-making. I aim to bridge from the specific case of the Tertiary Review to propose general conclusions which could be applied in other contexts, though recognising the limitations of the analysis for its selection of material and methodological constraints.

Why analyse the Tertiary Review?

The Tertiary Review could have resulted in a wholesale redesign of the approaches to, and mechanisms for, funding further and higher education in England. The review is, therefore, a significant topic for this inquiry because of its potential consequences for a large and important area of public policy. The further and higher education sectors in England represent major areas of economic, social and cultural activity. With 3.4 million students across ~1,800 providers (Augar 2019), the sectors touch all parts of the country and link internationally, and impact upon a huge number of lives. Furthermore, government investment in tertiary education represents a significant proportion of national spending. Taken together, the tertiary sectors are an important policy environment and one worthy of close scrutiny. When there are political proposals to review the funding of the sectors, the associated policy processes have the potential to effect material change, as was noted in the history of other funding reviews explored in chapter 2A, though funding does not exist in isolation: where and how money is allocated within systems reflects priorities and creates incentives for action. Thus a “major” and “wide-ranging” (Prime Minister’s Office 2018) review process is one to which anyone with an interest in the sectors should pay close attention. It is also worth noting that, while the potential of the Tertiary Review was significant, the review *process* itself had impact. This may not have been of the scale that the full potential allowed, but it is possible to identify examples where individuals and organisations have taken action in response to the review process in anticipation of greater

future impact (Pells 2019). Both the realised and the potential impacts of the Tertiary Review make it an important topic for scrutiny and a suitable topic for a critical policy analysis.

Critical policy analysis is a justified and appropriate approach to the Tertiary Review; the review is an example which can provide illustrative lessons for higher education policymaking, and more broadly. I chose to approach the review with a focus on higher education, and in doing so deliberately focused on just one of the sectors of tertiary education. It would have been possible to consider the review through different lenses, including the perspective of policymakers. An approach could also have looked at the process of policymaking and compared that to activities in other domains of public policy. As an extensive policy process, the Tertiary Review has many angles to consider which makes it a rich environment for a critical policy analysis. In my assessment, I have attempted to identify both what *is* there within the review texts, and some of what *is not* there. This approach simultaneously generates knowledge for the higher education practitioner, and prompts questions for further investigation, comparison or reflection.

I chose to focus on key texts from the Tertiary Review process as the core point of analysis. This selection, as noted in the introduction and part one, is in part a pragmatic choice. It also provides an illustration of what is possible for the researcher – or the practitioner – with access solely to the texts and without access to policymakers or other sources. In this respect, it is more akin to an historical documentary study, albeit applied to a contemporaneous topic. Close analysis of the texts of the Tertiary Review, using the Hyatt framework (2013a), Bacchi (2012), Wodak (2001), and others, enabled me to explore the documents from different angles, each adding new and different points of information. Contextualisation has been an essential tool for situating the texts within their historical and social position; the tools of deconstruction then provide the complementary piece of the analytic jigsaw. Through this approach, the Tertiary Review can be seen for what it is, where it fits, and where silences exist.

I described in chapter 1C, and elaborated in the following chapters, the adaptations I would make to the Hyatt framework, and throughout I have held the goal of applying the Bakhtinian concepts I identified in chapter 1B. In this respect, I have used dialogic analysis at different levels within the thesis: at the most transactional I focused on the consultation process itself, the visible exchange of texts. I have also sought to apply these principles to the generation of meaning from textual analysis both in deconstruction and through the contextualising

chapters. At a higher level there is a meta commentary of dialogic relations between this thesis and the Hyatt framework. While I have kept in mind the reader, particularly in the form of the practitioner, I have tried not to “idealise” that reader in favour of a recognition of Bakhtin’s rejection of that idea (Shepherd 2001). The application of Bakhtin with the other elements of textual contextualisation and deconstruction represents a novel analysis which could be adopted by others for similar policy analyses: I have found that the combination of theory and practical tools, particularly in the form of questioning frameworks such as Bacchi’s (2012) “What’s the problem represented to be” approach used in chapter 3A, or my own “value, voice, impact” approach deployed for 3C, have provided the structure by which I have confidence that the Tertiary Review has been explored from a range of perspectives from which I can then draw conclusions through this synthesis.

I have noted throughout that my aim has been to make purposeful choices. My purpose has been to generate knowledge and practical tools for the practitioner who works in and around universities to support their professional understanding and activities. This orientation to action has been the guiding principle behind the analysis but should not be accepted uncritically. I said in the introduction that I am – in a parlance reflecting a key divide within the higher sector – a “managerialist” who recognises the absolute value of education and knowledge-creation within universities but thinks of them in organisational terms (Deem and Brehony 2005). With this mindset, I have accepted some premises within the Tertiary Review, including that funding is an area with legitimate state, i.e. “taxpayer”, interest. I have not focused significant attention on parts of the review which will be deemed controversial by others, such as “the principle that students should contribute to the cost of their studies while ensuring that payments are progressive and income contingent” (Department for Education 2018a, 3); there are others who could argue that the principle of education free to the students is a right and the correct policy goal. I say this not to make apology for this approach or emphasis, but to reflect that this is my position and that the analysis I have conducted is built upon this position. I invite others to present their alternative interpretations seeking and observing value in the interanimation of this text with others to generate meaning beyond the sum of each individual contribution.

Policy deconstruction

The Tertiary Review was a formal review process centred on an expert panel assessment akin to previous exercises, specifically the Browne Review of 2010, and was created to report to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Education. The Augar Panel sought to gather evidence from which to draw the conclusions outlined in its public report, including through a stakeholder consultation exercise. This approach to policy development provided significant documentary evidence to which tools of deconstruction could be applied. However, not all of these documents warrant the same level of scrutiny: the selection of where to focus my effort reflects the choices of emphasis on my part.

Within each layer of analysis there are choices – reflected in words on the page and the silences between those words – which provide the reader with their opportunity simultaneously to find answers and to raise questions. A key choice made, and therefore a valid area for this questioning, lies in the focus of the three chapters on deconstruction – authority, consultation and influence. I judged that these would provide a useful basis for analysis of the Tertiary Review through the organisation of key concepts in policymaking, from the authority imbued in the policy process through to the active engagement with stakeholders, to a reflection on that which can be seen to have influenced the review. In the descriptions of the parts I have linked them together and, crucially, to the concept of power and the reflections and representations of power within the texts. The three lenses are overlapping, interconnected and designed jointly to generate understanding of the Tertiary Review and to provide a platform from which it is possible to draw conclusions which could be applied in other contexts. I could have chosen different lenses for the organisation of deconstruction. The Tertiary Review, for the education practitioner, could be illuminating on key areas of topical interest such as access and participation in education or the funding of student maintenance support. These, and others, are valuable topics and could be the source of their own tools aimed at practitioners in related areas. Equally, it would have been possible to follow the thread of the economic conception of education, building upon the context I discussed earlier which explored the discourse of markets in education. Reflecting on these paths not chosen enables me to draw a conclusion that textual deconstruction is able meaningfully to reflect an interpretation of the elements of authority, consultation and influence but does not – and cannot – cover every facet of the texts.

The process of textual deconstruction also identified silences within the texts. As with many policy processes and associated textual analyses, this reflects the selections made by

the policymakers themselves. In the Prime Minister's speeches on the Tertiary Review (May 2018; 2019), there is mention of the government's apprenticeship policy and the positive impact for which claims are made. Those texts are uncritical of that policy – as the genre of political speeches often lack critical self-reflection – yet it is one which has been subject to many setbacks and could be characterised as a failure.

In my analysis of the Tertiary Review, I have assumed that the policymaking outsiders – those working in universities and others responding to the *Call for Evidence* – would want to see their input reflected in the texts and to be able to identify the product of their engagement. In my own analysis I have positioned authority, consultation and influence each in the positive, as concepts to be actively sought out. This perception, as explained in the introduction and part one of this thesis, comes from a starting point of believing that universities as organisations ought to be self-improving, both from an internal perspective and through the active influence of their external environment. These conclusions therefore need to be read with the reminder of that premise.

The policymaking process

The government chose to initiate the Tertiary Review consistent with the paradigm that skills development through education should improve labour market productivity for economic growth. This aspiration was evident through the pursuit of value for money and, in particular, the explicit need to address perceived failings on the part of English universities in line with a contemporaneous political discourse on the deficit in performance by these institutions. The tertiary lens applied was consistent with a broader national and international discourse on increased coordination of the two sectors. While this collection of points represents a coherent “why?” for the policy, within the terms of the prevailing political discourses, it did not mean that the policy agenda could, or would, be enacted as described.

The Tertiary Review can be seen as a disappointing policymaking process. If one has a view of perfection in policymaking – particularly when considered through an elaborate review process – as requiring a story with a beginning, middle and end, then the Tertiary Review is lacking in that final component. It is possible that the Johnson government will respond to the review but, in the absence of that forthcoming at the time of writing, I chose to take the General Election of 2019 as the natural point of conclusion for this inquiry. As commentators have identified, the effort put into the review process by the May government may have fallen victim to the Prime Minister's political fortunes: “The risk is that a report

which was commissioned to frame government thinking will fall into oblivion with the prime minister who commissioned it. This would be a pointless waste” (*The Guardian* 2019). Parallels have been drawn between the Augar Report and previous exercises, noting that these panels have not always been accepted *in toto*: “It is worth bearing in mind that neither the Robbins nor the Dearing nor the Browne reports were fully accepted by government” (Westwood 2018b). However, these processes still had conclusions through reception in government even if the panel element had not been the end of their stories.

The rationale for the Tertiary Review was the perceived need to effect change across two sprawling sectors of public policy. In England, there is a broad consensus about the imbalance between a comparatively well-funded and successful higher education sector and a neglected further education sector (Leach 2019). This is a division which is reflected in jurisdictions across the UK’s nations and in policy discourses around the world, as noted in chapter 2A. The review then was set as a solution to this broad problem, and within it contained the threads of several sub-problems including the overall cost of the higher education system, the perception of poor quality degrees and that the education systems were not sufficiently responsive to the needs of industry – particularly when framed against the government’s Industrial Strategy (HM Government 2017; May 2018). Additionally, the Tertiary Review was seen by its originators – the then Prime Minister Theresa May chief among them – as the pinnacle of a suite of associated reforms. Against the test of these grand ambitions, the policy failed. A policy commentator put it starkly:

We’ve still got a college and adult education system starved of investment; a university financial model under pressure; a flawed apprenticeships funding model; and a politically toxic tuition fees and loan system. And the odds are the Post-18 Education & Funding Review process will fall well short of addressing it all. And with Theresa May now on her way out of Downing Street, it almost certainly means that the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Education Secretary who commissioned it, will be gone by the time decisions get made – let alone implemented. (Leach 2019)

The goal of this policy analysis has not been to judge in some binary fashion the policymaking process as good or bad, successful or a failure (McConnell 2010). However, the fact that the Tertiary Review did not reach its intended *dénouement* – with the Augar Report received, interpreted and judged by the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Education – means that it must be seen as failing on its own terms at the very least. The consequences of this failure are that problems identified remain unresolved, or that

resolution is delayed. This, for some interested parties, particularly those who disputed the representation of the problem as posed by the review, may be a relief.

For the practitioner assessing a policy process, the interrogation of influence should be particularly instructive to consider. When deconstructing the Tertiary Review through the lens of influence, I asked first what evidence there was of what was valued by the insiders in the policymaking process; this follows from the understanding of the contextual position explored in part two. I then asked what could be seen of how the outsiders were viewed by the insiders. Finally, I asked what could be evidenced of impact on the policymaking process. These elements provide a triangulation of the potential for influence in the policymaking process. I made the case in chapter 2C that English universities, in the period 2017–2019, had found themselves with less political capital than they had had hitherto (Shattock 2012). Charges of grade inflation, rampant unconditional offers, and failing to protect free speech were levelled against them. While there was evidence that public support remained relatively high, universities were subject to a new regulator prepared to bare its teeth to avoid any perception of “provider capture” (Department for Education 2017, 39). These were observable occurrences and it is reasonable to draw from them – and the ways in which the higher education sector was diminished in the Tertiary Review texts – that there was little enthusiasm on the policymakers’ side for the input of universities to the outcomes of the review. By contrast, the observable review process contained significant university input. The expert panel included one former vice-chancellor, one serving vice-chancellor and another university professor. This was greater representation than was provided by the further education sector with one chief executive of a college, though that the same university professor – Alison Wolf – had published extensively on vocational education. In addition to the chair – Philip Augar – whose background included working in finance, there was one additional member drawn explicitly from a business background. The texts show that a great number of universities responded to the *Call for Evidence*, and that the input from academic specialists was recognised and valued in the Augar Report. This assessment reflects the tensions between an overarching narrative – an attempt to diminish the role of universities – yet those same institutions being both powerful in their position and the sites of expertise sought by the expert panel for its analysis.

The analysis I have presented, based on the texts and with limited emphasis on the extra-textual influences, leaves out much of the “backstage” realities of the policymaking process (Wodak 2009): in my exploration of influence and the role of evidence, I identified

that it was not possible to identify clearly what had been rejected by the panel. There is an inevitability in elements of the process being hidden from view, and selectivity in what parts of policymaking activities are shared with a public audience. Where the Tertiary Review published material relating to its process (Pye Tait Consulting 2019; Department for Education 2019), these must be viewed with scepticism as lacking independence, being the outputs of the official “insider” process. On balance, I believe that there is sufficient evidence shown within the texts of the review, combined with analysis of the contextual political position, to conclude that the Tertiary Review as a whole, even if less true within the Augar Panel element, was hostile to the position of universities. Achieving this understanding through critical policy analysis is a contribution to knowledge of higher education policymaking, and a useful insight for practitioners who seek to influence policy agendas.

Consultation and the Tertiary Review

Consultation is a normal part of the policymaking process and can take many forms. It can have a hierarchy of outcomes expected by the designers of the exercises, from superficial engagement to active co-creation of policy. Within the Tertiary Review, consultation took a range of forms including individual meetings, site visits and convened group conversations for designated stakeholders. It also included a written consultation exercise which elicited nearly 400 responses to a 16-question list (Pye Tait Consulting 2019). All of these elements of consultation were built into the expert panel process; the task of consulting was delegated to Philip Augar, and the activity of consulting was confined to the concept of “giving evidence”. Of all the terms which could be synonymous with concepts of consultations, evidence stood out as the most frequently used and of greatest importance to the review: the expert panel sought not to engage stakeholders, not to consult on the impact of policy, but to acquire evidence for its assessment. The acquisition of evidence through consultation was itself a small part of the evidence-gathering process, with commissioned research and other means and expert interviews also used. Evidence, while commonly used to imply a neutrality of position – objective and unimpeachable – is highly contestable given the selection process for what is judged to count as evidence for any given purpose, and the evidence judged to be most acceptable. This plurality of sources gave ample opportunity for the panel to decide what evidence it valued and for what narrative.

The information asymmetry in policymaking exercises will always make the desire for dialogic engagement greater for the outsider than for the insider. While the insider might

have needs to fulfil through consultation, such as avoiding potential barriers to their policy or generating new ideas (Mansfield 2019), they also hold the power to determine the tools for consultation and the extent to which they accept or reject what they hear. As in the Tertiary Review, transparency can only ever be partial – both what is selected and why any given choice is made. For the outsider, they have “wants” and “asks”. They seek what the policy outcomes might give them; this necessarily places them as supplicants. The Tertiary Review combined political, accountability and evidentiary warrants: the authority behind the policy process was a strong one and it is reasonable to conclude that there was a very significant imbalance in power between the policymakers and the outsiders, including universities.

Exploring the Tertiary Review through different lenses, and with a range of tools, I have shown a common thread of the difficulty for stakeholders – particularly universities as the emphasis of my inquiry – to engage in collaborative dialogue in which to advance their case. I have not argued that universities should ask for, and receive, everything that they want, but I have accepted the premise that the nature of dialogic consultation is for giving and receiving. Seeking outsider views invites material contributions to a dialogue. It also implies a preparedness to negotiate over the outcomes of a review process, taking into account outsiders’ interests. However, it does not imply an equality of position as the natural imbalance of power remains. From the outsider’s perspective, the task is not to lament this imbalance but to accept these as the terms. A single written consultation response is very unlikely to change the outcome of a policy process substantially. But where it is all that is offered, because either the process is closed or the other avenues for engagement are closed off – the university is not the location for the site visit, there was no invitation to the roundtable discussion – then the most must be made of this as an opportunity. While the concept of dialogue is a useful one, it should not be confused with a meeting of equals; the process of meaning-making through dialogue is one of a struggle for power (Fairclough 2001), a challenge to influence the views of the other.

Implications

In applying what has been learned through analysis of the Tertiary Review, I have identified three lessons from which to build from this specific case to the general and which can be used to inform practitioners’ actions in response to future policy developments.

1. The policy agenda in a sector can be trumped by bigger issues, even when there is significant political weight behind an initiative.

The Tertiary Review had all the conditions for major change: previous reviews had been transformational for the sectors; the Prime Minister made it a core part of her personal agenda; key stakeholder groups, particularly universities, had insufficient political capital to resist reform; there was cross-party support for renewal in vocational and technical education. In spite of these conditions, the Tertiary Review, as conceived by Theresa May, came to nought within her premiership. The overarching political conditions – particularly the impact of Brexit – meant that there was insufficient capacity for change in government. Similarly, the economic impact of COVID-19 may be the dominant context for policymaking across all sectors for coming years if predictions on the depth of the recession come to pass, as noted in the introduction.

2. Policy watchers should be interested in longer-term trajectories.

The position of tertiary education in the policy discourse, the concept that there is one sector, rather than two – for further and higher education – is significant. While the Tertiary Review may not have resulted in seismic change to the way the two sectors are organised, there is potential for this discourse to reappear. From the exploration of the context of the Tertiary Review it is possible to deduce that the enthusiasm for tertiary policy is more than a simple passing phase, and that therefore practitioners should situate their understanding of the policy landscape within this broader recent historical position rather than simply consider a policy initiative at face value; this approach is consistent with the dialogic conception and the intersection of texts and their discourses.

3. Engaging with policy processes can be valuable, even if the result appears negligible.

The Tertiary Review failed on its own terms because of the change in political personalities and priorities. However, it was not possible to see at the outset that this would be the case. For the practitioner, as for anyone with an interest in the potential impact of the policy agenda, it was still worth engaging – including investing the time and energy to complete a written consultation response – in an attempt to shape the

policy to one which favoured the particular institutional position. It is not acceptable to hope that a policy process leads to nought; it is essential to engage where possible for the active pursuit of “good” policy for each actor according to their interests.

This chapter synthesised the deconstruction of the Tertiary Review texts in the previous part and drew threads of argument across the chapters and with the contextual part. I concluded that the review process was largely hostile to universities. The consultation process which offered universities and their representatives an opportunity to engage with the review was, in practice, a relatively minor part of the overall policymaking activity, having been subordinated in importance within the expert panel process. However, dialogic policy consultation remains an important and routine part of policymaking processes. The policy consultation should not be considered a level playing field; as seen in the Tertiary Review, the power asymmetry is such that the policymaking insiders hold much more power than the outsider. While acknowledging that state of affairs, engaging through consultation may be an outsider’s only opportunity and as such they should therefore seek to have the greatest possible impact through their engagement.

Chapter 4B: A practitioner framework for dialogic policy consultation

This chapter builds on the previous chapter's critical policy analysis of the Tertiary Review and focuses on the role of consultation within the policymaking process. It considers the perspective of the practitioner who exists outside the formal policy process and offers a framework for maximising the impact of their engagement through the consultation. To achieve this maximisation, the framework proposes appreciative dialogic engagement within the institutional setting to facilitate the formulation of the consultation response, and the dissemination of that response alongside submission to the formal process. The chapter proposes the application of the tool, represented in full in Appendix B, and its further refinement in the light of practitioner feedback.

Practitioner lessons from the Tertiary Review

When setting out to contribute to professional practice, my starting point is a consideration of why any given practitioner would want to make use of any given tool. In this chapter, I propose a dialogic policy consultation framework which is intended for use by people in professional roles where they are required to formulate institutional responses to external policy agendas. My starting point is that it is a valuable exercise to interrogate professional practice at the level of a whole profession, but also that it is valuable to the individual to reflect on the way they go about their roles and to seek enhancement. I do not suggest that the framework proposed form a be-all-and-end-all of this professional activity, but I do expect it to prompt personal and organisational reflection on how to maximise the effort expended on this activity. As noted across this thesis, policy consultations – particularly written exercises – are labour-intensive both for those originating consultations and for those responding. I noted in the introduction my own professional interests and background, and that I seek to provide insightful resources for policy wonks, colleagues working in and around the higher education sector (Bagshaw and McVitty 2020).

While I recognise that the framework can be used by other groups, my target is still narrow in focusing on that group of higher education professionals. In chapter 1A, I reflected on the position of higher education research and its insider–outsider challenge: it is always conflicted with the object of the research of direct interest to the subject. This is not a

reason to reject the endeavour, merely a reason to reflect on that position and interrogate it. There is a further complexity when it comes to professional staff and institutional leaders, however. This is a group which faces an interesting position when it comes to problematising their own practice: professional staff and management in universities are not, on the whole, the ones charged with the creation of knowledge within the institution. Even where academics are in leadership roles, their managerial duties do not normally include knowledge-creation in the way that their research and scholarship posts do. I assert that this is, like the practice of higher education research, a phenomenon of interest rather than a reason to prevent inquiry. Given the complexity of universities, and the challenges they face as organisations, I argue that precisely this kind of inquiry is of significant potential value.

The task of prompting reflexivity in practice should be structured to identify where there is the most value: changing practice can itself be a drain on limited resource. The Tertiary Review, given its scale and significance across large areas of activity and the many billions of pounds in funding at stake, provides a particularly useful example to draw on and from which to derive insight. I outlined in the introduction how the hierarchy of the interrogation of the Tertiary Review situates the “what?” – higher and further education funding – in a position of lower value than the “how?” – a politically led review process supported by an expert panel – and lower value than the “why?” – a more complex network of factors including market ideology, dissatisfaction with universities and the belief in the long-term value of a coherent tertiary education system. Equally, when thinking about practitioner tools, I propose that the “why?” is of great importance: for this I refer to Bakhtin and meaning-making through dialogue. Underpinning the framework is the concept of dialogic consultation: the framework includes deliberate dialogic interanimation and it is built on the notion that the impact for practitioners will come from the connections made between textual utterances. Beneath this insight is a proposal for “how?” this might be achieved at a conceptual level. The “what?” comes from the application of the framework to any given topic.

If indeed it proves that the outcomes of the Augar Report are not the ones which influence public policy on tertiary funding, the Tertiary Review may well be largely forgotten. A policy process without an end point may be less attractive as a topic of study or commentary. I contend that there is nevertheless much to learn from this process, including lessons which practitioners should take on board to inform their future policy engagement.

Policymaking through dialogic consultation

Across this thesis I have noted the importance of consultation in policymaking processes and the role of practitioners in responding to consultations, and considered the asymmetry of information and power between the policymaking insiders and the outsider stakeholders. There is every reason to believe both that consultation will continue to be a routine part of policymaking, and that the asymmetries will persist: in the case of the development of higher education policy in England, the balance of power falls to the government and to OfS, the primary regulator of universities. With the power, granted by parliament, to permit universities to operate legally, or to deny them that right, and to grant or withhold access to funds, the OfS has the dominant position (Great Britain 2017a). The OfS will be among the bodies which conduct policy consultations and it will retain the upper hand in power relations and the ability to digest and respond to consultations in opaque ways (Jamdar 2020).

With every reason to believe that there will be more opportunities to engage with policy consultations in the future, there is value for the practitioner in problematising the speech genre and considering the nature of meaning-making in this dialogic system. There will always be gaps, silences and unknown qualities within the dialogic exchange, and while not every participant's voice will be allotted equal value, or perhaps any value, it can be useful for the practitioner to think about those dimensions and the likely influences on policy development. Returning to the concept of a spectrum between autocracy and anarchy, between the monologic diktat and chaotic cacophony, those are unreachable extremes: if we accept that all engagement has a dialogic component then there is always the capacity for influence and therefore potential value in the attempt to influence.

The dialogic policy consultation framework

Responding to policy consultations is an important but time-consuming practice. With the intention of supporting the reflexive practitioner, I propose a framework – shown in Figures 7 to 10 below, with elements explained through descriptions in Tables 8 and 9. Explanation begins with the contexts in which the framework sits; these provide a foundational understanding for the conditions of the policy consultation, just as the exploration of the historical, political and institutional context of the Tertiary Review did in part two above, following the Hyatt (2013a) framework drawing on DHA in particular (Reisigl and Wodak

2009). This is followed by an exploration of the activities in the dialogic consultation framework. These are drawn from the exploration above asking three intersecting questions about what policymaking insiders value, how they see the voice of the outsider group, and what is likely to influence them most. For the outsider process – the element focused on the practitioner group – what follows is an attempt to problematise the consultation response process in order to maximise the return on the effort expended which has two ends: first, to influence the policymaking process; and second, to consider the development and communication of the consultation response as an active dialogue with the stakeholders relevant to the practitioner and their institutional context. The underlying rationale for this dialogue-focused process is that meaning-making is a valuable pursuit and that active dialogic processes offer the practitioner an opportunity to co-create meaning with their stakeholders in ways which enrich professional practice and institutional outcomes.

The framework proposed is a tool for bridging between the contextual understanding described above and the activities undertaken to maximise the return on the effort of the consultation response. Formal consultations are, from the policymakers' perspective, an important tool, but from the perspective of those working on responses within institutions the burden of response is significant, yet with little expectation that the response will make a difference. Views from both sides acknowledge the importance of contacts between policymakers and interested parties outside the formal process as a way of achieving a higher quality of engagement (McVitty 2020; Mansfield 2020). It is in this context that conceiving of the consultation response as multiple dialogic opportunities is an important framing: not all actors will have a high level of access or influence and, therefore, the formal consultation response may be the only opportunity – or at least one of few chances – to represent particular viewpoints into the policymaking process.

Figure 7 aims to represent the minimum number of steps within the policy consultation process and forms the core of the framework. The first step is the design and publication of a consultation exercise such as the *Call for Evidence* in the Tertiary Review. This is received by the practitioner who produces a response which is returned to the originators of the consultation who collate and analyse responses. This core to the framework, however, takes insufficient account of the contextual pieces and does not reflect the full opportunities available to either the insider or the outsider.

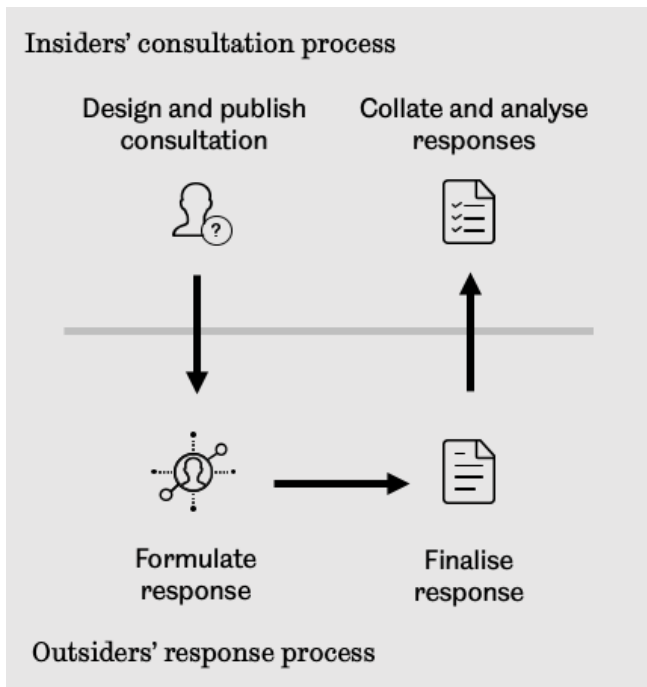


Figure 7 | Core consultation and response process

To augment this core, I have identified further steps in the process which are shown first in Figure 8 which adds the contextual pieces described in Table 8.

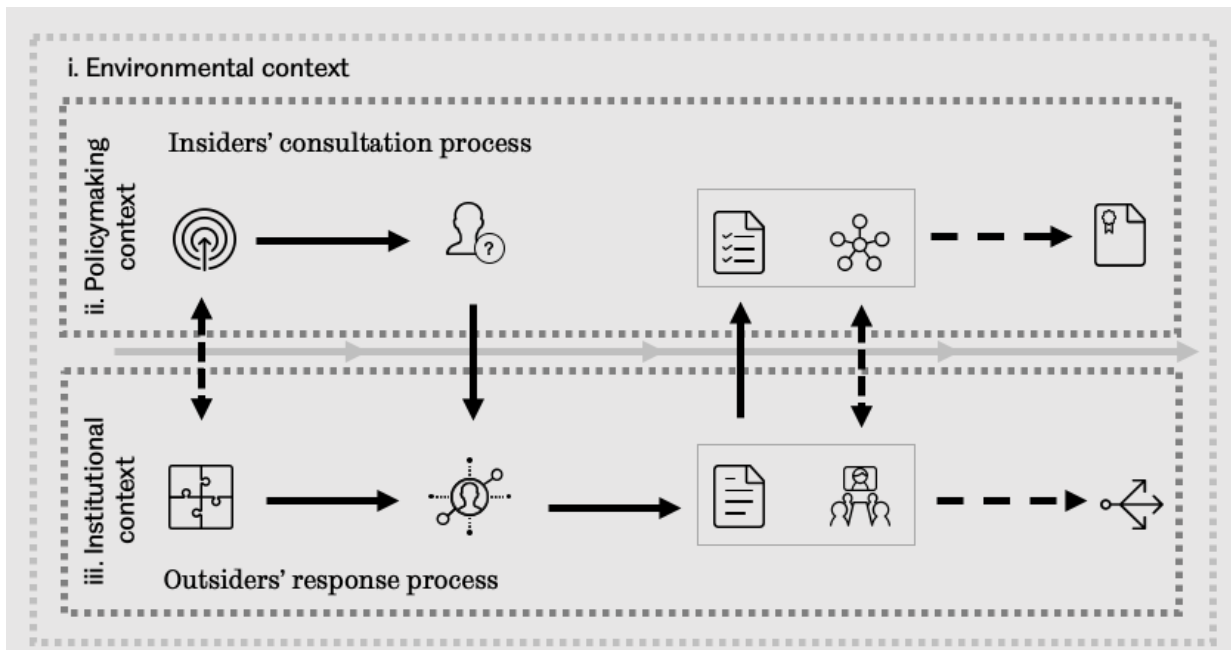


Figure 8 | Dialogic consultation framework contexts

The disaggregation of contexts reflects a reality that there will be some factors which affect all parties in the systems – the overarching environmental context – while the insiders and outsiders each have their own contexts which influence the development of policy or the reception of the consultation.

Table 8 | Dialogic consultation framework contexts

| Context | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| i Environmental | The overarching environmental context reflects the full range of contextual factors which sit around the whole policymaking process. In the example of the Tertiary Review, these include many of the features identified in the part on contextualising the policy, including: the immediate and medium-term socio-political contexts; contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures; and epoch. |
| ii Policymaking | The policymaking context reflects those cultures, norms, expectations, strategies and behaviours operating for policymakers. This includes the political environment, intersection with other policy areas, personalities, priorities and resources. |
| iii Institutional | At the institutional level, the context in which a response to the consultation is formulated, the contextual factors include an organisation’s cultures, norms, expectations, strategies and behaviours. This context also includes the local authorising environment, intersection with other institutional agendas, personalities, priorities and resources. |

Rather than present a new framework with which one could analyse these factors, I propose that the tools applied in part two, above, could be applied to the practitioner’s context for any given policy process to generate a rich understanding. In this thesis, I have focused on an exploration of the environmental and policymaking contexts and touched on general conditions for higher education institutions, but I have not taken an in-depth look at any one organisation or its response to the Tertiary Review. I propose that the reflexive practitioner in their institutional context draw from the tools applied to the first two contexts to apply the concepts to their own particular setting.

Once the contexts for the consultation have been established, there is value in considering an extended version of the core consultation process to identify the multiple transactions and opportunities for dialogic interaction. This extension is represented in Figure 10 and the steps explained in Table 9. To support practitioner understanding, and with the view to how the framework might be used in practice, I have adopted the use of icons within the diagrammatic representation. These icons were chosen to provide visual cues

which relate to the steps described in Table 9. In Figure 9 I briefly describe the icons to explain the rationale for their selection for application in this framework.

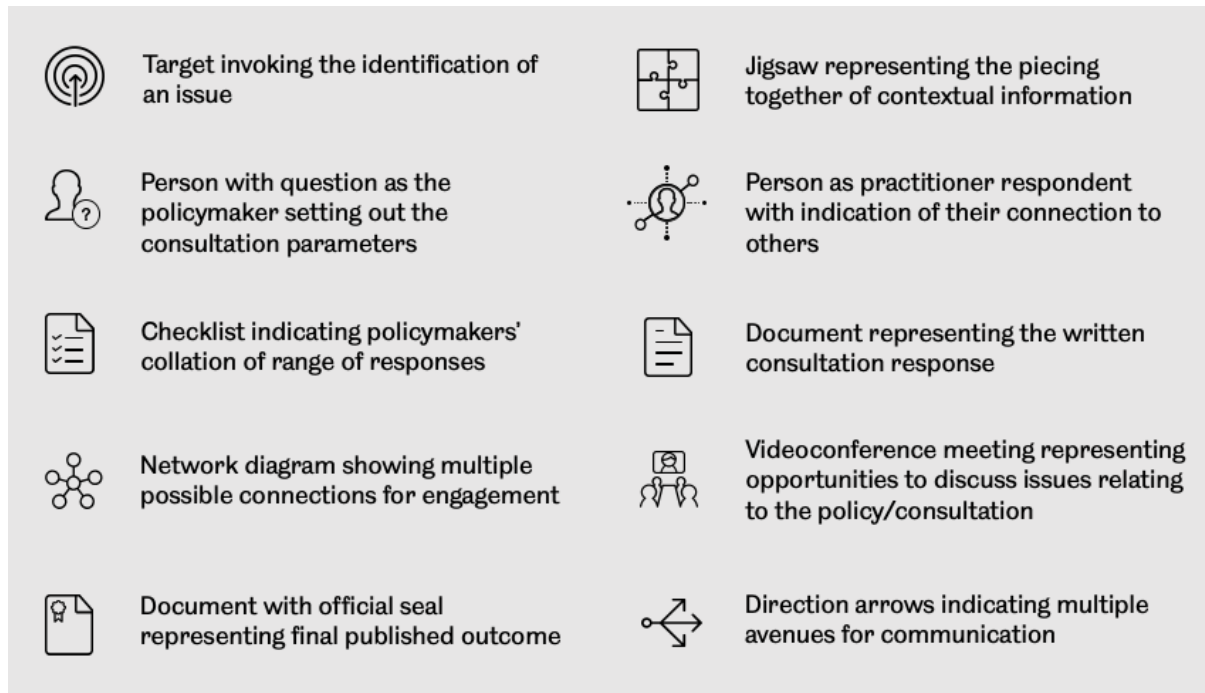


Figure 9 | Rationale for icon choice

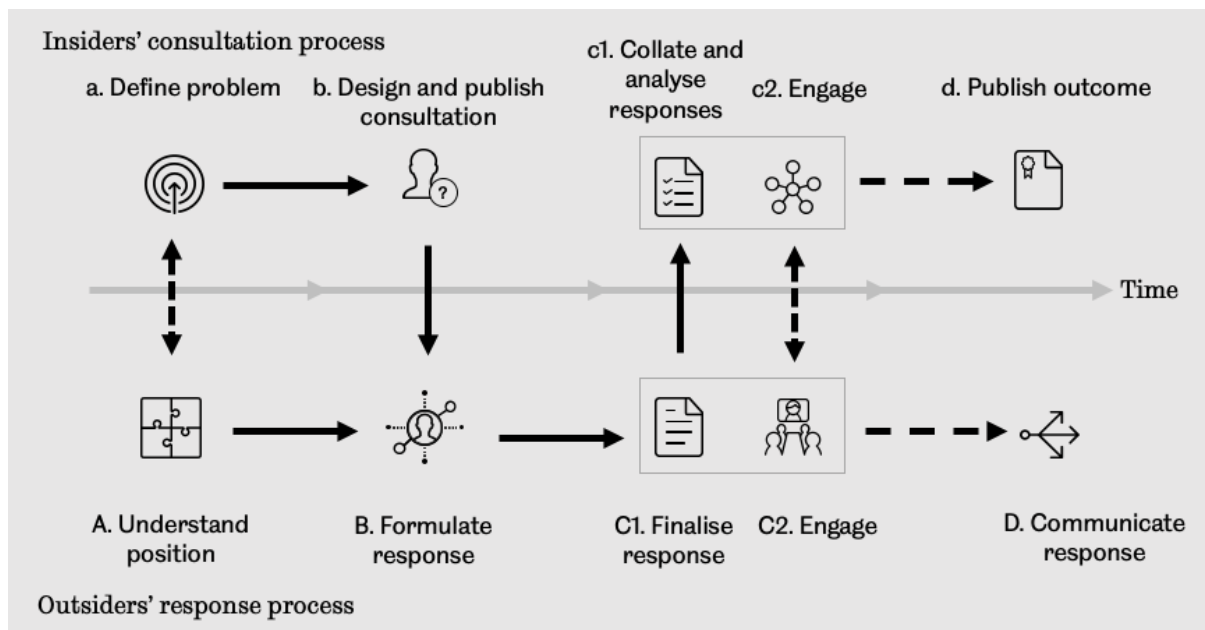


Figure 10 | Dialogic consultation framework

Table 9 | Dialogic consultation framework activities

| Insiders' consultation process | Outsiders' response process |
|--|--|
| a The problem is identified, defined and articulated through policy texts such as political speeches, or in a manifesto. | A The policy problem is interpreted through that which is publicly available, supplemented where possible by contextual information and any access to insiders. |
| b The consultation design is the product of a political question informed by the needs of policymakers. Ultimately it results in the creation of a question, or series of questions, to which responses are sought from relevant external parties. | B Informed by the questions set out in the published consultation, the response is formulated. The response is situated within the institutional needs and wants and mediated by what is considered acceptable in the format and tone of consultation conventions. |
| c 1. The multiple responses are collated and digested for incorporation into the policymaking process. 2. Additional engagement takes place at the discretion of the insiders to supplement or contextualise responses. | C 1. The written response is submitted alongside those of other respondents. 2. If available, respondents could engage actively with policymakers to supplement information provided or to enrich their understanding of the response. |
| d The consultation responses impact on the next stage of the policy development at the discretion of the policymakers. <i>Optional:</i> a final output is produced and published, such as a standalone document which collates or summarises the responses. | D The responding party has the opportunity to engage in a further dialogic process using the consultation response as stimulus. There is a range of options available, for example, publishing the response independently of the process, engaging in face-to-face or electronic dialogue with internal or external parties, or using the consultation response as the basis for other communications. |

In the dialogic consultation framework, I have represented three key transactional processes. From the point of view of universities, the consultation respondents in this case, the process of policy formation can be conceived as a dialogic system, and within the consultation process we have multiple dialogic transactions:

- At the heart of the process is the collation of stakeholder (outsider) views by policymakers (insiders), typically written responses but also supplemented through further formal and informal means, which are solicited, collated, analysed and distilled into a final output.

- The construction of a consultation response is typically the exercise of marshalling the multiple voices and opinions from within an institution to produce a single artefact, the consultation response, which is then submitted alongside those from other respondents.
- Following submission of a consultation response, the respondent has the opportunity to engage in a further dialogic process with audiences beyond the formal consultation process. In the case of a university, this may be with staff, students, alumni, the local community, businesses or other institutions.

If we conceive of the full picture of dialogic consultations with these three transactions affecting the respondent side, then it is easier to see the full value that can be realised from the activity. The framework is represented in full in Appendix B, bringing together all the elements described above.

In my professional experience, the elements of the framework which can be neglected within the process – and therefore the reason there is value in representing these in full – include the explicit interrogation of contexts and establishing a detailed understanding of the relative positions of the insiders and outsiders. Advice on political influencing focuses on considering what the respondents will want to hear and what will have impact for them (Fletcher 2020). This framework aims to embrace that advice and build in at the start an understanding of these positions. Consultation responses can be written by individuals within organisations and not necessarily embrace a plurality of voices from within the institution, or from key institutional stakeholders. Considering this as a separate distinct step should increase the level of understanding about a policy, help others to see that their input is valued, and enrich the quality of the response. Policy and public affairs practitioners may not have, as part of their role, an explicit mandate to communicate more widely the products of the consultation response. I propose that this should be considered and integrated as a valuable part of the process in order to engage institutional stakeholders in the viewpoints developed for the consultation response. This can then have wider positive outcomes, such as influencing internal or external stakeholders through developing their understanding of what is important to the institution. Taking this final step in the process also provides for a more controlled return on the effort expended: this is within the gift of the practitioner, not contingent on the policymaking insiders' process. Relating this to the Tertiary Review, the work done to develop and communicate a university's institutional position could have had a

greater impact when it had been communicated – to staff, students, the local community and businesses – than its influence over a policy process which fell by the political wayside.

The dialogic consultation framework proposed is a theoretical one grounded in the example of the Tertiary Review, built on the limited literature and brought together with my own professional experience. With any such framework, particularly one drawing explicitly on experience which might be atypical, it should be tested and refined to ensure that it meets the ongoing needs of the practitioner group. It may be advantageous to outline additional steps, to include more directly the specific elements of contextual understanding, or to elaborate other ways of engaging with the policy process, for example. It must also be recognised that this is only a partial representation of the policymaking process and does not include engagement in policy agendas in advance of problem definition and consultation. I invite practitioners to critique the framework, to apply it, to refine it, and to share the results with colleagues to continue its dialogic development.

Consultations are an important part of the policy process: they are frequently used and have a well-established role in the cycle of policy formation. It is therefore necessary for those who wish to influence policymaking – the practitioners who have been the focus of my analysis and the development of this framework – to understand the consultation process, their role in it, and how best to interact with purpose. Applying a dialogic lens, and drawing on Bakhtin, to problematise the production of the consultation, the response, the interpretation and subsequent communication is valuable in facilitating an understanding of the consultation as a speech genre. The Tertiary Review has been used as an example from which to build a framework for dialogic policy consultation which promotes the most effective use of time and effort in responding to a consultation through conceiving of the process as a series of managed active dialogues.

Chapter 4C: Final remarks

In this final chapter, I reflect on the approach taken in the thesis, its limitations and opportunities for further research. I begin with observations on the approach and method adopted before exploring the contributions made to knowledge and to practice. I use this chapter to share personal reflections befitting the reflexive way in which I have approached writing the thesis.

Method and approach

In this thesis, I have drawn on concepts from Bakhtin to enrich my analysis of the Tertiary Review and to build out from that analysis to develop a dialogic policy consultation framework. Bakhtin's work is, for the non-Russian speaker, necessarily read in translation. It also has, in places, an impenetrability of form and language. In other places, however, it provides lucid insight which can lead to the application of deep philosophical and conceptual logic to more prosaic problem areas. I do not imagine that Bakhtin saw the application of his work to policy consultations or English higher education policy, but his avowed belief in meaning-making through the intersection of texts would, I believe, lead to a conclusion that this was a worthy endeavour. I have necessarily selected those parts of Bakhtin's work that I find accessible and make no claim to a broader understanding of his corpus; to overcome this selectivity, I have tried to present definitions and to make clear where and how the concept of the dialogic has been applied. I have also drawn on others who have interpreted Bakhtin for their own purposes.

Bakhtin's work is not extensively used across social and public policy topics, or not explicitly, perhaps because he is less fashionable, or less accessible, than some other theorists. In excerpts and concepts raised across this thesis, I have shown alignment with Foucault, whose work is more accessible and much more widely applied, although I would argue similarly impenetrable in parts, if less consistently than Bakhtin. Reflecting on the application in this case, I conclude that the attempted adoption of a conceptual approach is a useful starting point, particularly for an author whose professional experience has been focused on more immediate and problem-solving approaches. Forcing the expansion of conceptual thinking changes the nature of the inquiry and, in my experience in this thesis, elevates the level of understanding which can be generated from the activity. It has provided a solid "why?" for the thesis: I have started with a foundational concept that meaning can be

derived from dialogic interanimation. In my case, the concept of the dialogic also provides a thread which runs throughout the thesis, through to its conclusions and the dialogic consultation framework, and operates at multiple levels. I aimed to show in the introduction to this thesis, and in this chapter in particular, my attempt at an explicit reflexive dialogue to provide a meta level of meaning-making in addition to what I have explored in the specific policy analysis.

Hyatt's critical policy analysis framework (2013a) has been an essential asset for the construction of this thesis: it provides an accessible and engaging way of tackling what might otherwise be too large or too complicated policies which one wanted to explore. As noted in chapter 1C, I made a number of changes to the proposed structure of the framework, most substantially to re-order between the contextualisation and deconstruction elements. This, I believe, has provided a sensible and effective exploration of many important dimensions of the policy. The emphasis on the DHA (Reisigl and Wodak 2009), supplemented by other approaches including Bacchi's "What is the problem represented to be" (2012) has provided a set of structured and methodical ways to explore many facets of the Tertiary Review and its surrounding context. I also developed some of my own questioning frameworks for other elements of the deconstruction to provide structure to the analysis of the texts of the Tertiary Review. I attempted to bring these varied insights together in meaningful synthesis and analysis. The changes made to the Hyatt (2013a) framework and the application demonstrated here show both the utility – it was a valuable starting point – and the flexibility, and I would endorse its critical use by other doctoral students (Hyatt 2013b).

In the ordering of the Hyatt framework (2013a) elements, and within those the tool selection and areas of particular focus, I have made choices throughout the thesis. Guiding those choices has been an aim to contribute to the sum of knowledge about policymaking – and higher education policymaking in particular – but also the creation of a tool for the benefit of practitioners who engage with policy processes in their professional endeavours, specifically consultation exercises. This has left many things out. No study can be fully comprehensive, but another similar study of the Tertiary Review might have considered the intersection of a greater number of texts, for example expanding analysis to include more of the consultation responses which the expert panel received. There could have been a more detailed focus on the text of the Augar Report or of political actors around the review process. I believe that the selection has been sufficient to develop a novel understanding the Tertiary Review, but that other methods could have enriched the analysis significantly. In

particular, the combination of textual analyses with elite interviews or observation of key actors can provide more depth: Wodak's study of the European Parliament, for example, combines critical discourse analysis with ethnographic research. This sort of multi-dimensional study can shed light on additional areas such as the "backstage" of politics "where performers are present but the audience is not" (2009, 10).

In drawing on Bakhtin to develop the concept of the dialogic consultation, I strayed into the literature on public relations and communication studies. I also read about the use of "dialogic policymaking" in discourse on citizen-democracy (Bevir 2009). While my inquiry has been primarily situated within the literature on higher education policymaking, this intersection with other discourses offers an opportunity to enrich the use of dialogic concepts. I have considered dialogue primarily through the institutional or organisational lens, either the part of policymakers advancing an agenda beyond their own individual roles, or the respondents writing on behalf of a university or other body. There emerges here the potential for a typology of dialogic approaches which reflects a fuller range of academic inquiry or practitioner tools: the dialogic approach can be applied at different levels and used as a way to understand dialogic interaction within, and between, those levels.

If the Tertiary Review remains in political abeyance then it may not garner the attention it could expect if the process were to be revived and action taken as a result. Nevertheless, there is significant potential in exploring the review further. It could be illuminating to learn from the actors, including the expert panel members, politicians and civil servants involved, about their reflections on the process. It would be useful to test the theory about making the most of consultation processes with practitioners: what is presented here is a proposal based on first principles in combination with sparse literature and a single case study which would benefit from refinement within a professional context.

Contributions

When I embarked on this inquiry, I believed – as had been the stated intention from the policymakers – that the result of the Tertiary Review would be a major change to the funding and structure of further and higher education in England. I believed that this would be a key part of a turn to a tertiary discourse with its impacts felt keenly in the UK's devolved nations through spill-over policy effects and more widely through the cross-pollination of policies, particularly in the anglophone world. Bookending the inquiry with the General Elections of 2017 and 2019 provides a closed bound to the research: while the scope of the thesis stops in

December 2019, it is entirely possible that the Johnson government, or another future administration, will revive the formal review process. Choosing to study a topic contemporaneously leaves the author open to this kind of disappointment. However, I believe that this study is still a useful one, as I have argued in earlier chapters. It is interesting not simply as an academic exercise; it is also a useful example for the practitioner to be aware that not all policy processes follow the trajectory the originators envision. The timing of this inquiry also means that there is an absence of extensive critical peer-reviewed literature: this simultaneously provides an opportunity to contribute to what will grow as a body of research while limiting access to others' considered insight on the topic. There is much commentary on the Tertiary Review, some by better informed authors than others. This thesis sits between those first "hot takes" and the capacity for more considered retrospective engagement.

I said at the outset, and have reiterated throughout, that I had in mind a practitioner audience for this work. Analysis of the Tertiary Review, its scale, potential impact and long timeline, shows that it has been, as a topic, one of significant importance for the practitioner audience including staff who work in universities whose roles include policy or political engagement. In particular, the exercise of responding to the formal written consultation for the expert panel was a significant resource allocation, as it was for the panel to analyse and synthesise the responses, and to include consultation elements within the Augar Report. I described my own professional and personal position at the outset of the thesis; I have also referenced throughout my own and others' contributions to *Influencing higher education policy* (Bagshaw and McVitty 2020). As reflected in that collection, and explicitly in this thesis, I have tried to flex between theory and practice. I find it enjoyable working with colleagues across universities whose interest in policy and politics generates deep and nuanced policy engagement; my experience is also that this is largely a reflexive group willing to interrogate new ideas and to try them out in their practice, and conscious of the conflicts and opportunities posed by being knowledge-creators, but not explicitly researchers, within universities. In developing my contribution to practice, I have kept in mind that practitioner audience, and I invite engagement with the dialogic consultation framework proposed here. On development of the framework specifically, I have found that diagrammatic representation can be a particularly effective communication tool for concepts and frameworks. The choice to present the dialogic consultation framework in a diagrammatic manner, supplemented by a textual commentary, is a deliberate attempt to prepare material

which is accessible to practitioners, becoming the “cut-out-and-keep” element of the thesis as a reminder of the opportunity that exists in problematising the policy consultation process in this way, balancing simplicity with complexity to convey a set of interconnected ideas. I encourage others to make more use of this approach as a way of communicating concepts and frameworks, not to replace text but to supplement it and enrich understanding.

The Tertiary Review has proved to be a useful topic of inquiry and one which has touched different discourses and enabled the exploration of a wide range of topics. I have enjoyed engaging with the details of higher education policy and policymaking, and applying Bakhtin’s concepts to this thesis. The opportunity for dialogic interaction with others who found Bakhtin enlightening has been its own “homecoming festival” (Bakhtin 1986, 170).

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Appendix A: *Call for Evidence* questions

(Department for Education 2018b, 5–6)

Q1. This review will look at how Government can ensure that the post-18 education system is joined up and supported by a funding system that works for students and taxpayers. The panel would like to understand your priorities. What, if any, are your principal concerns with the current post-18 education and funding system?

Part 1: Choice and competition across a joined-up post-18 education and training sector

Q2. How do people make choices about what to study after 18? What information do they use and how do they choose one route over another: for instance, between academic, technical and vocational routes?

Q3: How do people make choices later in life about what further study to undertake?

Q4: In recent years we have seen continued growth in three-year degrees for 18 year-olds. Does the system offer a comprehensive range of high quality alternative routes for young people who wish to pursue a different path at this age? How can Government encourage provision across a wider range of high quality pathways to advanced academic, technical and vocational qualifications?

Q5: The majority of universities charge the maximum possible fees for most of their courses and three-year courses remain the norm. How can Government create a more dynamic market in price and provision between universities and across the post-18 education landscape?

Q6: What barriers do current and new education and training providers face in developing innovative or diversified provision?

Q7: How can Government further encourage high-quality further education and higher education provision that is more flexible: for example, part-time, distance learning and commuter study options?

Q8: To what extent do funding arrangements for higher education and further education and other post-18 education and training act as incentives or barriers to choice or provision: both at the individual and provider level? How does this impact on the choices made by prospective students and learners? What can Government do to improve incentives and reduce barriers?

Part 2: A system that is accessible to all

Q9: What particular barriers (including financial barriers) do people from disadvantaged backgrounds face in progressing to and succeeding in post-18 education and training?

Q10: How should students and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds best receive maintenance support, both from Government and from universities and colleges?

Part 3: Delivering the skills the UK needs

Q11: What challenges do post-18 education and training providers face in understanding and responding to the skills needs of the economy: at national, regional and local levels? Which skills, in your view, are in shortest supply across the economy? And which, if any, are in oversupply?

Q12: How far does the post-18 education system deliver the advanced technical skills the economy needs? How can Government ensure there is world-class provision of technical education across the country?

Part 4: Value for money for graduates and taxpayers

Q13: How should students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies, while maintaining the link that those who benefit from post-18 education contribute to its costs? What represents the right balance between students, graduates, employers and the taxpayer?

Q14: What are the most effective ways for the Government and institutions to communicate with students and graduates on the nature and terms of student support?

Q15: What are the best examples of education and training providers ensuring efficiency in the method of course provision while maintaining quality? And what are the challenges in doing this?

Q16: What are the ways that Government can increase the value for money of post-18 education?

Appendix B: Dialogic policy consultation framework

Purpose

The dialogic policy consultation framework is designed to support the ways in which practitioners think about, and act in response to, a policy consultation.

The value in the framework's application is developing understanding through interrogation of the contexts and the critical consideration of the steps in the process of the consultation.

The aim is to support practitioners to maximise the return on the investment of effort in responding to consultations, including seeking to influence stakeholders independent of the submission of a formal response to a policy process.

This interpretation sees the consultation response as having value beyond the task of responding to the question(s) set by policymakers

Insiders' consultation process

a. The problem is identified, defined and articulated through policy texts such as political speeches, or in a manifesto.

b. The consultation design is the product of a political question informed by the needs of policymakers. Ultimately it results in the creation of a question, or series of questions, to which responses are sought from relevant external parties.

c1. The multiple responses are collated and digested for incorporation into the policymaking process.

c2. Additional engagement takes place at the discretion of the insiders to supplement or contextualise responses.

The consultation responses impact on the next stage of the policy development at the discretion of the policymakers.

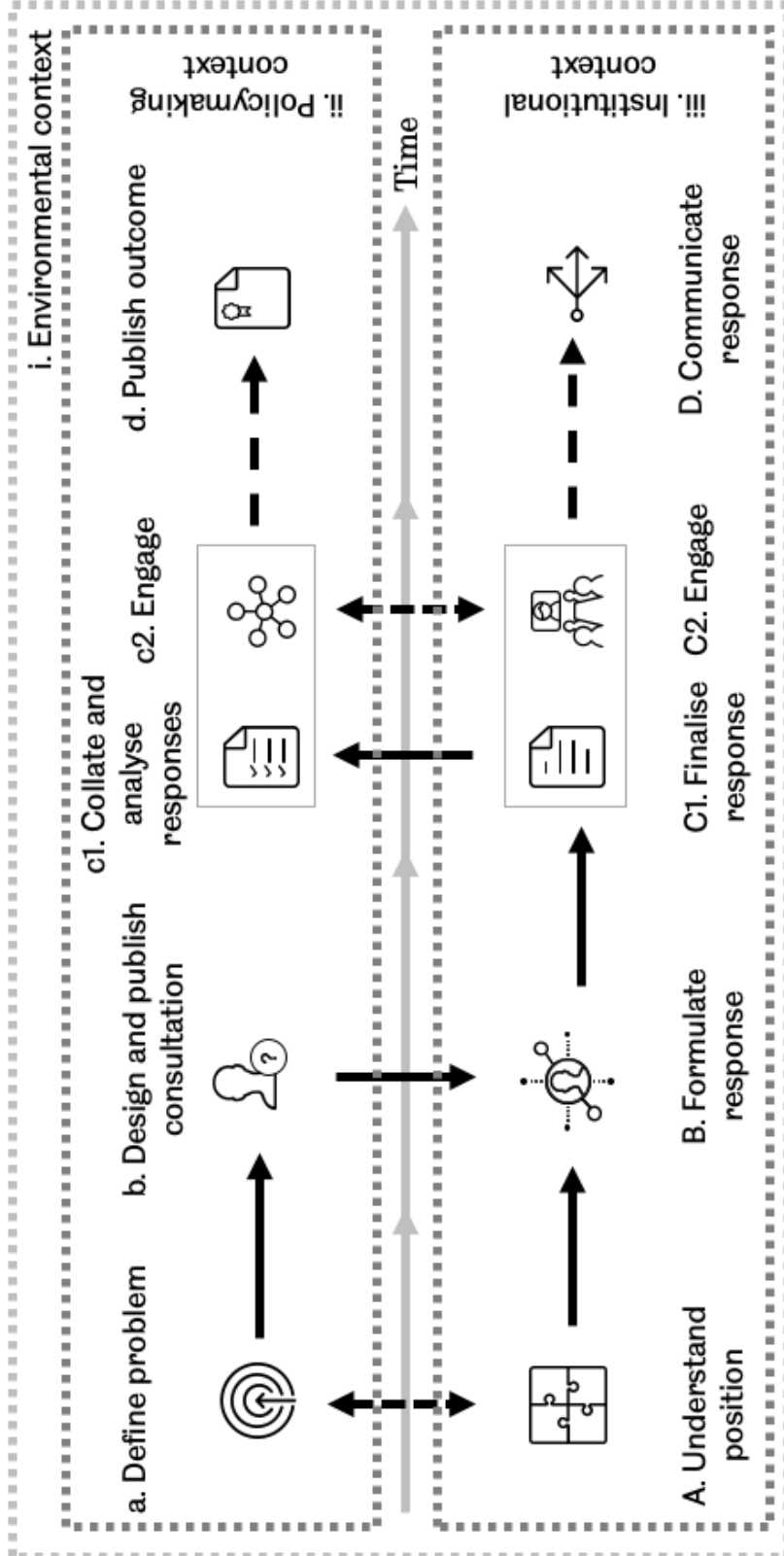
Optional: a final output is produced and published, such as a standalone document which collates or summarises the responses.

Contexts

i. The overarching **environmental context** reflects the full range of contextual factors which sit around the whole policymaking process including the immediate and medium-term socio-political contexts; contemporary socio-political individuals, organisations and structures; and epoch.

ii. The **policymaking context** reflects those cultures, norms, expectations, strategies and behaviours operating for policymakers. This includes the political environment, intersection with other policy areas, personalities, priorities and resources.

iii. At the **institutional level**, the context in which a response to the consultation is formulated, the contextual factors include an organisation's cultures, norms, expectations, strategies and behaviours. This context also includes the local authorising environment, intersection with other institutional agendas, personalities, priorities and resources.



Outsiders' response process

A. The policy problem is interpreted through that which is publicly available, supplemented where possible by contextual information and any access to insiders.

B. Informed by the questions set out in the published consultation, the response is formulated. The response is situated within the institutional needs and wants and mediated by what is considered acceptable in the format and tone of consultation conventions.

C1. The written response is submitted alongside those of other respondents.

C2. If available, respondents could engage actively with policymakers to supplement information provided or to enrich their understanding of the response.

D. The responding party has the opportunity to engage in a further dialogic process using the consultation response as stimulus. There is a range of options available, for example, publishing the response independently of the process, engaging in face-to-face or electronic dialogue with internal or external parties, or using the consultation response as the basis for other communications.

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